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Book Review

Another kind of home: A review of residential child care

By Angus Skinner

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In response to a call from this journal to review historic publications, I am reflecting on this groundbreaking report dated 1992, how it influenced my practice, its missed opportunities, and a view on how this plays out today.

Another Kind of Home: A Review of Residential Child Care by Angus Skinner, chief inspector of Social Work Services for Scotland, made 66 recommendations, which seemed at the time to be aspirational and exactly what was needed to reform and reframe residential child care in Scotland. However, many wrongly deemed it unachievable.

For example, upholding rights, giving voice, showing respect, and reaching for ambition were far-reaching concepts to some, yet, in my role I dared to challenge the norm and advocate for a robust improvement agenda. In this I discovered that the barriers were high and entrenched.

The mere thought of asking people who use and/or were supported by services and their families/carers for their opinions, never mind offering them any choice or control, seemed terrifying to those in charge when Skinner wrote *Another Kind of Home*. The perspective was that they knew best, even when clear evidence from the report suggested otherwise.

Being ridiculed, at best, for trying to even talk about, never mind implement, Skinner's recommendations for improvement felt like a daily trial in residential and child care services. This frustrated but never deterred me, often in fact fuelling my resolve to keep going.



Established in 1978, Who Cares? Scotland is the only independent membership organisation for care experienced people. Initially, the organisation provided the opportunity for young people to comment on the care services they received.

Their support throughout the 1990s gave me and others even more motivation to continue, despite an often defeatist narrative, in an attempt to try and improve the quality and response of a broken and outdated system that was in tatters.

The reforms and recommendations suggested by Skinner became even harder to implement due to local government reorganisation in 1996, the uncertainty of funding, and the continuation of existing service supports.

Undeterred, Skinner gave me and likeminded others a roadmap to follow, endorsed by The Scottish Office of the day, which we could and would quote while fending off any resistance to the reform proposals.

Overall, Skinner set out these fundamental principles alongside his 66 recommendations:

- individuality and development
- rights and responsibilities
- good basic care
- education
- health
- partnerships with parents
- child-centred collaboration
- a feeling of safety

This has led me to reflect on recent developments, including Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) (introduced in 2006), The independent Care Review (beginning in 2016 and completed in February 2020), and the development of The Promise (published in 2020), alongside the implementation of new care and workforce regulators, numerous iterations of Centres for Excellence, the establishment of Care Quality Frameworks, and much more, since Another Kind of Home was published.

In doing so, it feels troubling to me that some 33 years later we are still trying to embed the principles and recommendations made by Skinner, let alone The Promise.

Would Scotland have needed a full independent care review that included residential child care if Skinner's recommendations had been carried out and achieved?

The former First Minister of Scotland, Nicola Sturgeon, stated that the 'root and branch' care review may be failing to deliver sufficient change. She told a BBC



Radio 4 series 'Fixing Britain' that she blamed 'very vested interests that were pushing back against changes and institutional inertia [which] makes it sound more passive than it actually is' (Walker, 2024, para. 3).

Surely, then, it's reasonable to ask ourselves 'why?' Or do we fear that doing so would just create another social care/work review that seems to have become expensive, lengthy, and almost another industry?

Thankfully, it's not all doom and gloom, with many great examples of children- and young people-led ambition that have grown around Scotland as a result of The Promise. Additionally, there is currently political and financial support to try and meet all recommendations by the target date of 2030.

But we should remember that there is a Scottish election just round the corner, in 2026, with its outcome uncertain and the potential impact of political change unknown.

With this in mind, we must not allow progress to be left, once again, half baked. Historical examples have shown that not following through with *all* interconnected recommendations could lead to another implementation failure, similar to the struggles outlined within *Another Kind of Home*. We do not want to find ourselves in another 'root and branch' review if the ambitions of The Promise are not met.

I will leave you with a final thought from Skinner and urge you to read and reflect on his report: 'Effective change, however, requires commitment sustained over time. None of us should forget that' (Skinner, 1992, p.9).

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About the reviewer

A retired social work care professional for nearly four decades, who has never let go of the need to continually improve and innovate both public and charitable service's that provide support, advice and guidance to those in need.

I firmly believe that it is essential that the voice of those who use and are connected with services is genuinely heard, understood, and given the respect it deserves when planning and delivering any and all health and social work care in Scotland and beyond.

The review author was reviewing their own copy of this book.

