

# Editorial

In November 2008 the Child Care History Network held its inaugural conference at the Barns Conference and Study Centre at Toddington in Gloucestershire. The meeting was attended (among others) by three staff from the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care. SIRCC has a warm interest in the work of the Child Care History Network and continues to be involved at various levels. I was privileged to attend the second annual conference of CCHN at the Barns Centre in November 2009. We have been fortunate in securing the publication of the main papers from this inspiring event, and these form the core of this issue of the Scottish Journal of Residential Child Care. We are most grateful to the speakers for revising their conference presentations for publication.

The conference had three main speakers on the theme of Ethics in Child Care. Dr June Jones, Senior Lecturer in Biomedical Ethics at the University of Birmingham, reminded us of the continuing relevance of ancient wisdom by concentrating on Aristotle's concept of 'training' character in young people. We were reminded that in a therapeutic environment 'where the aim is to develop a child's character so that right action will flow more readily than focusing on the rights and wrongs of individual acts', and where role models are important, Aristotle's Ethics still has much to say to residential workers today.

Another speaker was our former SIRCC colleague Mark Smith, now a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. Mark's book *Rethinking Residential Child Care: Positive Perspectives* (2009) argues that residential child care needs to move away from discourses of protection, regulation and procedure towards those of care and upbringing – in other words, ethical concepts. In his paper to he



pleads passionately for ethical debates around what residential child care should be like, debates that 'have at their heart a notion of care that centres around the personal relationship between the cared for and the one caring, with all the complexity and duplicity that this entails.' The Bible asks, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Of course I am, says Mark, as he embarks on a journey through the ages of moral philosophy from ancient writers through the enlightenment to modern legislation and practice.

The third speaker spoke on a contrasting and much more sombre subject. Noel Howard serves on the National Executive of the Irish Association of Social Care Workers. His career has spanned the decades of change in child care in Ireland, moving from large orphanages run by religious orders with little training and limited resources towards smaller units staffed by trained professionals. The 'Ryan Report' (Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Government of Ireland, 2009)) painted a bleak picture of institutionalised neglect, abuse and lack of love by church and state over many decades. Scottish readers who have read the 'Shaw Report' (Historic Abuse Systemic Review (2007)) will find much of it depressingly familiar, but the sheer scale of the Ryan Report is striking. Noel's plea for 'a residential care system that really does cherish all the nation's children equally' is a moral one that transcends national and cultural borders.

These three papers, with their contrasting emphases, still remind us that care for children has always been guided by moral principles, and that we need to think seriously about these. They also remind us that we must learn the lessons of history if past mistakes are not to be repeated. These papers are a thought-provoking contribution to this debate.



The remaining four papers in this issue also tie in with the ethical and historical theme. Hannah Dale and Dr Lorna Watson describe the research process of a health needs assessment in Fife, in which research on the experience and views of young people was critical. Health care and research on young people's needs have an important moral and ethical dimension. Catherine Hanly describes the recruitment and vetting process in residential child care in Ireland, where various inquiry reports have identified the importance of comprehensive staff vetting policies and procedures for children's residential services. Clearly the Ryan Report has cast a long shadow, and here we do have evidence of lessons learnt. Dr Elizabeth Kohlstaedt describes a developmental/relational approach to residential care for children that has been used at Intermountain, a treatment facility in Helena, Montana, USA. This ties in with Mark Smith's plea for an emphasis on 'the personal relationship between the cared for and the one caring'. Finally, the paper by Kirsty Hamilton and Kathleen Mulvey explore their feelings about being part of the SIRCC conference and how this inspired their connection to residential child care as vocation.

Nobody would deny the need for safeguarding, training and procedures on one hand, or the need for personal relationships and caring on the other, so that child care does not become loveless and institutionalised while still being safe and protective. We hope that these papers will provoke thought and discussion about these different emphases, and will serve as a reminder that caring for children is, and always has been, a moral issue.

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