

The story of the first-ever care experienced history month

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Abstract

The first-ever Care Experienced History Month took place in April 2021. Announced in Scotland in September 2020, Care Experienced History Month was celebrated across the world by Care Experienced people and their allies. The month aimed to draw attention to the rich and far-reaching history of Care Experienced people by connecting the past with the present and sharing the legacies of Care Experienced people who lived before us. This article explores the process that led to the creation of Care Experienced History Month, worldwide collaborations involved in the delivery of the month, the overall aims of the month, and an overview of the content created and shared throughout April 2021.

Keywords

Care Experienced, history, culture, Scotland, Care Experienced History Month

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Introduction

Care Experienced people have existed in societies across the world since the earliest forms of civilisation. As far as records go back in history, Care Experienced people can be found. The oldest existing codes of law, from the Third Sumerian Dynasty of Ur, featured laws protecting orphans (Finkelstein, 1968). The Greek philosopher Plato wrote extensively about orphans and, of course, his student Aristotle was himself an orphan (Internet Classics Archive, n.d.; Rist, 1989). Why is this important? Well, simply put, this recognition tells us that we have been trying, for millennia, to get it right for Care Experienced people. Since the end of the Second World War, there have been constant attempts to reform and improve the 'care system'. The most recent attempt in Scotland was the Independent Care Review, which was different in that it was largely led and shaped by the opinions and experiences of adults and children who had lived, or were living, in care. Care Experienced History Month is likewise led by Care Experienced people, with support from allies. It continually strives to report on the history of care from the perspectives of Care Experienced children and adults.

I am a Care Experienced young woman. That means I have experienced state intervention in my life. As a teenager, I experienced foster and kinship care. My Care Experienced peers might have lived in a residential or secure unit, been in kinship or foster care, lived at home with the involvement of social workers or were adopted. The term Care Experienced, I believe, originated in Scotland, and arose from a consultation with Care Experienced people by Who Cares? Scotland in the campaign which led to the Independent Care Review. Throughout history, Care Experienced people may have been referred to as orphans or foundlings, among many more derogatory terms.

At the time of the launch of Care Experienced History Month, I was an employee of [Who Cares? Scotland](#) for four years. It was during my employment here I began researching the history of Care Experienced people in Scotland, and then across the world. This research subsequently led to the idea of hosting an entire month of activity dedicated to telling the history of care from past to present; sharing the stories of Care Experienced people throughout history and honouring

the legacy left behind by Care Experienced people no longer with us. The idea came to life in April 2021, in Scotland and indeed across the world, with the official launch of Care Experienced History Month.

This article will examine the process that transformed an idea into an internationally recognised and celebrated campaign. It will explore the UK-wide and international connections and collaborations required and created to ensure the month's success. I will outline the aims of the project at the beginning and explain how and why these aims developed with the assistance of Care Experienced people, academics and organisations involved who inspired a new focus as planning progressed. Finally, I will share an overview of the content produced in advance of and throughout April 2021, specifically focusing on the content that stood out to me the most as the project lead.

Laying the foundations

I started exploring the history of care in 2018. My research initially focused specifically on Scotland and went no further back than the 20th century. The scope of my research naturally expanded to going further back into the past and soon included the United Kingdom, and then was followed by several other countries as I found myself discovering moments in the history of Care Experienced people in Australia, the United States, and other imperial colonies of Great Britain.

I was struck to learn the first record of Care Experienced people in history dated back to 2047bc, under the rule of Sumerian King Ur-Nammu of the Third Dynasty of Ur who created the oldest surviving codes of law which included the protection of orphans (Finkelstein, 1968).

It was at this point it became clear to me that the history of Care Experienced people dated back thousands of years, in all corners of the world, and yet so little of this history was understood to be the history of Care Experienced people and consequently had often been overlooked.

In February 2020, my findings were collated and transformed into an incomplete timeline of the history of care in Scotland. This was then developed into a

facilitated session that was delivered on Care Day, presenting an introduction to the history and culture of Care Experienced people in Scotland to the First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, and Scottish Labour Leader, Richard Leonard. This event was important in laying the foundations of Care Experienced History Month as it revealed that senior politicians had an appetite to understand how care, as we know it today, came to be and showed they were interested in hearing the lessons in the present day that are still to be learned from the history of care in Scotland.

An elevated session including moments in the global history of care was delivered in July 2020 to the International Federation of Social Workers' annual conference. The input was met with curiosity from participants from across the world, who expressed a desire to understand the history of Care Experienced people in their respective countries. This feedback and the feedback from the Care Day event, coupled with the collated findings from my research, solidified my personal realisation of the universal need for Care Experienced people to understand where we come from, what our heritage and culture is, and the history of our community. I then looked to other liberation campaigns to understand how to address the history of a community of people and I drew inspiration from Black History Month and LGBT History Month. This ultimately led to the idea to create an annual commemoration of the history of Care Experienced people, through a dedicated month of activity — Care Experienced History Month.

The process that led to April 2021

Following the success of the two events at the beginning of 2020, a formal pitch was made to Who Cares? Scotland, who supported taking the project forward. At this stage, it was agreed that sponsorship would be required to fund the month and steering groups made up of Care Experienced people and allies were to be established.

Conversations with partner organisations in New Zealand and Australia took place in August 2020 to gauge interest outside Scotland. These discussions confirmed there was indeed international interest but also highlighted the

delivery of Care Experienced History Month would have to look different in each country — particularly with differing levels of coronavirus restrictions in place — if the month was to be successful.

Care Experienced History Month was officially launched on social media in September 2020 following confirmation of international interest. Once it was announced, the process of creating a sponsorship model and three steering groups progressed.

Sponsorship

In the early stages of planning, there was a recognition of the need to bring others alongside the delivery of Care Experienced History Month. Sponsorship allowed the project leads to bring on paid consultants to sit on the steering groups (detailed below) to advise on and shape the direction of the planning for the month. The sponsorship model formulated followed a three-tier system — bronze (£250), silver (£500) and gold (£1000), with the latter two tiers offering a larger reward for sponsors. In the first year, Care Experienced History Month was able to secure a total of nine sponsoring organisations to fund the steering groups created.

Steering groups

As this was the first-ever Care Experienced History Month, two steering groups were created to guide the direction of the month. It was identified in the early stages of planning that the team responsible for delivering Care Experienced History Month would require support from skilled and experienced people to ensure the success of the month. Other solutions for this were explored, however, it was ultimately decided that a steering group function would provide the correct model required to deliver the work intended. The Scottish Steering Group's purpose was to direct, shape, create and lead the delivery of Care Experienced History Month in Scotland – including creative outputs, planned activity, social media and web content and Scottish resources. The International Steering Group's purpose was slightly different, in that it was intended that this group would serve as a space to make decisions collectively at an international

level, however, representatives from respective countries were expected to direct, shape, and lead the delivery of Care Experienced History Month in their own countries, based on the needs of the Care Experienced community there and being sensitive to the current landscape of care.

Having skilled people working alongside Who Cares? Scotland to help with the planning and delivery of the month in Scotland was essential. The Scottish Steering Group was created to provide a space for Care Experienced people, historians and academics to come together to create the outline of Care Experienced History Month across the country, including activities, events and resources which would become available throughout April 2021. This group was made up of five paid consultants bringing with them a variety of skills and experience.

Dr Ian Milligan	Honorary Senior Research Fellow, CELCIS, University of Strathclyde
Dr Christine Whyte	Lecturer in Global History, University of Glasgow
Amy-Beth Miah	Care Experienced Social Sciences Student
David Anderson	Care Experienced, University Lecturer in Social Work, Université de Bretagne Occidentale.
Lorna Goodbrand	Care Experienced Social Sciences Student

Table 1: Members of the Scottish steering group

The key achievements of the Scottish Steering Group include the creation of the lesson plan and teachers' support pack for secondary schools, the HMS Mars' videos, the In Conversation With event, and content featured on the Scottish section of the [Care Experienced History Month website](#). There were also several creative pieces ranging from blogs and poetry to the creation of the symbol for International Care Experienced Day of Remembrance.

Alongside the Scottish Steering Group, an International Steering Group was established, providing a space for Care Experienced people from across the world to come together to share ideas, collaborate on projects and provide additional support for countries that needed it. Like the Scottish Steering Group, the International Steering Group was made up of seven paid consultants, including Care Experienced people from Australia, North America, and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Dr Dee Michell	(Australia) Care Experienced, Lecturer in Sociology, Criminology and Gender Studies, University of Adelaide
Dr Robin Sen	Lecturer in Social Work, University of Dundee
Amanda Gavin	PHD candidate in history, University of Glasgow and visiting researcher, University of Edinburgh
Tupua Ulrich	(Aotearo New Zealand) Care Experienced, Advisor, Office of the Children’s Commissioner New Zealand
Keri Richmond	(North America) Care Experienced, Manager of Child Welfare Policy at AAP and Executive Director of FosterStrong
Sean Geoghegan	Care Experienced, Writer/Director at Nightfighter Films
Kayt McGeary	(Australia) Care Experienced, Career & Workforce Development Facilitator

Table 2: Members of the international steering group

The key achievements of the International Steering Group include the creation of International Care Experienced Day of Remembrance, a series of [‘Untold Stories’](#) from across the world, three of four lectures in our lecture series, the ‘History Around the World’ webpages on the [Care Experienced History Month](#) official

website, several events in Australia, social media engagement across countries, and a global reading list for Care Experienced history.

Aims for Care Experienced History Month

The purpose of creating Care Experienced History Month was to provide a platform for Care Experienced people and their allies around the world to come together to remember, celebrate, learn, and connect to Care Experienced people who have been present in our global history and societies since records began and beyond.

To launch and deliver Care Experienced History Month 2021 successfully in countries around the world, and to secure commitment to the project as an annual occurrence, there were four aims we wanted to achieve from the outset.

These aims were:

- Bringing Care Experienced people and their allies together in a safe space to influence the creation and direction of the first-ever Care Experienced History Month. This was to be achieved by the establishment of the three steering groups — the Global, Scottish and 5N1V steering groups — which were to be chaired by Who Cares? Scotland.
- Secure sponsorship to ensure consultants on the Global and Scottish steering groups were paid for their contributions. Sponsorship secured in 2021 would then set a precedent for future years when seeking dedicated funding and/or further sponsorship partnerships.
- Create an online bank of information, content, resources, and a timeline on the history of Care Experienced people across the world which will continue to grow as Care Experienced History Month reaches more countries.
- Create a dedicated day of remembrance, International Care Experienced Day of Remembrance, for Care Experienced people and their allies across the world to pause, reflect on, and remember the legacy of Care Experienced people throughout history.

As plans progressed, the aims for Care Experienced History Month continued to develop, adapt and, at times, shift through various inputs from Care Experienced people, academics and NGOs involved in the steering groups guiding the direction of the month.

When starting the project, an overall aim of mine was to create a digital timeline of the history of care. Time constraints, lack of available funding and staffing meant we were not able to achieve this aim in 2021. However, I remain with the view that this should continue to be a goal that anyone involved in the continuation of Care Experienced History Month should strive to achieve, as ultimately a core purpose of the month is to provide a platform to learn about the history of Care Experienced people.

A key aim that emerged early in the planning stages alongside the steering groups was creating the case for the longevity of the project. Care Experienced History Month 2021, therefore, had to demonstrate the gap in our collective knowledge of Care Experienced people to such an extent that it would be impossible to ignore, thus presenting the case for the commemorations to take place annually.

It became clear that those involved in the delivery of Care Experienced History Month overwhelmingly felt that governments and organisations across the world should seek to continue all year round to look back at their own involvement in the history of care, however challenging this may be. This means being prepared to do the work required to be a true ally to Care Experienced people by allowing our community to come closer to the moments in our history which were caused and perpetuated, exacerbated, and perhaps prevented, by governments and organisations, by acknowledging, remembering, and addressing these moments.

There were several moments in our history that the steering group wanted to explore. However, time restrictions meant that we could only focus on specific moments to achieve the application of rigorous historical research methods to offer a fresh perspective on the events that occurred and the life histories of those who experienced them, debunking myths that previously existed in the context.

As part of the aims of Care Experienced History Month, the steering groups set a goal to explore the history of the Child Migrant Scheme, which on the surface saw the Government, religious organisations and charities sending orphans to imperial colonies for a period spanning more than 300 years. However, below the surface, the Government-induced trafficking scheme as it was named by former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown (ITV News, 2017), was a deeply flawed government policy that was badly implemented by numerous religious organisations and charities, in which 'successive British governments failed to ensure there were sufficient measures in place to protect children from all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse' (Independent Inquiry Child Sexual Abuse, 2018).

Providing context from the perspective of the Care Experienced people affected by moments such as this was central to the inquiry of steering group members and, going forward, should remain a focal point of the work carried out by anyone involved with Care Experienced History Month.

Of course, the aims of Care Experienced History Month will continue to grow as the reach of the campaign broadens. Countries with different care landscapes may find their aims for the month differ to what they are in Scotland. The beauty of Care Experienced History Month, however, is that even with differing aims tailored to the needs of respective countries, as long as the true purpose — to create a platform for Care Experienced people and their allies around the world to come together, to remember, celebrate, learn and connect to the history of Care Experienced people — is preserved, then societies around the world will begin to make strides in understanding the Care Experienced community and our culture, and why care exists the way it does in the present day.

Collaborations

Partnerships

From the beginning there was a need to work in partnership with sponsors, organisations that work with work with Care Experienced people from across the

UK and Ireland. Following the announcement of Care Experienced History Month, several organisations reached out to offer support in making the month a success. We organised a series of meetings with those who had registered their interest to establish a formal partnership for Care Experienced History Month.

The organisations involved in this process included:

VOYPIC (www.voypic.org)

Voice from Care Cymru (www.vfcc.org.uk)

EPIC (www.epiconline.ie)

Become (www.becomecharity.org.uk)

Drive Forward Foundation (www.driveforwardfoundation.org)

Coram (www.coram.org.uk)

From November 2020 onwards, representatives of each organisation came together at a monthly meeting to discuss and develop plans for Care Experienced History Month. The group became known as the 5 Nations 1 Voice Care Experienced History Month Steering Group. This provided a space where conversations took place on how to collectively support each other, how to deliver the month across the United Kingdom and Ireland, and to provide updates on planned events and outputs in our respective countries. Discussions on the longevity of the project were also had, including the possibility for joint funding bids in the future to ensure that Care Experienced History Month continues annually for years to come.

International collaborations

The team in charge of delivering Care Experienced History Month for the first time wanted to make sure that the month would stretch further than across countries in the United Kingdom. Once the formal announcement took place, we began extensive mapping of organisations across the world that support Care Experienced people. From August to December 2020, the team reached out to organisations in New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and North America.

Care Experienced History Month in New Zealand was led by our Care Experienced international steering group representative, Tupua, who works for [VOYCE](#) — Whakarongo Mai. Extensive research into the history of care in New Zealand was carried out to create a context to understand the impact these moments have had on Care Experienced people in New Zealand today.

Activity in Australia was led by the two representatives on the international steering group from Melbourne and Adelaide. They delivered seven events throughout April, hosted their own 'Untold Stories' series, contributed to the creation of the Care Experienced History Month website and participated in International Care Experienced Day of Remembrance.

Collaborations in North America were led by Keri Richmond, from [Fosterstrong](#). Fosterstrong participated in the International Care Experienced Day of Remembrance and supported the creation of the Care Experienced History Month website — particularly the dedicated United States of America section.

The pandemic meant that a lot of the planned events were unable to happen. However, Care Experienced History Month was able to reach many countries, including securing engagement from India, Zimbabwe, Kenya, France, and Italy. While formal collaborations did not happen with every country approached, we saw that as April 2021 progressed, international interest continued to grow. With more time to plan, more people involved in the delivery of the month, and proper funding streams, I hope that more international collaborations will be formed every year as Care Experienced History Month expands its reach.

Content overview

The global coronavirus pandemic prevented in-person events from taking place in Scotland. This meant that the focus of Care Experienced History Month had to be on digital content. From the start of planning, it was evident there was a desire to create an independent [Care Experienced History Month website](#), which could act as an online wealth of resources all year round. Alongside the website, dedicated social media platforms (@HistoryofCare, @CEHMUK) were key to promoting the content created throughout April 2021.

Every week in April 2021, a live lecture on Zoom was hosted exploring a new topic in relation to the history of care across the world. The lectures followed the schedule detailed below and are all stored on the Care Experienced History website for future viewing.

'The 'Child Migration' Scheme for Care Experienced Children After 1945: What Was it and Why Remember It?' delivered by Dr Robin Sen, University of Dundee

'A History of Everyday Life in Scottish Children's Homes, 1940-1970' delivered by Amanda Gavin, University of Glasgow

'Voices from the Silent Cradles — Life Histories of Romania's Care Experienced Children' delivered by Dr Mariela Neagu, University of Oxford

'African Mission Children in Scotland in the 19th Century' delivered by Dr Christine Graham, University of Glasgow.

As well as the lectures, every day in April the social media accounts shared 'Untold Stories' of Care Experienced people from throughout history to the present day. This project sought to highlight the untold story of a Care Experienced person or of a well-known person whose experience of care has previously been unknown.

In Scotland, we held an online 'In Conversation with' event — also stored on the Care Experienced History Month website — to explore the oral history of the influencing of the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014, hearing from two Care Experienced activists who shared first-hand the process they experienced to see legislative changes introduced.

Perhaps the most poignant moment of Care Experienced History Month was the International Care Experienced Day of Remembrance, which took place on 30 April 2021. A key aim of Care Experienced History Month, the Memorial Day provided a space for Care Experienced people and our allies to pause, reflect, and remember Care Experienced people who lived before us, their legacies, and the Care Experienced people we have lost prematurely. The two steering groups felt it was an incredibly important space to create, particularly with the high rates of premature deaths within our global community. These high rates of

premature deaths are detailed in research reports based on studies in England and Wales (Murray, Lacey, Maughan & Sacker, 2020) and Sweden (Vinnerljung & Sallnäs, 2008), as well as a systematic review of research in several countries (Häggman-Laitila, 2018).

The day was marked by sharing the Care Experienced symbol of remembrance, which represents a bridge from the past to present; a bridge to the people; a bridge to the future, and bridging the divide in understanding of the history of Care Experienced people. Throughout the day Care Experienced people and our allies around the world shared reflections on loss, mourning, hope, and of need for change. Just as it is hoped Care Experienced History Month will be celebrated every year, I hope that International Care Experienced Day of Remembrance will long continue and as a result, conversations on accountability progress further than they ever have before.

Conclusion

The history of Care Experienced people is rich and far-reaching. Care Experienced History Month is only the tip of the iceberg. To truly understand a community of people that exists in all societies on this planet, and indeed seek to make changes for people with care experience, we must first look back at the past, remember it, recognise the impact of it, and then learn from it before looking forward to the future.

Care Experienced History Month has a purpose. It is needed. Celebrations in April 2021 have demonstrated that to such an extent it is hard to ignore. The space to acknowledge and commemorate our history should not be underestimated. The COVID-19 pandemic hindered the opportunity to take these commemorations to the streets, to mass grave sites, to former large-scale institutions, but I have hope that Care Experienced History Month will grow into a campaign marked in all corners of the earth, underpinned by the message that Care Experienced people deserve to know their history and culture and that governments and organisations involved in that history have a duty to face, teach, and preserve it.

In my view, Care Experienced History Month presents a new area of historical inquiry that allows Care Experienced people to begin to understand where we come from, our heritage, our culture and the moments in our history that have changed not only us as a community, but changed the systems who intervened in our lives as children.

Care Experienced History Month affords Care Experienced people and our allies the opportunity to learn, be shaped by and grow from our shared history. By reflecting on how we have cared for children of the state throughout history, no matter how challenging this may be, as a society we must force ourselves to confront the role we have had as the oppressor, aggressor and at times enabler of maltreatment of Care Experienced people. This is an uncomfortable reality and no one state can be excused from facing it.

Looking back at history together to create a better future is truly the greatest gift we can give Care Experienced people. Care Experienced History serves as a concrete embodiment of this gift.

I am excited to see how Care Experienced History Month expands. I hope that Care Experienced History Month 2021 will be a pivotal moment in our history. Most importantly, I believe the first-ever Care Experienced History Month marks the beginning of a change in our collective trajectory — a change that is founded on accountability and will see societal shifts for generations of Care Experienced people to come.

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