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Editorial

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Introduction to the spring 2026 issue of the *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*

Welcome to the spring 2026 issue of the *Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care*, another very full issue.

As I write this editorial, there is a fragile ceasefire in the war in the Middle East. International aid agencies have reported that hundreds of children have been killed, thousands injured and more than a million displaced by the ongoing conflict (Christou, Tondo & Holmes, 2026). The BBC's special correspondent Fergal Keane has written extensively about the effects of war on children. In the context of the war in Iran, he writes, 'The children's world has shrunk,' and even when fighting stops, 'the damage inflicted on young minds and bodies by the violence of bombing, the militarisation of childhood, and the loss of safety will endure long into the future' (Keane, 2026).

And this is just one of many crises with devastating impacts on the lives of children and their families. The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that there were 130 armed conflicts in 2025.¹ The UN children's agency UNICEF estimates that more than 200 million children, in 133 countries and territories, will require humanitarian assistance of some kind in 2026. Children affected by armed conflict are more likely to be separated from their families and consequently at high risk of

¹ <https://www.icrc.org/en/article/humanitarian-outlook-2026>



experiencing trauma, poverty and abuse. This risk underlines the importance of having effective arrangements for providing support and alternative care for children affected by conflict. The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action (2025) published results of a survey of needs, based on the responses of 154 participants in 15 countries, representing crises in Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. The detailed findings highlighted greater needs at a time when the resources of international relief agencies are being squeezed. Among the implications for provision identified were the importance of tailoring provision to local circumstances and to the needs of children with disabilities.

Journalists and researchers provide a valuable service in highlighting the particular effects of conflict and natural disasters on children, but it can be hard to get accurate data about children displaced from their homes and families, and consequently from their childhood friendships and schooling, as a result of conflict and violence. For that reason, I want to point our readers to a new website provided by the International Data Alliance for Children on the Move which aims to 'improve data and statistics and support evidence-based policymaking for migrant and misplaced children'. The website has informative resources, information about events, and you can sign up to IDAC² to receive regular updates.

This journal exists to educate readers on the circumstances and needs of children in alternative care, and we would like to be able to publish articles from authors working with children affected by conflict or those with direct experience of care in conflict zones. If you are working with children, engaged in supporting others in this work, or care experienced, please consider writing about your experience. We would love to hear from you.

Meanwhile, in Scotland, the needs of children are at the heart of two new pieces of legislation recently passed by the Scottish Parliament. The Children (Care, Care Experience, and Services Planning) (Scotland) [Bill](#) is intended to strengthen the entitlements to support up to the 26th birthday of young people leaving care services. The Restraint and Seclusion in Schools (Scotland) [Bill](#) when in force will regulate the physical restraint and isolation of children in education settings, including residential schools. The atmosphere in which this legislation is being introduced is

² <https://www.dataforchildrenonthemove.org>



the general acceptance that the use of restraint and seclusion should be avoided, their use certainly minimised, and alternative approaches used to keep children safe. The legislation also gives a duty to government ministers to provide guidance on the use of restraint and seclusion, as well as the authority to develop standards for use and training. Education providers will have duties to record and report use of restraint and seclusion and to inform parents.

These new Acts, and the introduction of a new Care Leaver Payment of £2,000, go some way in statutory responses to The Promise of Scotland's Independent Care Review to improve the life circumstances of care experienced young people and adults in Scotland. Readers can follow progress at The Promise Scotland website.³

While new law to protect and support children and their families is generally framed as improvement, responding to widely acknowledged weaknesses or gaps in the frameworks for this the legislation developed over time brings problems of coherence and potential confusion. The Scottish Government has therefore introduced a review of Scottish legislation, to run for a year from February 2026, and led by Professor Kenneth Norrie, an acknowledged expert on Scottish child and family law, and Professor Emeritus at the University of Strathclyde, in partnership with CELCIS. Professor Norrie gave the Kilbrandon Lecture in 2025 and contributed an article, 'Who then, in law, is my parent?', to Volume 24(1) of the SJRCC (Norrie, 2025). More information about the review and opportunities to participate, can be found on the CELCIS [website](#).

The spring 2026 issue

Many of the articles in this issue have been contributed by authors based in Scotland, working within Scotland's policy landscape, even if the practice issues they raise have global significance. The SJRCC, while published in Scotland, also aims to have an international outlook, and we begin the spring 2026 issue with an original research paper contributed by researchers based at McGill University in Canada.

Amanda Keller, Yunung Lee, Nikki Tummon and Michael Mackenzie conducted a scoping review of 29 research papers reporting on physical health and mental health outcomes of care leavers in several countries.

³ <https://thepromise.scot>



Their findings indicate that adults who spent any time in out of home care as children experience greater physical and mental health difficulties than the general population, and research in Europe also suggests higher rates of premature death. Among the limitations in the data is the lack of evidence about adults over the age of 30, indicating the need for longer follow-up studies. There are two really important implications of this work. First, as Keller et al. point out: 'understanding the differences between placement experiences, individual and community-based resilience factors, and their associations on long-term outcomes is critical to improving upon our child welfare practice'. Second, better understanding of the risks of certain physical and mental health difficulties in the life course for care experienced people could lead to more effective targeting of services.

Sydney Guinchard of the Why Not Trust for Care Experienced Young People and Danny Henderson of Care Visions present findings from a forum conducted with 20 residential care workers from one care provider in Scotland aimed at understanding better how workers cope with violence in the workplace. The paper is structured around themes emerging from the forum, including difficulties in defining violence, the importance of having opportunities to process violent experiences and the impact of personal and professional identities. The authors argue that by avoiding 'calling violent and aggressive behaviour "violence" and renaming all instances of emotional or physical harm to another person as "distress" invalidates the very real experiences of violence that RCC workers have told us they face on a regular basis'. They also highlight the importance of 'intentionally creating psychologically safe spaces away from the day-to-day operations, where practitioners can reflect on their experiences, resolve tensions between their personal selves and professional roles, and surface practice wisdom that can benefit the sector as a whole'.

Charlotte Wilson, a doctoral candidate at the University of Strathclyde, has examined the impact of secure care on autistic young people in Scotland. Based on the experiences of 19 young people, using diary and interview methods, Charlotte identified four themes emerging from her research which she presents as paradoxical (opposite poles): care vs restriction; structure vs flexibility; nurtured vs scared; belonging vs loss. Considering her findings, Charlotte makes recommendations for secure care providers in relation to three areas of young people's lives:



relationships; residence; and rules. In respect of the latter, she recommends that, 'Autistic young people should be given additional support in making sense of ambiguity'.

Kerr Lumsden, a doctoral candidate at the Moray House School of Education and Sport at the University of Edinburgh, has analysed education outcome statistics available from annual official statistics reports and received directly from local authorities in response to a Freedom of Information request. Five of Scotland's 32 local authorities did not respond despite a legal obligation to do so, and seven of the responding authorities said they did not know how many care experienced young people aged under 26 lived in their area. This is concerning in the context of The Promise in Scotland to improve the lives of this important group of citizens. Kerr identifies weaknesses in the data collection approaches used nationally and locally which, despite recent improvements, he finds are insufficiently finessed for effective policy making. He is also critical of the methodological assumptions in the approach to data collection whereby, 'existing descriptive statistics do not take into account wider inequalities, which may be exacerbating the negative educational experiences of care experienced young people'.

We are also publishing four short articles in this issue. The short article concept (normally up to 3,000 words) is designed to allow space for anyone with an interest in care experience, including people with lived experience of care, to share their perspective, report novel approaches to practice, critique policy, philosophise, and so on.

Marx Petrus Gertenbach, a residential child care worker and doctoral candidate at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, considers how 'diagnostic and care status labels function within residential child care as interactive markers that participate in the formation of identity, agency and everyday practice'. Marx explores how labels 'invite anticipation', with both residential child care staff and young people having prior expectations of behaviour and responses. Marx argues that such 'co-anticipation can narrow curiosity on both sides'.

Ross Buchanan, a service manager with Care Visions in Scotland, reports on his conversion from initial reluctance to having a young person's family pet live with her in a residential care setting, to becoming an enthusiastic advocate for what pets can do to support 'transformative changes in the



young person's wellbeing, relationships, engagement with education, and ability to regulate'.

Andrea McKeown, Laura Docherty, Claire McMorland and Jane Gibson, public health clinicians with NHS (National Health Service) Ayrshire and Arran in Scotland, report on their experience of using the Health Safety Check screening instrument for supporting children's health which the authors argue is a valuable aid to upholding care experienced children's right to good health.

Philip Coady, a residential child and youth care worker with Care Visions in Scotland, completes our short article section with a reflective piece on an unusual approach to 'the beautiful game', football (soccer) and the benefits it offers to a group of regular participants. The way this group perceives it: 'It is a game with many winners and no losers. It's football, but not as we know it'.

The editorial team has been delighted with the response to our call for reviews of classic books, an idea proposed by editorial board member, Professor James Anglin. In this issue we publish four such reviews. Ian Macfadyen, a retired social worker, reviews James Patrick's 'A Glasgow Gang Observed', reflecting both on his own early work experience and the ethical issues raised by the book's source research and writing. I have contributed a joint review of my late friend Bob Holman's accounts of helping children and families by living in their community and developing close relationships, as reported in 'Kids at the Door' and 'Kids at the Door Revisited'. Emma Astra, a lived experience expert, independent writer and researcher, and former social worker, reviews 'Stuart: A Life Backwards' by Alexander Masters who tells a story of his friend Stuart's life from adulthood back into childhood, arguing that the storytelling shows 'that lived experience can educate as powerfully as theory'. Leanne McIver, research associate at CELCIS and editorial board member of this journal, reviews 'Someone Else's Kids' by Torey Hayden, an account from the 1970s of a teacher's efforts to encourage children through love and understanding which colleagues construed as being soft. Leanne says: 'Many of these challenges and tensions will resonate with readers almost half a century later'.

We are also publishing three reviews of recent books. Euan Currie, a protecting children consultant at CELCIS, reviews 'Messy Social Work' by Richard Devine. Andrew Burns, who holds research and teaching posts at



the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, has reviewed 'An Essential Guide to Surviving and Thriving in Residential Child Care: Lessons from the Frontline on how you'll laugh, love and cry...all before lunchtime' by Jane Dalgleish. And I have contributed a review of an award-winning debut novel, 'Glasgow Boys' by Margaret McDonald.

We also commend to readers a paper on the theme of 'contextual safeguarding' by Professor Carlene Firmin of the University of Durham, based on her Kilbrandon Lecture, given at the University of Strathclyde in November 2025. The lecture itself can be viewed on the [Kilbrandon Lectures Archive](#), where readers will find all previous lectures and biographies of the lecturers.

We end this bumper spring issue of the SJRCC with a reflective piece by John Ryan, director of services at St Mary's Kenmure residential school in Bishopbriggs, near Glasgow. John's theme is 'Relational Practice, Professional Identity and a Lifelong Commitment to Care', and it is a very personal account of growing into the leadership role while keeping sight of the values that matter in residential child care. John's article was submitted in response to our call for articles on the theme of 'Identity and Belonging for Caregivers'. The call is open during 2026, and we encourage readers to consider writing on this topic for submission to our autumn issue too (deadline early September). More information can be found on our web pages [here](#).

The journal will be back in the autumn. We are grateful to our loyal readers. Please recommend the SJRCC to your friends and colleagues. If you are attending an event, we will be happy to supply flyers in hard copy or electronically. Perhaps your reading has inspired you to send us your research paper, short article or book review. We will be delighted to hear from you at sjrcc@strath.ac.uk.

Happy reading!

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Dr Graham Connelly is Editor-in-chief of the SJRCC and chair of its editorial board. He is an honorary senior research fellow at CELCIS and the Department of Social Work and Social Policy in the University of Strathclyde. His current research interests are mainly related to the history of child welfare.

