Meet the Authors - Graham Connelly

Hello, and welcome to SIRCC online’s Meet the Authors, 2021. The theme of this year's online conference is workforce. And we have a special edition of the Scottish Journal of Residential Childcare with this theme being released. We are delighted to be holding a series of conversations with some of the authors who have contributed to this special edition to hear a bit more about their writing, and get to know the people behind the papers. I'm joined here today by our very own Journal editor, Graham Connelly. Graham, Hello.

Hi Sarah, it’s good to see you.

It’s good to see you. Hopefully we'll get to meet in person in the university very soon.

Oh, I'd like that.

Graham, could you tell us a bit about yourself and your connections to residential Childcare over the years?

Yes, my first involvement in working with young people was as a voluntary youth worker. And then, professionally, I trained as a teacher, I worked for a number of years as a geography teacher. I was looking for a change of work. And I saw what looked to me like an interesting post advertised at Langside College (Glasgow). It was mainly to teach general education to apprentices. But included with it was a number of hours a week teaching psychology. And I'd studied psychology in my first degree. And as it happened, I was completing a master's degree in psychology. So that sounded like an interesting opportunity. I applied, got the job and found that I was teaching psychology, probably not very well, I think, on the certificate and social service program. About a year and a half into that dual role. The then head of section the late Margaret Morris, who was a fascinating person - she'd been the first ever children's officer for The Highlands and Islands in the 1950s. And she set up the course, or its predecessor anyway, at Langside. She said to me, there's a vacancy in the section. Why don't you apply? I said, you know, I'm not a social worker. And she said, we have plenty of those, I think you've got other skills, why don't you considered it. So I did and got the got the job. And that started another 10 and a half years working in the social work section that Langside the last three of them, which I was the head of section, a role, which sometime later, CELCIS’s present director, Claire Burns took over. So that was my introduction. And my role there, I guess, was a teacher as well as teaching psychology and other social sciences, organizing the course and I had the opportunity to visit, because it was a block release and service course, we did quite a bit of the teaching when the students were back in the workplace. So I visited all these workplaces and had opportunities to see so many children's homes, residential schools, homes for, for older adults and centers for adults with disabilities. I even in fact, spent a week shadowing one of my students who worked at Ballikinrain, where I believe you worked as well. And ironically, in the current issue, we've got an article about the migration of, of the facility from its castle headquarters into more suitable locations, written by Paul Gilroy and Lawrence Wareing, so look out for that one. During my time at Langside, the Open University came along and said, we'd like significant social service courses, one in Scotland, and we were the main center for the teaching, and courses in England and Wales to get involved with us in developing a new online course called working with children and young people. And I volunteered to do that. I spent three years working on a part time secondment with the OU. Which started a very long relationship from me with the OU, I worked on a number of courses subsequently. And it was also my first introduction to higher education teaching and also for myself to academic writing. And also on that course was the late great Professor Bob Holman. And because he lived in Glasgow, we shared a lot of train journeys back to Glasgow. And he encouraged me in my writing got me to write some things and gave me good feedback. Of course, there's no such thing as a free lunch. And one day, Bob phoned me up and he said, What are you doing in Thursday? And I thought, well, Bob and Annette are inviting for dinner. But actually he said, I run this youth club, you know, that. He said, I think they would like to learn to ski, so I need you to teach them. And that began a very different relationship with Bob and his youth club for some time.

I then left Langside I moved to the then Scottish School of Further Education, where I was involved in helping to set up an online course for further education teachers in student guidance. Later, I was working in Strathclyde’s School of Education. And I had this idea to develop a course on the education of looked after children. I'd come across while I was working for the EU, a monograph written by Professor Sonia Jackson, based on her research in England, on the education of children in local authorities, and really pointing out that it was dismal. And it got me wondering if it was the same in Scotland. So I couldn't find any research, I decided to run a course for teachers to I suppose, make them more aware of the needs of care experience children. And as often happens when you teach something you learn more. And I got my first research grant in that area. And that became my main area of research.

Graham, that is so fascinating listening to you talk us through your journey so far. And a journey that has taken you to become editor of the Scottish Journal for Residential Childcare. Can you tell us a bit about what it means to hold that role?

I suppose principally, I'm the champion of the Journal, to make sure that it gets published on time, and that we continue the legacy which, which started in 2002, when Andy Kendrick first started the journal. I'm the custodian of the back catalogue - we've got a huge back catalogue of fascinating articles, which continually are important when people are thinking about subjects or a new development in residential work or related work, then surely, they will find an article where somebody has discussed this issue in the past. So I'm the custodian of that catalog, I suppose just in a very practical level, there is the liaison with our internal editorial team, of which you're a valued member, Sarah, and then liaison with our board of advisors, the editorial board. I'm pleased to say and we've got representatives from many countries now and many types of setting there. People with academic experience and also people with practice experience. So I suppose that's my main role.

So when did you become editor of the Journal Graham?

Well, as I said, the Journal started in 2002. And I became editor in 2012. And that's when I joined CELCIS. When CELCIS was created from the Scottish Institute of Residential Childcare, I moved. By that time I had a post in the school social work. And I moved in to become part of the first management team for CELCIS with particular responsibility for the courses that CELCIS and its partners were running, but also its research portfolio. And it so happened that the Journal was lodged within the research portfolio. So it became my responsibility then.

Have you noticed any changes since that time over the years?

Well, the year that when I took over a 2012, we didn't publish an issue. Hopefully that wasn't because of my arrival, but we use that time to make some significant changes. The Journal, then I think you remember this, was a hardcopy and came out twice a year. And it had subscribers, not very many individual subscribers, but we had quite a lot of institutional subscribers, mainly universities that had Social Work courses. And I managed to persuade my colleagues and CELCIS that we should really migrate this online, make it available online, also free to download and not require subscribers. Actually, we weren't making any money from subscribers in any case. And I reasoned that it costs more to collect that money, and we would been better putting that effort into getting the journal available. So it then became part of CELCIS’s portfolio - substantial portfolio - of online materials. Probably, I suppose the other major change is that we introduced this idea of having research based articles. We realized that we were receiving submissions from researchers, from academics, but also from people working in practice. And sometimes the people in practice were new writers, didn't have the experience. And it might seem daunting to write a long research base article. So we came up with this formula, which we use now, which is to have double blind, peer reviewing for longish articles, which mainly appeals to researchers or research students and academics, and shorter articles, so that we don't lose out on people who just want to write about an innovative piece of practice, or an idea that they have had or to sound off about a particular topic. So that was one. That's another of the changes, I think, and of course, the online, I suppose the online presence of the journal has developed in many ways in the past 18 months, as you know, we've had special features on COVID-19 where we publish articles instead of waiting for an issue, we publish them as we receive them.

Thanks so much Graham. In terms of the Journal for each edition, I know that you divide the forwards, can you give us a sneak peek into what this edition’s forward is about and what your key messages are?

Yeah, well, I've developed a kind of formula for writing the editorial and I tend to write it in two parts. And the first part, if you think about the Journal, We are based in Scotland, but our audience is far beyond Scotland. And what I like to do in that first part is to communicate with our audience outside Scotland, some of the things that some of the significant things that have been happening recently, since the previous issue. And then in the second part I give, I feel like a forward to the content of the current issue. I just give a summary of what readers can expect. An advanced organizer, if you like. So in the first part, the key points that I’m making - well firstly, a nod to COVID, which has been so so important in the past 18 months, two years. It's affected the work that everyone has done, the way we work, and so on. And I noticed a report from UNICEF, which said that less than 1% of the global supply of vaccines is reaching low income countries. And it got me thinking - in 2016, I spent a little time in Nigeria, doing research that was commissioned from CELCIS by the European Commission, to look at residential care in a number of countries and I went to do some fieldwork in Nigeria. And I've kept in touch with my co-researcher, who lives in Nigeria. And I just feel how privileged we are. I am double vaccinated. I'm conscious of how privileged we are and I just think that we need to have some concern about countries that are less fortunate. I was reading yesterday that something like 2% of the population of Africa is vaccinated and I heard on the news last night that more than 80% of the population of the UK have had two shots of the vaccine. So that gives you some sense of that wide Gulf really. So I'm going to mention that. In relation to things happening in Scotland, well something we're also featuring in the current issue was Who Cares? Scotland's Care Experienced History Month, which involved partners from a number of countries. And the young care experience history student who had the idea in the first place, Charlotte Armitage, is contributing an article in the current issue just about that. So I'll be mentioning that in the editorial. And then in terms of policy, as you know yourself earlier this year, Part 13 of the Children Scotland Act 2000 came into operation. And crucially, that means that there's a duty on local authorities and providers to support brothers and sisters to be able to stay together in care. And there's new national guidance about that. So will be mentioning that. There's a recent announcement that there will be a national care service. I expected that simply to be about older aged care, but in fact I was surprised to learn that Children’s Services will be will be part of that. So we’re mentioning that. And that's the first part. As I said, the second part will just be introducing the articles, the 15 or so articles that we'll have in this issue.

So it sounds like you've been busy pulling those bits and pieces together. Is there any other pieces of writing that you've been involved in recently?

Well, you know that I'm mainly retired, although my wife doesn't think so. So I probably haven't been writing as much as I would have been when I was working full time, but I have been publishing. Last week in fact, a new book was published Marginalized Communities and Higher Education, edited by Neil Harrison, Andrea Masterton and my colleague Linda O’Neill. Neil Harris and myself have contributed one chapter to that book. It is about the journeys of care experience students in England and Scotland. And that's largely based on work that Linda, and myself and Nadine Fowler from CELCIS did on looking at the experience of care experience students in Scotland in 2018 and 2019. And similar work that Neil had done previously. I haven't seen the book yet. But I think a copy is wending its way to me. Something that, that I did last year, when we were all completely locked down, was to work with a school pal of mine, a guy I first met when we were 12, Mike Lawrence. We wrote an article for the occasional series on COVID-19, on the effects on children of the 1918 pandemic, the so called Spanish flu. I had come across some material about that and my pal, Mike, who in professional life was a management consultant really he likes to be a historian.

And he gave us something to do together when we couldn't meet up. So, that was particularly satisfying. And I think we're, we're hoping to go and get some material from the archives once we're allowed to do that. I've also been involved with our former colleague, Louise Hill and Robbie Gilligan from Trinity College, Dublin who’s a member of our editorial board on writing a paper on kinship care in Scotland and Ireland. And that was published last year. And there's been a bit of a spinoff from that. Robbie has just been presenting on that at the EuSARF conference, the European children's conference. And we've also been running seminars, we had one in March and we've got another in October, and we hope I think to have some ideas for a further paper. That's the academic writing.

I've got a piece of writing that's in my head, which is very different. And I hope it will get onto paper soon. I've got a long interest in James Connolly, the Irish Republican, and one of the core leaders of the 1916 rising and Dublin. But the story I'm kind of formulating in my head is actually a love story about him and his wife, Lily Reynolds, because I discovered that whilst they met in Dublin, in fact, she lived subsequently in Perth, where I grew up. And he was living with his brother in Dundee, which is where my father grew up. And they got married in Perth, so and some of their less passionate letters to each other, are in the archives in Dublin. And I'd really like to write about that.

I would love to read about that, hopefully, you'll go through that process and get it down on paper seven.

Graham, you don't sound retired, you sound very busy, as if it's something you enjoy, then please keep doing that, because we enjoyed reading your work. And you mentioned, we've got quite a number of Journal articles being produced and this edition, and we're holding podcast conversations with quite a number of the authors who have articles linked to the theme of workforce. Can you tell us a bit about the relationship between the Scottish Journal of Residential Childcare, and SIRCC and the thinking behind the author's conversations that we are doing just now?

Well, you'll know yourself that the origin of SIRCC - The Scottish Institute of Residential Childcare was a report by Angus Skinner, the then Chief Inspector of Social Work, Another Kind of Home. And one of its many recommendations was that there should be a Scottish Centre for consultancy and development. There hadn't previously been such a thing. And that was at a time when I suppose there was very little training for workers, it was certainly wasn't compulsory. And there was very little research into residential child care. So the Journal was, was integral I think, to the setting up of SIRCC and the idea that we'd encourage people to research to write about and therefore workers to be able to read about what others were doing and researching in relation to those in residential childcare. So that's the kind of origin I think the thinking that Andy Kendrick had when he proposed and set up the Journal. When CELCIS was formed, then the journal itself and Scottish Institute and the conference and so on, became the legacy (as well as the courses) became the legacy of that original Center, which Angus proposed. So they've grown up together, if you like.

The thinking behind the Meet the Authors conversations?

Yeah, well, I think most of us like to see people in 3d, get rounded feel for people who have written what you see on paper or online. Because often, individuals, their background, what makes them tick has, of course, contributed to what they're writing about. And people are curious. So I guess that's what it is. That was the thinking. Also, I think so much of our life is online now, podcasts are very popular, we've made a great deal of use of zoom. So we all hope that this would be another way of introducing the journal and it's fast by catalog to possibly people who haven't come across it before. So I think that that was some of the thinking.

Absolutely. It'll be interesting to see how people feel and if they're interested in us doing any more of these. In terms of the theme of SIRCC online this year - its workforce – do you think the residential childcare workforce has changed over the years that you've been involved in residential care?

Yeah, I mean I'm really a commentator on looker if you like, so I'm probably not best qualified. It's probably better to speak people working in the sector, although I am a Non-Executive Director of Kibble school, as you know, so I've got strong links with the with the sector. But well, one of the ways in which I certainly observed that things have changed is in relation to qualifications of staff. If you think about Another Kind of Home the report that Angus Skinner wrote, he said in that report that 88% of staff working the sector had no qualifications. And now, of course, it's compulsory to be registered, you need qualifications to get registration. There are a range of ways you can do that, including in service, but gone are the days when we allowed people to continue in employment without getting qualifications. Of course, there's support, and it's a very diverse workforce. But that's certainly one thing that I would notice. That diversity, also of workforce. There are more psychologists other therapists, a whole range of people now, working in and associated with residential childcare. And the links, I think, between residential childcare and other forms of care are closer and more obvious than they were in the past. Then I think, also there have been very, very important influences on residential childcare. In more recent years, I've just mentioned the influences of social pedagogy. And more recently, trauma informed practice.

That's brilliant, Graham, thank you. We've come a long way as a residential workforce.

Exactly,

and it reflects and what you're saying there. Another topic that's evolving quite a bit over the years as the subject of restraint, and we feature restraint at this year’s SIRCC online. We've now featured restraint a couple of years running at SIRCC. What do you think Scotland's next step should be in relation to restraint?

Well, I've never had to restrain a child in a professional setting. So I just leave that as a health warning. But I'd like to start with a story. Some years ago, I had the privilege to go on a trek in Nepal with young people, organized by Who Cares? Scotland. And one day, we were probably at the highest point in our treck, and it was very sunny. And one of the youngsters who was with us, a young man, like to walk without a top on, which was fine when we were at low altitude, but the guys who are with us, the sherpas, were concerned that that he would get sunburned and sunstroke, and we were actually a long way from help. And persuasion hadn't worked. He wouldn't put on suncream and I think I walked with him for a while, and we talked and I got to know him a bit better. And I thought I realized what the difficulty might be. And I made a suggestion to him, I said that I'd noticed one of the young women had spray on sunscreen, and perhaps you would lend it to him. Would he be interested? Would he allow me to speak to her? And he said, yes. So that was arranged, he spread it on where he could and he allowed me to spray it on his back. We kept walking and he said to me, something that I'll never forget. He said, you know, the teachers in my school are not allowed to put sunscreen on me. But they can hold me down. And I suppose what that taught me was that we need to get much better at understanding children who have experienced trauma, and also that it may be that something had happened that meant that people working with children were afraid if you like, just to have the normal contact that you would have, the arm round, around the shoulder and so on. And somehow we'd also formalized touch, if you like, holding which is restraint, or you can use a euphemism like safe holding. So we definitely need to get the balance. Now, I realize that sometimes it may be important to hold someone safely for their own safety, so they don't harm themselves or others. But the statistics suggested that holding down was happening much too frequently. So I think what we have to do is to follow what The Promise says, that the workforce will feel supported to support behavior in a trauma informed way, that reflects the deeper understanding of children in their care. That's what they say. And I think we just have to do more to help workers to be able to do that. I think that's all I can say, it's not going to be easy. But we need to make sure that it's understood by all workers, by the managers, and also by boards of management who may be ultimately responsible for schools centres, and the off site management teams.

And that was such a powerful story and it highlights that we've come a long way in our journey in relation to restraint, but we still have a long way to go. And it's the “we” - that everybody needs to be involved in this journey. You talked to The Promise there, you touched on the role of The Promise. What do you think will change or needs to change in relation to residential child care? And if I can ask you for your views on the role of The Promise?

Well, perhaps we should start just by explaining what The Promise is. Just very, very briefly, for listeners outside Scotland. The Promise is the name that's given to the report, and well, it's more than a report, of course, it's an entire change the childcare system, that resulted from the review of childcare in Scotland. The Promise team produced a plan, the plan of change from 2021, (present year) to 2024. And I mentioned to you that I'm a Non-Executive Director of Kibble. Kibble and, I guess, many other providers have set up groups, which will be responsible for oversight, I guess, of the way in which the findings from The Promise report and its other materials are implemented and Kibble has set up its Promise Task Force and also some subgroups. And I am a member. We've got three board members who have joined groups and I am a member of the Promised Task Force. We're meeting fortnightly and that group is charged with ensuring that The Promise is implemented within Kibble. And I know that there's work all across Scotland, and in many locations, and so on, to do things that are similar. Well, there's a lot that required, some of it will be quick wins, I guess, for example, the idea of language that cares, the promise talks about importance of language that's not stigmatizing. And we've been looking in Kibble at the vocabulary, the way in which you talk about care, because the way in which you talk about it sets expectations. So we've been looking at shared language from board members, through to teachers and care staff, and so on. I think it's important that our government doesn't abdicate responsibility. They've said that brothers and sisters should be kept together in care. And that presents some challenges because residential childcare as a sector has reduced in proportion to other forms of care, like foster care, it's perhaps not reduced as much in Scotland as it has in some other countries, but nevertheless, it has reduced. And centres have reduced in size and that makes it more difficult to be flexible. So I think governments and agencies working in partnership, will have to think of ways in which they can innovate, to ensure that brothers and sisters are kept together. I mean there are many other things that we need to do. But that's something I've been thinking about just now I think.

I suppose thinking about some of the things that we need to do. And thinking about our Journal. Do you think the Journal will contribute and play a role in realizing the ambitions of The Promise?

I hope so, I mean, the Journal exists as a forum for debate and it's a place where we encourage people to write about innovation and their ideas. And also, of course, that means that people can read about others innovation. So I think those things will be important. For example, in the, in the current issue, we have an article by Kevin Pollock, and Jim Gillespie, from Kibble. And they're talking about moving towards organizational resilience, and the ways in which, by anticipating the needs for resilience in organizations, Kibble was able to respond creatively to the difficulties presented by the current pandemic. So, I mean, we think by publishing that article, it will inspire others who perhaps have not thought much about organizational resilience and planning for things that might go wrong. I think another way in which we can contribute is to encourage more contributions from authors who themselves have care experience. We've encouraged new writers and we've had co-authoring of articles by professionals and care experience young people but I'd like to see more of that - more articles from authors with care experience themselves.

We would encourage any of our listeners, who are thinking about collaboration, please, please do get in touch and ask us for some advice. In terms of the impact that the Journal has had on residential childcare over the years, you've already kind of covered that a bit. But I just wondered, what's your personal thoughts on the impact of the Journal on residential childcare?

Well, it's a very significant part of the CELCIS website, I think the comms team, tell me that it accounts for something like a quarter of downloads. So I'm guessing that people are coming to the journal looking for information, for ideas and reading it. So one hopes that they're doing that because they find it useful, find it inspiring that they get ideas, perhaps it's a topic of debate, you like to think in workplaces. We don't really know, because we perhaps we should do some research about that. Sarah, what do you think? But, you like to think anyway, that it does have an influence and not just here in Scotland, because what we say in the aim is that with the Journal, about residential care, but not solely about residential care about all the kinds of care that is related to residential care, we're published in Scotland, but we're not solely about care in Scotland. It's not an inward looking journal, we're looking out. So we hope that people in other parts of the world like to read about what's happening in Scotland, but similarly, I suppose because we provide a forum for authors across the world, then what we're doing is we're bringing to our Scottish workforce, articles or ideas that they wouldn't otherwise have had the opportunities to read about. So that's the function I think, just allowing people to make contact, I think with with ideas, the intellectual aspects of, of caring which is actually so important, so fundamental to our practice.

So that's the the impact on the readers and the impact on the sector. What about anybody that that might be considering submitting an article? Do you have any advice that you would give to any of our viewers or listeners?

Yeah, well, I give the advice that I would give myself, don't put off putting pen to paper, or tapping the keyboard. If you've got an idea, just start it. Crucially, talk to your colleagues about your idea. But also talk to us, if you've got an idea, you can send us a paragraph, we say that on the website, send in a paragraph. Actually later today I'll be responding to a graduate student who has an idea for an article based on her on her research. So do that. And we will respond. Particularly if you are not an experienced author, we can help you as well - don't let that put you off. The first article I ever sent to a journal was based on my master's research. And it was rejected. I wrote nothing for two years after that. And it was a while before somebody said to me Well, that's what happens. You know, you don't get published first time or your article comes back to you. Unfortunately, the editor of that particular journal hadn't sent a very encouraging response to me. And that's what we try to do we have, we have our advisory board, who largely act as our reviewers for articles. The long articles, research based articles or double blind peer review that, as I said, earlier, but even the short articles are reviewed, they're reviewed by one member of our editorial advisory board. We give all writers feedback. And to be honest, in the time I've been editor, we've very rarely not eventually published, just by helping writers to get there in the end. We like to think that we will give positive feedback that is encouraging and not discouraging. So please come to us. We all know what it's like to get feedback on articles. We know what that rejection letter feels like. So we like to think we've learned from that experience and that we want to make it as painless as possible and to be a learning journey for our authors, because we know. We are authors ourselves. We know that people spend a long time crafting their articles. Do read our guidance for authors. Sometimes people don't do that they send in the articles without reading about our about our house style - for example, the form of referencing we use, APA 7th. We're a very small team, we don't have endless resources. We're not published by one of the large publishing houses so we don't have those resources behind us. And it does help if we can get articles that are close to the format that we use for publishing as possible. And do remember, you'll get feedback from us.

Graham, thank you so much.

It has been an absolute pleasure to chat to you today to hear more about you, The Scottish Journal of Residential Childcare, and your journey as Editor. As a reminder to all our viewers and listeners, all Journal articles are free to read or downloads in the Journal section of the CELCIS website. And there are other recordings in this Meet the Author series. Thank you so much.