

The other side of the wall

Laurence Wareing and Paul Gilroy

Abstract

The closure of CrossReach's last remaining residential school, Ballikinrain, marks an important stage in the evolution of the charity's care for young people. CrossReach (the operating name for The Church of Scotland's Social Care Council) began opening large residential schools following World War II. It has now moved to family-style living in local communities for its children and young people, a process in which Scotland's changing legislation and CrossReach's own knowledge and experience have interacted to underpin a nuanced understanding of child centred care. Changes in practice at Ballikinrain, informed by academic and psychological consultation, legislative changes and recommendations from Scottish Government reports are described, together with a growing understanding of the local community's role in supporting cared for young people and necessary collaboration in the elimination of stigmatisation. This evolution is illustrated by statements from former pupils, and the particular example of one boy and his key worker, whose metaphor of driver and navigator suggests a fruitful way of viewing relationships at every level of the residential care system. We argue that the trajectory towards child-centred practice and legislation, exemplified by The Promise, supports the residential childcare system to enable our children and young people to influence national policy.

Keywords

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When Ballikinrain, CrossReach's residential school north of Glasgow, closed its doors for the final time earlier this year, in one way it felt like the end of an era. At the same time, the decision represented a decisive affirmation of the direction of travel CrossReach has been following for the past couple of decades.

CrossReach, which is the operating name for The Church of Scotland's Social Care Council, has been providing residential care and education for young people since opening its first List D ('special') school for girls after the close of World War II. For the next 60 years, we held to the model of gathering children and young people together in large, residential school campuses located across central Scotland.

From the turn of the millennium, however, the combined influence of government legislation and our own evolving understanding of effective practice has underpinned a move away from the residential school model to providing a range of houses located in communities, supported by a separate school. The first of these houses, Millmuir Farm in Gargunnoch, opened in 2007 and marked the beginning of a shift to family-style living in local communities. Its success, and that of other houses that followed, led to a service-wide restructuring in 2014 and – ultimately – to the closing of Ballikinrain's doors at the start of 2021.

We no longer have large groups of young people living together in imposing buildings with extensive grounds. In the case of Ballikinrain, quite literally we've walked beyond the estate – rather remote and set apart – into local towns and villages. Here, our young people can connect more immediately with the world around them. Two to five children live in each of our houses that look and feel a good deal more like ordinary family homes. Nevertheless, while we may 'look' different, it's the same ethos, the same value base, informing our work that has driven CrossReach's evolving strategy since the opening of Millmuir.

Relational model

That ethos is built on a relational model. Like many others in our field, we believe in the maxim that children who have been harmed through relationships can be healed through relationships. It is a way of being that we worked on at

Ballikinrain with the help of Dr Dan Hughes, who developed his Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy approach in the late 1980s. This approach encourages connection with children and young people using playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy (P.A.C.E.).

However, with the best will in the world, it's hard to build homely, therapeutic environments in a castle. There is no denying that good relationships were built at Ballikinrain. One former pupil, now a priest and coffee entrepreneur in Derby, has written about 'the seeds of love planted' here, whose lasting impact finally emerged after 15 years of a chaotic lifestyle. In emphasising his memory of love and care, Darren – who was part of the care-experienced system in the 1980s and early '90s – is using language that pre-echoes a key thrust of the Independent Care Review: *The Promise*.¹

Yet, how can you build equally important relationships with peers or members of the surrounding community when, as another former pupil said, you have to walk 200 yards just to get to the end of your driveway? Claymore says that the difference it made to him when he moved to Millmuir Farm was immediate. A 200-yard walk would now get him to the local shop. And when he began high school, he added, 'I was allowed to get the bus every day, there and back. That was me taking the bus myself.'

Claymore vividly describes this transition from the castle environment, living with six boys within a much larger group of staff and young people, to having just one other housemate and someone looking after them. Millmuir became his home for four years. Before, he says, he had only been interacting with 'the same people in the same situation' as himself, and had felt like he was 'avoided by the public'. Now, however, he integrated into the local community with far greater ease. This was even a place where he could invite his friends to after school.

Emphasising otherness

At Ballikinrain, despite the best efforts of loving staff well-versed in supporting trauma-experienced children, the 'avoidance' Claymore speaks about was a dominant feature of a broader understanding of being stigmatised. He surprised

us when he identified the isolation that he had felt there, despite having been part of a lively, nurturing community. Yet, Professor Andrew Kendrick, Emeritus Professor, University of Strathclyde, has argued that one of the worst results of stigma is precisely this sense of isolation.ⁱⁱ

When Pineau, Kendall-Taylor, L'Hôte and Busso (2018) ask what care-experienced children and young people need, at the head of their responses is a requirement to 'engage local communities to help support the care system to reduce stigma and marginalisation':

According to experts, building connections between people in the wider community and care-experienced young people can reduce the 'othering' that care-experienced individuals may feel. Connections with community can also build informal networks of support for both carers and children.ⁱⁱⁱ

In residential child care organisations, we often find ourselves unwittingly 'othering' the young people we seek to help precisely because we are naming their issues, saying we're good at supporting and helping them to change, in order to bid to local authorities and other funders who want us to resolve those issues.

There is a real sense in which the system of which we are a part perpetuates an unspoken requirement to label our young people to argue for, and justify the allocation of, resources, thus underpinning the process of 'othering' and the very stigmatisation we wish to eliminate. Residential care organisations find themselves with no choice but to adhere to language that is itself damaging.

Moreover, in the case of Ballikinrain, the relative isolation inherent in the building's physical environment could only ever result in a reinforcement of otherness and the experience of living with stigma.

Context and community

In the decades since we began opening our residential schools, we have supported over 5,000 children and young people at CrossReach. But it was

precisely the kind of transformative experiences Claymore describes, because of his move to Millmuir Farm, that inspired us in 2014 to move towards closure of our large institutions and extend our delivery of care and support in local communities, alongside the opening of a new school campus in Erskine.

At a time when society's values often seem to weight towards a desire for 'bigger and more', we have confirmed that what benefits our young people best is 'local and less'. Family-style living enables them to experience love and nurture in a more homely context, and to build relationships with their carers that have the potential to be sustained in a mature way after they have moved on to the next stages of their lives.

More than that, by bringing young people in CrossReach's care close to local communities, in more intimate settings, we are endeavouring to minimise the experience of 'othering' that Claymore has identified. The point is to support young people to connect more effectively with society and the world at large. Going 'local and less' helps build their resilience.

For this to be at its most effective, engagement with the surrounding community needs to be intentional, on both sides of the relationship. The term 'corporate parenting' may sound bureaucratic, but as defined in the 2008 Scottish Government report *These are our Bairns*, it is something akin to the more homely notion that it takes a village to raise a child. The report quotes Sir William Utting:

You may feel that 'corporate responsibility' and 'corporate parenting' are . . . concepts that bear little relation to activities in the real world. However, the fact is that children's lives are directly and profoundly affected by the quality of corporate parenting offered to them! ...This is not to replace or replicate the selfless character of parental love; but it does imply a warmth and personal concern which goes beyond the traditional expectations of institutions.^{iv}

Former pupil Darren likens this approach to the process of roasting coffee beans. He caught the coffee bug after a period of prison and rehabilitation and insists

that making good coffee is about giving the bean the right treatment and 'putting it in the right context. The journey that you go on, how you nurture it, how you discover and release the potential within it. . . that's rather like people.' Drawing that comparison led Darren to upscale his belief into something organisational, developing a social enterprise business that teaches coffee making skills to help others step out of institutions into society, as he did.

What is needed for someone coming from a traumatic background – who hasn't even been shown how to live in a community in a healthy way – is a sense of shared responsibility. A sense that we can all change our community. If we're transforming others, we're all being changed. When I discovered that I can contribute to society, it's that which keeps me away from the chaos.^v

For CrossReach as an organisation, our own journey to establish homes for our young people in the right contexts and communities has been a long one, but one that has run in parallel with Scotland's evolving legislation and aspirations. Back in 1992, Angus Skinner's report, *Another Kind of Home*, highlighted that for some children, residential care should be considered a positive option.^{vi} Reports that followed, while challenging, have also supported us in what we were trying to do. These, through to the findings of the Independent Care Review: *The Promise* (2020), coupled with GIRFEC, A Curriculum for Excellence, The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act (2014) and, most recently, the Scottish Parliament's unanimous support for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill, have all challenged us to think, do and behave differently.

In particular, *The Promise* states: 'There must be no barriers for children to have regular, positive childhood experiences and Scotland must create an approach to care where maintaining, sustaining and protecting loving relationships is possible and much more probable.'^{vii} So, it's heartening to get feedback from another former pupil who lived at Ballikinrain long before we began instituting our move to home-style living: 'It never felt like staff, more like family, with father figures

mother figures, uncles, aunts, the type of structure a kid needs in any situation, that was given wholeheartedly.^{viii}

The rally car principle

From the perspective of Claymore's own key worker, Craig Faller, to be 'more like family' requires patience and an eye on the end goal:

When I first started key working Claymore, I told him that we would be a two-man team, that we would work together to get the best possible outcomes for him. I assured him that we would go through his journey together, the good times and the bad times, and we would come out the other side stronger people with us both having learned something. I never made promises that I couldn't keep. Importantly, we never set targets that were outwith his reach.

I used to look at it like being in a rally car. Claymore was the driver and I was his support /co-driver. I just gave him directions and he negotiated the road that would get us to our destination. Sometimes we got there unscathed and sometimes we crashed on route. But we would stop, assess the situation, make some repairs and then carry on our journey to the finish line.^{ix}

Craig recognises that Claymore 'had a resilience about him and a determination to succeed and that is the ultimate reason he has got to where he is today'. Nevertheless, we would argue that the rally car principle was instrumental in establishing mutual respect and a strong bond over the years that has been maintained between these two men now that Claymore has moved on. From Claymore's perspective: 'I always had someone in my corner all the time. If you don't have someone who believes in you, what's the point?'

We would also suggest that this metaphor, which reflects the impact of trust and journeying alongside the young person in care, is one that can resonate at all levels of the residential care sector. It embodies the idea of partnership and mutual respect, ideally also to be found between a care organisation and the community within which its young people live (thus creating the 'right context' to

release potential that Darren spoke about). It can, and should, also be fostered between legislators and care organisations, and legislators and care experienced young people themselves.

The confidence Claymore developed by being part of a smaller family-style environment was one factor that allowed him to get fully involved with Who Cares? Scotland, a national voluntary organisation that supports care experienced people to have their voice heard. He discovered they wanted to hear his ideas and what he had to say. He shared with others who'd had similar experiences and, together, they went to the Scottish Parliament and made their views known there as well. In such ways, our national duty of care for young people can prove its commitment to child centred responses – by listening to the information and guidance young people themselves present. If we want to get to a successful conclusion in the rally, we'll listen to what those with the knowledge have to tell us.

It's an approach exemplified by *The Promise*. We would argue that *The Promise* holds a level of credibility not because much of what it says is new (as our own organisational experience and the impact of earlier reports have demonstrated) but because it has heard and amplified the voice of care-experienced young people currently in the system and those who have come through the system in recent years. Their voices now have the potential to speak not only to the residential care sector but, crucially, also to the communities within which we operate.

Legislators, care deliverers and communities alike can be navigators, offering direction but from the passenger seat, allowing our young people to negotiate the road that will get us all to our destination.

Looked After children and young people need continuity and stability and essentially they need listening to. In my opinion we need to improve the communication between local authority workers, from social, residential and education workers, to foster carers and senior officers, to make sure their roles and responsibilities are having a positive impact. Putting the young people at the centre of all they do will, I believe, improve the future of many.

(Young care leaver, quoted in Scottish Government, 2008^x)

For the children and young people and adults who have made that final step from Ballikinrain into local communities, the impact in just a few short months has been incredible. Young people are going to the local park and making new friends, neighbours arrive with home baking to welcome us, and one social worker described the atmosphere in one house as 'much more nurturing'. They added, 'J is more relaxed and happy'.

Positive, healthy and caring relationships have always been at the heart of what CrossReach does. Sometimes these relationships are with the place, sometimes with the people we have met and known, but for most of us, former pupils and staff members alike, it will be a mixture of both. So, we're certainly feeling some nostalgia around saying goodbye to Ballikinrain. Its grand entrance, elaborately carved staircases, and huge play spaces all contributed to the school's unique character.

But if we are aspiring (as the Scottish Government is) for Scotland to be 'the best place for children and young people to grow up', then isn't it important for them to be living within Scotland's diverse and vibrant communities and not set apart from them – 200 yards behind an estate wall?

Reference

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Notes

- ⁱ “We grow up loved, safe, and respected so that we realise our full potential.” Scotland’s ambition for children and young people’, Independent Care Review: *The Promise* (2020: www.carereview.scot/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-Promise.pdf), p.1.
- ⁱⁱ Stigma in Childhood project seminar, August 2017, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Pineau, M. Gerstein, Kendall-Taylor, N., L’Hôte, E., & Busso, D. *Seeing and Shifting the Roots of Opinion: mapping the gaps between expert and public understandings of care experience and the care system in Scotland* (2018: Washington, DC., FrameWorks Institute), p.10.
- ^{iv} Utting, W., cited in Scottish Government *These are Our Bairns: a guide for community planning partnerships on being a good corporate parent* (2008: www.gov.scot/publications), p.v.
- ^v Howie, D., interview with authors, 14 July 2021.
- ^{vi} Social Work Services Inspectorate for Scotland (1992) *Another kind of home: a review of residential child care (1992: Edinburgh, Her Majesty’s Stationery Office)*.
- ^{vii} Independent Care Review: *The Promise* (2020) *op.cit.*, p.22.
- ^{viii} Former pupil (anon), private Ballikinrain Facebook page, 13 June 2021.
- ^{ix} Faller, C., personal email to authors, 15 May 2021.
- ^x Young care leaver (anon), cited in Scottish Government (2008) *op.cit.*, p.v.