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Editorial

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Editors

Welcome to the autumn 2026 issue of the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care

In the UK, in recent months we have seen children's care discussed in places beyond the policy and practice communities that often sit at the centre of such conversations. In a recent episode of BBC Radio 4's This Cultural Life, poet and broadcaster, Lemn Sissay and actor and director Samantha Morton reflected on their childhoods, experiences of care and the influence these experiences have had on their lives and creative work (BBC, 2026). While rooted in personal stories, the discussion raised wider questions about identity, belonging and the ways in which care is understood and represented in public life.

Such conversations remind us that care is never simply a matter of policy, legislation or service delivery. It is a profoundly human experience, shaped by relationships, stories and the meanings people attach to them. The growing visibility of care experience in public life presents both opportunities and challenges. Personal accounts can illuminate realities that statistics alone cannot capture, helping to build empathy and challenge stigma. At the same time, individual stories cannot represent the diversity and complexity of care experience. For those working across research, policy and practice, there remains an important responsibility to ensure public understanding is informed by a broad range of evidence, perspectives and lived experiences.

Alongside these cultural conversations, significant policy developments continue to shape the landscape of children's services. In Scotland, implementation of The Promise of Scotland's Independent Care Review remains a defining focus of reform. The Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026 marked an important

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milestone, strengthening rights, advocacy and support for care-experienced people while reinforcing the responsibilities of corporate parents and public bodies. The legislation forms part of Scotland's ongoing commitment to implementing the recommendations of the Independent Care Review and creating a system in which children and young people can grow up loved, safe and respected.

Legislation, however, is only one dimension of making meaningful change. The fourth report of the Oversight Board for The Promise welcomed evidence of progress but concluded that too much of The Promise remains 'on paper, not in practice' (The Promise Scotland, 2025). The report highlighted stretched services, workforce pressures and shortages in suitable care provision, while acknowledging examples of effective partnership working and relationship-based support. A central message suggested that commitment alone is not enough; reforms must translate into tangible improvements in people's lives.

The recent publication of findings from the Bright Spots programme in Scotland offers valuable insight into what over a thousand care experienced children and young people said about their wellbeing, what's working well in their lives, and where there is more to be done so that all children who need care and protection can thrive.

At the same time, wider social and economic pressures continue to shape children's experiences. On 31st March 2026, 10,715 children were living in temporary accommodation in Scotland, the highest number on record (Scottish Government, 2026; Scottish Parliament Information Centre, 2026). Meanwhile, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's (2026) Poverty in Scotland 2026 report warns that Scotland is unlikely to meet its statutory child poverty targets without significantly greater action, noting that current plans are unlikely to deliver the scale of change required. These findings serve as a reminder that children's experiences of care and support cannot be understood separately from the wider conditions in which they live. Poverty, housing, health, education and relationships are deeply interconnected aspects of children's lives rather than discrete or siloed policy concerns.

Changes to digital access are also under consideration. The UK government proposes to introduce a social media ban for all children under the age of 16 (House of Commons Library, 2026). The plan would ensure that social media platforms cannot offer services to under 16's

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throughout the UK from spring 2027 onwards. The announcement followed a consultation with 116,000 responses from young people, parents and specialists. The results showed that nine in ten parents support the ban with two-thirds of young people supporting the notion that under 16's should not have access to at least some social media platforms. Proponents of the ban say the move will reduce online harm caused to children and young people (UK Government, 2026).

Taken together, these various developments identify a recurring challenge for policymakers, practitioners and researchers: understanding what children need not only to be protected from harm, but to flourish. As debates about poverty, housing, online safety and care reform continue, relationships, belonging and participation remain central concerns.

It is against this backdrop that the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care invites contributions to two forthcoming special themes: Love in Alternative Care for Children and Young People and De-institutionalisation and Child Care Reform. Although distinct, both themes explore how care systems can create the conditions in which children and young people are not only safe, but also loved, valued, connected and able to flourish.

As these debates continue to evolve, the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care remains committed to providing a space where research, practice experience, policy perspectives and lived experience can be brought into dialogue.

The autumn 2026 issue

This issue brings together authors from a range of practice and academic backgrounds from countries including Sweden, Australia, South Africa as well as several Scottish authors. The international perspective is long standing and valued. As a journal published in Scotland, it is important that we learn from, consider and share knowledge internationally. Together, the contributions in this issue offer a balanced, evidence-informed exploration of the key themes shaping the field today.

'A place of useful learning' is the motto credited to the founder of the University of Strathclyde, Professor John Anderson. This phrase is still guiding us today when we consider the wealth of evidence, practice experience and knowledge shared within the SJRCC.

We begin this issue with six original research papers.

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Deborah Lindsay, residential child care worker and recent master's degree graduate of the University of Strathclyde, challenges deficit-based explanations of exclusion from mainstream education of care experienced children and young people, highlighting a gap between Scotland's policy ambitions and their everyday educational realities.

Angela Griffiths, a social worker and director of Children's Homes Improvement Ltd., based in England, challenges the longstanding characterisation of residential child care as a 'last resort', arguing that this framing can delay appropriate decisions for children and that high-quality residential care should instead be recognised as a positive, planned and relationship-based option within a continuum of care.

Natasha C. Farrugia, a systemic family psychotherapist in Malta, explores how children's behaviour in residential care may often reflect unresolved grief and ambiguous loss. Farrugia discusses a need for more relational, trauma-informed and emotionally attuned approaches to care.

Michael Watson and Hope Christie of Robert Gordon University, Scotland, consider that high-quality care depends on the wellbeing of those providing it, highlighting the importance of supportive teams, reflective practice and organisational cultures that sustain residential child care workers.

Annu Gaidhu, a child and youth care practitioner in Ontario, Canada, considers that care records are rarely, if ever, neutral and calls on practitioners to prioritise listening, reflection and relational engagement before recording children's experiences.

Amanda Keller of Université de Montréal, Canada, Yunung Lee, Nikki Tummon, and Michael J. MacKenzie of McGill University, Canada, advocate for a life-course approach to understanding care experience, highlighting evidence that educational and economic inequalities can persist far beyond early adulthood while recognising that many care-experienced adults follow delayed rather than disrupted pathways towards education and employment.

This issue includes three articles from specially invited guest authors on the theme of 'Forgotten Children'. The common thread in these different stories is that in the relatively recent past children in many countries were removed from their families and communities by state authorities who

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failed to understand or value their cultures. We want to shine a light on stories which are at risk of being forgotten, just as the rights of the children in each of these three case studies were diminished. There are salutary lessons in these stories for the contemporary child and youth care practitioners, managers, and authorities. We would like to publish similar accounts in future and welcome readers' help in identifying relevant authors.

Re-examining the 1951 Greenland children's initiative, Kevin Anthony Perry of Ilisimatusarfic University identifies lessons for current residential childcare practices, underscoring the continuing relevance of participation, rights, belonging and relational care.

Exploring the enduring legacy of the Stolen Generations Kylie Day and Lynne McPherson of Southern Cross University, Australia, highlight that children's wellbeing depends upon maintaining connections to family, culture, community and identity, making a compelling case for Indigenous-led, relationally accountable approaches to care

Through an examination of one Scottish Gypsy/Traveller woman's care records Davie Donaldson, Dan Allen, and Martha Stewart, researchers with Scottish gypsy-traveller backgrounds, offer a powerful reminder that what is written about children, whose voices are included, and how their identities are represented can have lifelong consequences for their sense of self, belonging and wellbeing.

We are also publishing seven short articles in this issue.

Nicola Watson and Jess Jackson of Shared Lives Plus , a UK membership charity, illustrate how strengths-based, community-focused support can enable parents with learning disabilities develop the confidence and skills to parent successfully, challenging deficit-based assumptions and helping families stay safely together.

Daiki Sasaki of Tokaigakuen University, Japan, explores the critical role of staff support in preventing abuse in residential child care, calling for integrated approaches that combine trauma-informed, attachment-based and cognitive behavioural perspectives with ongoing supervision and organisational support.

Terje Halvorsen of the Norwegian University for Science and Technology considers how some of the most significant influences in residential child

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care may be found not in specialist interventions but in the ordinary experiences of everyday life that help children feel secure, valued and able to thrive

Maurice Gilligan, and Sam Macrae of Renfrewshire Council, Scotland, suggest that keeping The Promise of the Independent Care Review requires more than policy commitments alone, it requires a whole-community approach.

Peter Andersson of Stockholm University, Sweden, argues that residential child care should be grounded in everyday care and relationships, suggesting that it is most effective when providing safety, continuity, belonging and meaningful connections to family and community.

Amy Miskimmin-Logan, a participation development worker at Our Hearings Our Voice Scotland, highlights findings from youth-led research showing that trusted, reliable relationships remain the foundation of effective support, meaningful participation and positive change for care experienced children and young people.

Robyn Elliott, a social worker with East Lothian Council in Scotland, demonstrates how timely, individualised support for adoption and kinship care families can strengthen permanence, preserve family relationships and help children thrive within stable and loving homes.

And, we are also publishing a further three articles on our special theme for 2026 ‘Belonging’

Diane Cafferky, a manager with Imagine Care in Scotland, suggests that creating safe, nurturing and emotionally attuned environments can strengthen children's identity, relationships and sense of belonging while also supporting the adults who care for them.

In a reflection on leadership, Stephen McGhee, managing director of Phoenix Abbey, an independent child care provider in Scotland, proposes that creating belonging for children begins with creating belonging for the adults who care for them, highlighting how supportive organisational cultures, reflective supervision and psychologically safe workplaces are fundamental to high-quality residential care.

Through the lens of Ubuntu, Zeni Thumbadoo of the National Association of Child care Workers, South Africa, offers an exploration of how child and

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youth care workers come to understand themselves through their relationships with others, suggesting that belonging is not simply an outcome of care but a foundation of professional identity itself.

We are delighted to publish six reviews of recent books.

Jim Goddard, retired social policy academic and Chair of the Board of Trustees of The Care Leavers Association since 2011 reviews 'Ootlin' by Jenni Fagin.

Our Editor-in-Chief Graham Connelly reviews 'Social Work with Unmarried Mothers' by Vivienne E. Cree and Robert MacKenzie.

Neil Ballantyne, Principal Academic at the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand and former Reader in Social Work at the University of Strathclyde reviews 'Rethinking Democracy in Social Work' by Magnus Weber, Marcus Herz and Zulmir Bečević.

CELCIS Improving Care Experiences Consultant Mel Bridges reviews 'The Essential Guide to Kinship Care: Trauma-informed, Practical Help for You and Your Family' by Sarah Naish and Enza Smith.

Brandi Lee Lough Dennell, Research Associate at CELCIS, reviews 'Communication Tools for Working with Traumatized Children and Teens' by Richard Rose.

And last, but certainly not least, reviewed by our Book Review Editor and Research Associate at CELCIS, Nadine Fowler, is 'Blood Red Sky' by Sara Cullen.

We are also pleased to be able to publish a book review submitted in response to our call for reviews of classic books. Bethany Jay, National Embedding Manager at IMPACT, University of Birmingham reviews 'The Managed Heart' by Arlie Hochschild. Jay describes revisiting and recommending this text because its powerful analysis of emotional labour continues to illuminate the often-unseen demands of residential child care practice and has had a lasting influence on both their thinking and research.

It was with sadness that we learned of the death of Dolly Parton, whose generosity, vision and commitment to children transformed the lives of millions around the world. Through Dolly Parton's Imagination Library,

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thousands of care experienced children across Scotland have received books and the opportunity to develop a love of reading from an early age. We are grateful to Helena Barrett-Duncan of The Dollywood Foundation UK for sharing a tribute to Dolly Parton's extraordinary legacy in this issue of the journal. Her belief in the power of reading, books, stories and dreams leaves an enduring legacy that will continue to enrich the lives of children and families for many years to come.

The issue concludes with an introduction by Professor James Anglin of the University of Victoria, Canada, to a statement from FICE International on promoting appropriate and quality alternative care for children and young people. The statement reaffirms the organisation's longstanding commitment to high-quality alternative care, including residential care, while recognising the importance of ensuring that children's rights, wellbeing and best interests remain at the centre of policy and practice. As countries continue to grapple with questions of deinstitutionalisation, care reform and the future role of residential care, the statement offers an important contribution to ongoing debates about the future of residential child care. We are pleased to publish it in full and invite readers to engage with the questions and debates it raises.

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