

Guest Editorial

Welcome to the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care

Some young people have a positive care journey with reasonable outcomes as evidenced in *Extraordinary Lives: creating a positive future for looked-after children and young people in Scotland* (Social Work Inspection Agency, 2006). Achieving consistency of care, however, has remained elusive as outlined in reports such as *Let's Face It* (Paterson, Watson, and Whiteford, 2003). During the eighteen years I spent as Director of Who Cares? Scotland, I witnessed many new initiatives but was often somewhat frustrated at the unrealistic way in which some of these were resourced. The introduction of initiatives may lead us to believe that the care offered to looked-after children is improving. Initiatives, however, require to be adequately resourced in terms of finance and the promotion of cultures which support aspirational plans. Sadly, there is still a stigma and a culture of low expectation associated with residential care. If the best possible service is to be provided for looked-after children and young people, policymakers must be realistic about the effort that will take and the investment that still has to be made. To help us get to that point perhaps we need a 'hearts and minds' campaign to change thinking and to combat some of the current negative attitudes that surround young people.

In a report to the Association of Directors of Social Work, Professor Arthur Midwinter stated that

Funding has failed to match the growth of numbers of looked-after children, the increased costs of purchasing provision for them, and the Executive's own policy agenda of setting and improving service standards.....(Midwinter, 2006, p17.). What is clear is that the status quo is a recipe for instability and uncertainty over the funding, provision and effectiveness of children's social work services, which are vital to the well-being of children in need of care and protection (Midwinter, 2006, p19.).

No Time to Lose: a manifesto for children and young people looked after away from home (Elsley, 2006) has called upon the Scottish Executive and politicians to provide the national and local leadership for services involved with looked-after children to enable them to achieve their potential. One of these services is independent advocacy. Independent advocacy is an important aid to listening to looked-after children, and has been recognised as such in reports such as *The Children's Safeguards Review* (Kent, 1997) and *Edinburgh's Children* (Marshall, Jamieson and Finlayson, 1999). Both of these reports stressed the importance of the availability of independent advocacy in safeguarding children and young people, yet financial support for growth in independent advocacy provision has been slow despite the widely acknowledged benefits it can bring.

Young people also need a range of high quality placement provision, and staff who are well trained and adequately rewarded. To do this, the resource conundrum needs to be resolved. As *No Time to Lose* and other reports suggest, care should not be seen as a last resort for children. Staff should not be viewed as jailers. Care and advocacy

services, and the staff who work within them, should be viewed as a source of hope and a positive future for all looked-after children and young people.

Elsley, S. (2006). *No Time to lose: a manifesto for children and young people looked after away from home*. Glasgow: SIRCC.

Kent, R. (1997). *The children's safeguards review*. Edinburgh: The Stationery Office.

Marshall, K., Jamieson, C. & Finlayson, A. (1999). *Edinburgh's children: the report of the Edinburgh Inquiry into abuse and protection of children in care*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh City Council.

Midwinter, A. (2006). *An assessment of expenditure need by Scottish local authorities on children's social work services from 2007-2011*. Edinburgh: Association of Directors of Social Work.

Paterson, S., Watson, D. & Whiteford, J. (2003). *Let's face it: young people in care tell it as it is*. Glasgow: Who Cares? Scotland.

Social Work Inspection Agency. (2006) *Extraordinary lives: creating a positive future for looked-after children and young people in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Social Work Inspection Agency.

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