# Everyday records or living archives? An analysis of record-keeping in residential children's homes in Scotland

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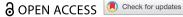Ruth Emond[a], Andrew Burns[b], Hugh Hagan[c] and Karl Magee[d]

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents research and experience gathered during a practice-based study to look at how group experience is captured and preserved in care records of children and young people. It discusses the work of the Archiving Residential Children's Homes project (ARCH), a joint Scottish-German research project with teams at the Universities of Stirling and Osnabruck. The article focuses on the Scottish side of the project, examining the steps recently taken in Scotland towards recognizing the value and importance of care records and challenging current recording practices in the care sector. It reflects on the interdisciplinary nature of the project, examining the differing positions taken by key professionals and their approach to record keeping. The article looks beyond the individual case file examining how everyday, group life was historically captured and recorded, drawing out the parallels and differences with contemporary practice and proposing a new reframing of record keeping responsibilities to include the wider responsibility of memory keeping.

## Introduction

There is an established, and growing, body of research which considers the place of records in the lives of adults who were in care as children. This valuable work has highlighted the challenges that many care-experienced adults encounter when accessing and navigating their care records as well as the limitations of the materials and information contained within them. In addition, projects, such as the MIRRA project at University College London and the Rights in Records by Design project in Australia, have gone further by designing and developing innovative, practice focused and technological solutions to these issues.[1] Arguably, care records focus on statutory activities related to the child often bracketing off the everyday aspects of childhood to instead capture information relating to legal requirements and practice decisions.[2] To date, much of the research undertaken in this field has focused on the social work case file as the primary source of information. Often taking a retrospective account, it has explored with care

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experienced adults what was lacking or, by contrast, useful in the materials that they were able to access within their case files. More recently, other forms of individual memory work with children have been explored, particularly focused on life story approaches, although the longer-term impact of this is less well established.[3]

This paper has a particular focus on record-keeping within residential care and grows out of a recognition that access to materials collected by residential care providers has traditionally been limited.[4] Residential care is a setting where everyday childhoods are played out alongside other, non-related, children and adult staff members. In this context, adult care givers take on many of the day-to-day tasks of parents, supporting children practically, physically and emotionally and taking account of their past, present, and future selves.

Our paper draws on Scottish data from the first two stages of a joint Arts and Humanities Research Council/German Research Foundation funded project: Archiving Residential Children's Homes in Scotland and Germany (ARCH) undertaken by interdisciplinary teams at the University of Stirling in Scotland and University of Osnabrück in Germany.[5] ARCH aimed to both explore how the everyday, shared experiences of children and young people in residential care were historically captured and preserved and to examine contemporary approaches to recording everyday life in residential care. The paper begins by contextualizing and outlining the ARCH project, both in relation to the context of residential care and the differing positions taken by key professions and their approach to record keeping. We discuss how everyday group life was historically captured and recorded through an analysis of the historical archive of one Scottish care provider, before going on to discuss the views of staff and young people about the contemporary experience of recording in residential care. We draw parallels in our findings with the ways in which memorabilia is created, maintained, and made accessible to children living in families and the challenges in doing so in a residential childcare context. Through this, we highlight the need to look and think outside the individual care record as a source of such everyday memories and examine the challenges of stepping outside of such individual case recording practices to capture everyday shared childhoods.

## Care records in context

Residential childcare (henceforth children's houses) provides a small but vital element of out of home care in Scotland. In the most recent available statistics, 1,433 (10%) of the 12,596 children and young people in looked after care were living in a residential setting.[6] Whilst not replacing family, children's houses are expected to provide family-like care. Often the children living there will have experienced other forms of care and have had disrupted relationships with adults in their families as well as in other care settings.[7] Despite growing recognition of the complex needs that many children who live in residential settings have, this form of care continues to be regarded as a 'last resort' and as a poor substitute for family life.[8]

In 2019, Scotland's Independent Care Review noted that care staff undertake day-to-day parenting tasks and ought to do so in a way which is deeply relational.[9] Arguably, this offers an interesting context for recording practices with staff acting as both parent and professional record keeper. Alongside this, each children's house carries its own history and story with parallels to the ways in which family histories are understood. Barclay and

Koefoed suggest that these histories are '. . . never made in isolation from wider culture,' an important observation given that residential care has long been associated in the public mind with the abuse and neglect of children.[10] Thus, children living in these houses and staff working there often contend with the stigma and fear that such a legacy has generated.[11]

Investigations into the histories of residential care have resulted in significant change to recording practices. Current initiatives to address poor record-keeping across the Scottish public sector stem, at least in part, from the findings of the Historical Abuse Systemic Review: Residential Schools and Children's Homes in Scotland 1950–1995 (Shaw Report).[12] As well as revealing systemic failures around the creation and governance of corporate information relating to the provision of these forms of care by the responsible public authorities, the Shaw Report commented on the thousands of case files created and subsequently lost or erroneously destroyed due to a lack of robust records management and weak legislation. This included where the responsible authorities contracted third-party organizations to provide the care services for which they had a statutory obligation, for example, children's houses. Not routinely building information obligations into the contracts governing these services meant that there was a failure to safeguard the information when, as often happened, a child moved between several care providers, or where the third-party organizations stopped operating. The Shaw Report highlighted the thousands of care experienced people in Scotland who were left with no access to any formal records of their time in care or materials relating to why out of home care had been decided.

In 2011, the Public Records (Scotland) Act (PRSA) was approved by the Scottish Parliament, the first Act to address the management and preservation of public records in Scotland for over 70 years.[13] It requires all named Scottish public authorities to submit a Records Management Plan for approval, thereby ensuring proper arrangements are made for the management of their records. A central element of the implementation of the Act was a focus on working with public authorities and third-party providers to safeguard information created under contract, addressing key issues highlighted in the Shaw Report noted above. This focus was further cemented by the Scottish Government's commitment to improving the lives and experiences of care experienced children as detailed in The Promise, a report produced by the Independent Care Review.[14] These two significant legislative and policy changes were key to why Scotland was selected as one of the two research sites for the ARCH project.

## ARCH: archiving residential children's homes in Scotland and Germany

ARCH was a 3-year mixed methods research project which brought together a multi-disciplinary team of people with care experience, archivists, social work practitioners and academics in information technology, social work, language and communication, and social pedagogy working with organizations providing care for children and young people in Scotland and Germany. Given the complex ethical challenges involved in each phase of the project, it underwent a rigorous review and was approved by the General University Ethics Panel and the partner agency.

Phase One of the project focused on the archives of partner organizations in both countries, exploring how historically, everyday group experiences were captured by

examining a range of extant records covering the period 1920–1980. In Scotland, the project worked with Aberlour Children's Charity, who deposited their extensive archives with the University of Stirling Archives.[15] In the case of Aberlour, the period under review straddled a time of major change in the nature of the care the charity provided. In 1967, the charity's orphanage in the village of Aberlour closed and was replaced by a network of small children's homes across Scotland.

Using content analysis, the ARCH team examined monthly magazines (produced for benefactors as well as ex-residents and staff), minute books, daily diaries, medical logs, photographs, as well as a random sample of individual case files. This analysis looked for accounts of group experiences as well as the routine activities that made up everyday childhoods in that setting. We explored who authored the records and how they were kept, in turn, highlighting ways in which childhoods were constructed and whether how power differentials and values were embedded.[16]

In addition to content analysis of the archive, interviews were undertaken with past and present archivists and 'managers' of the archive as well as people who had lived in the orphanage during the time period under review. These interviews explored perspectives and experiences on the accessibility of this type of record of everyday life and what they offered in relation to sources of memories for people who had lived there. The interviews also explored how the wider archives had been used by people with care experience.

Phase Two of the ARCH project utilized a participatory methodology in one RCH in Scotland and one in Germany (although we discuss only the Scottish site here). This phase aimed to explore contemporary experience of record keeping in residential care, particularly in relation to shared, everyday life and childhood. Participants were then later involved in the co-creation of a prototype digital shared archive.[17] Participatory research has been described as a style or orientation towards inquiry rather than a specific set of methods.[18] It has the potential to reap considerable benefits and has been seen by many of its proponents as a way of addressing power imbalances in the research process by repositioning participants as active co-producers of knowledge and by better ensuring that the knowledge produced benefits the individuals and communities concerned.[19] It has been used to centre and prioritize the voices from marginalized communities, to increase their sense of agency and control and ensure the integrity of research.[20,21] Beyond moral and political imperatives, participatory research has value in its ability to reveal the meaning of human action and to improve the quality of research by representing complexity, and, through its situatedness, gaining access to local knowledges.[22]

In participatory research, the goal is for participants to be active partners in the research process including, for example, designing and undertaking methods of data collection and analysis. Where children are involved in research processes, this is more often in data collection, with children largely absent from data analysis and interpretation.[23] From the outset, we set out to involve care experienced adults, children, and young people in as much of the process as they wanted. To help support this, for example, we appointed a young person who was living in the children's house at that time as a research assistant. She helped us with ways to approach active participation in methodological design, data collection, and analysis and was a key member of the ARCH team.[24]

In the Scottish site, young people were clear about who should be responsible for record keeping and what their own role was. They were busy with their lives, often in and

out of the house at different times and rightly prioritizing friends, fun, and activities. Despite this, they agreed to one of the research team visiting regularly over a period of year (a total of 16 site visits) developing relationships with four young people who lived there and with one who had recently left and with 10 members of staff. Visits typically involved asking questions on a one-to-one basis or in very small groups on an ad hoc basis whenever young people and staff were around and motivated to engage. Participant observation was used to capture how memory keeping was undertaken and how the young people and staff remembered together about events and experiences. This included joint recording activities such as the collation of memory books but also collective remembrance in conversations such as when those who had left the house but had maintained a connection would visit. Participant observation was supplemented by a series of interviews and photo-elicitation exercises with staff members and young people currently living in the house. We also interviewed two care experienced adults who had left care more than 20 years previously and 10 staff members from other children's houses in Scotland. Data were fully transcribed, pseudonymized, and thematically analyzed with permission being received from all participants for the information to be used and shared by the project.

## Professional perspectives and ethical challenges

### The recordkeeper

The analysis of historical records of the partner organizations in Scotland and Germany provided an opportunity for the social work professionals and archivists on the research teams to examine how their respective ethical approaches defined and shaped their engagement with the records under review.

For archivists in the UK and Ireland, the Archives and Records Association's Code of Ethics provides a model of professional conduct.[25] The responsibilities of records professionals are clearly laid out in the introduction to the code which notes that:

> Mismanagement of records in any context – whether through ignorance, incompetence or intent to cause harm – can at worst lead to significant injustice or organisational harm. It can have a hugely destructive impact on the individual and collective rights and the welfare of our fellow citizens.

While the above statement recognizes the collective (or group) as well as the individual, the code goes on to reflect the tensions inherent in the work of many archivists, section 4 stating that:

> Members should ensure open and equitable access to records and archives as far as they can, compatible with respect for other concerns such as the privacy of information subjects and their organizational context.

This highlights the tensions often inherent in archival work and raises the issue of the privileged access that both archivists and researchers may have to records which the record subjects do not.[26] These tensions are further exacerbated by the protections for the individual enshrined in data protection legislation, with redaction often limiting the information provided. The emotional impact which such redacted information can cause

on individuals accessing their own case records has been powerfully highlighted in the work of the MIRRA project.[27]

The code notes these responsibilities in section 28:

> Members must respect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals and corporate bodies who created, use or are the subjects of records, *especially those who had no voice in the creation, use or disposition of the documents*. (our emphasis)

While respecting and protecting the privacy and confidentiality of the subjects of the records in their care, archivists must also balance this with providing access to information for the record subjects. As we will examine in this article, the demands for information are challenging given the established framework of regulations and protections governing access for those with care experience whose lived experience does not necessarily align with the formal record keeping standards and processes in place. These tensions become particularly apparent when it comes to attempting to provide a representation of the everyday group experience for individuals who are part of a larger community. For example, those responsible for recording information in individual case files (the basic administrative record in most cases) may avoid recording details of any other young people or adults due to privacy concerns or, where these details are recorded, they may be redacted at the point of access with the potential for distress that this can cause.[28] Therefore, data protection and privacy concerns can result in providing the individual with an incomplete, partial picture within their own records.

### *The social worker*

While record keeping is a fundamental aspect of social work practice, it is fraught with tension and complexity, not least because of the variability in potential creators and audiences. Across social work and social care, including residential childcare, record keeping is a legal responsibility for those working in these fields and for the organizations that employ them.[29] However, there is significant variability in recording practice between agencies.[30] The Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) is the regulatory body for social services in Scotland. In their code of conduct, they state that social service workers will:

> Maintain clear, accurate and up to date records in line with procedures relating to [their] work.[31]

The requirement for social service workers is to record 'in line with [their organizational] procedures,' leaving room for significant variation in practice. The information recorded may be used to achieve a variety of ends such as: to help make and justify decisions about the types of services or interventions that are required to support or protect individuals and communities; to promote accountability; or to provide evidence for legal processes and complaints.[32] Ofsted's National Director for Social Care argues that:

> The record should clearly and succinctly explain what has happened to and for the child. On one hand, this informs the support provided to the child today. But children one day become adults. Good records help them to understand what decisions were made during their childhood and why.[33]

This contextualizes social care records as a site where decisions can be recorded and justified, but also as a resource for care experienced adults to understand key aspects of their childhood. There have been some recent changes in how records are thought about and practiced in social work in relation to access, content, and style, such as writing 'with the child at your shoulder.'[34] However, there continue to be difficulties reported by care experienced adults related to gaining access, the impact of redaction, biased and derogatory language, and a lack of their own voice and perspective in relation to their life and experiences. Arguably, within social work, the use of life story approaches with children has gone some way to redress this. Life story work is a biographical narrative approach which stresses the need for children to know and have access to information about their family, their childhood, and the decisions taken by professionals in relation to their care. Most often, this work takes place with children who are moving to permanent out of home care and results in a book which is given to the child and/or carer. Whilst beneficial to many children, research has suggested variability in the quality of such work with the time and skills required to undertake it well influencing this.[35]

More commonly, social work records are framed as individual records that may be solely accessed by the person concerned. However, as noted in the tensions for record-keepers above, for children and young people in residential care, the shared, group experiences of their childhood are often not recorded in individual care records and, where they are recorded, they may be subjected to redaction policies at the point of access due to concerns regarding confidentiality.

Arguably, what can result is a record of childhood disconnected from those with whom it was shared and experienced. Children are plucked out of the context of shared, everyday life and events are recorded in ways which isolates and individualizes them. The professional standards and codes focus on decision-making and outcomes rather than emphasizing the role of the record keeper as a curator of memories and of childhoods. It is to this tension that the paper now turns.

## Looking backwards: the Aberlour archive

An analysis of both the historical research and contemporary information gathering carried out by the project highlights the marked absence of care-experienced people from the creation of the records of their childhoods. In addition, the traces of shared, group experience, which many people craved, remained elusive.

Evidence of shared group experience and everyday life in the historical records of the orphanage required close examination of the available sources. The main source was the Orphanage magazine, which began publication in 1882. The magazine began as part of the Orphanage's fundraising activities, keeping subscribers and supporters informed of developments. Each issue included a detailed daily journal of events which recorded various aspects of orphanage life including the admission of children, activities and events, visits, and staff news. The research team found the magazine to be a particularly rich source of information about group life experiences in the orphanage. As time progressed, the voice of the orphanage children grew, with the magazine featuring articles written by the children on various aspects of their lives and letters written by former residents describing their experiences after leaving. The magazine also included photographs of orphanage life and activities. While the

magazine provides evidence of the voices of the children (which is lacking in other record types), it is important to note that these voices were all selected by the staff who edited the magazine. In a similar way to the creation and control of individual case files, the editing of the magazine followed a process also identified by De Wilde and Vanobbergen in Belgium where:

> … the documents about these children are products reflecting the gazes of authorized writers and choices of words. These writers made decisions about what events in the lives of children are to be reported or ignored.[36]

Reflecting De Wilde and Vanobbergen's analysis of case files in Belgium, the Aberlour Orphanage magazine was also written 'about the child, not for the child.'[37]

Importantly, despite its main focus being fund-raising, the magazine provided a way for former residents of the orphanage to keep in touch through its pages. It provided an analogue equivalent of modern digital forums where information could be shared, and friends could be reunited though the letters published in the magazine. For the children still living in the orphanage, its value was less clear. A former resident of the orphanage in the 1950s, interviewed as part of the ARCH project about his time at Aberlour, explained that the magazine was colloquially known as 'the blue book' due to its blue cover but for the children in the orphanage it was also known as 'the blue liar' as it was not regarded as offering a true picture of day-to-day life. It was only later in his life that he saw the magazine as a valuable means of maintaining a connection to his childhood home and to the children and adult caregivers that he had lived with.

## Capturing the voices in the archive

The current method of providing information to care-experienced adults from their care records is through subject access requests which focus attention on the individual's personal case file. Analysis of the archive suggested that a fuller picture of a childhood in care could be gathered by looking beyond the case file. In the case of Aberlour, the wider administrative records of the institution provided additional contextual material and publications and promotional material, such as the orphanage magazine, created a fuller and richer picture of individual childhoods.

However, a combination of legislation, regulations, and lack of resources make a more holistic approach to information provision difficult. The current concern with protecting third-party information means that a trawl through the wider archival evidence can be prohibitively time-consuming. In the case of Aberlour Orphanage, the case files for children were often created and kept by family unit rather than the individual child. This results in additional complexity when providing information to an individual; the record-keepers having to review and redact information in the file relating to other family members. The family unit was not, however, retained on admission with siblings being separated and placed in groups or 'houses' arranged by sex and age. It was these 'houses' that formed the family group for the children in the orphanage, progressing through life in the orphanage with their peers, the adult staff providing the parental figures in this artificial family.

A stark illustration of this arrangement was provided in an interview with a former resident, who was admitted to the orphanage as a 6-month-old baby in 1950 along with seven of his siblings. He stated:

> ... when I was six or seven years old, I was in the playground of the school ... the boy standing next to me said 'see that girl, that's one of your sisters'... I never knew this ... 'and that lad down there, that's your brother.' Now I never knew I had brothers and sisters at the orphanage.[38]

For many of the former residents of the orphanage, it was the other children in their house with whom they formed their closest bonds rather than their biological siblings who were kept apart by the administrative structures of the institution. This feature of a childhood in care was also identified in an Australian context by Murray who noted that a research participant in a study on life after care stated that 'to me they're all my brothers, all those boys [with whom he grew up in an orphanage].'[39]

While archivists, social workers, and administrators grapple with questions of access and regulatory frameworks, former residents of the Aberlour Orphanage have created a parallel network of information and record sharing over the years to preserve and record the evidence of their group experience. Memoirs of orphanage life have been published and accounts of experiences collected and shared.[40]

Through the course of such activities, other, alternative, archive collections have been collected and created which provide a more holistic group-focused record of orphanage life than the institutional record. For example, in August 2022 a collection of material related to Aberlour Orphanage was deposited with the University of Stirling Archives by Ron Aitchison, a former resident. His personal collection, built over many years, contains material relating to the history of the orphanage including photographs and papers relating to life in the orphanage given to him by other former residents and staff, and information relating to his own time in care.[41]

Ron's archive provided an alternative home for the personal material of former residents, a space separate from the official institutional archive where these records could be collected together and shared. It further illustrated the limitations of the formal organizational archive. A recognition of the steps that Aberlour has taken to address its historical responsibilities in recent years (including the deposit of its archive with the University of Stirling) gave Ron the confidence and reassurance to place his records in the University Archives where they sit alongside the institutional record, providing a more personal, child-focused record of orphanage life (and sometimes inadvertently filling in the gaps in the official record).

The informal communities of care-experienced people who created their own networks outside and beyond Aberlour also created records which need to be considered in a review of available sources of information. In the early 2000s these groups organized reunions for former residents of the orphanage with events being held in the village of Aberlour. As part of the preparation for these events, booklets were assembled and printed containing photographs and memories collected from former residents and staff of the orphanage. The village church also published collections of reminiscences of former residents to support these events (and wider local history activity in the community).

These reunions and publications provide evidence of this care-experienced community in action, with information being collected and shared outside the organizational framework of Aberlour Children's Charity. The material produced further highlighted the appetite for a more communal method of preserving and sharing memories, a key theme emerging from the ARCH project. In addition to the material created from these events, an active community of former residents also exists online in private Facebook groups where they share news, memories, and photographs. These contemporary initiatives build on the historical evidence for the need for (re)connecting with others in an echo of the letters pages of the orphanage magazine.

The parallel accounts of orphanage life created and collected by the institution and care-experienced people can combine to provide a fuller and more rounded record of life in care. The tensions that emerge when trying to produce this joined-up picture provide a practical example which the ARCH project drew on when moving to the contemporary challenges of the later phases of the project.

## Looking forward: creating a 'living archive'

### Whose role is it to collate childhood materials?

The historical approaches to both record-making and record preservation, as highlighted in Phase One of the ARCH project, were shown to have been top down with the needs of the organization or the authors dominating the decision-making about what should be captured and retained. Adults were regarded as the sole authors of records and were required to do so by their organization. By contrast, current social work practice encourages the recognition and inclusion of young people in record-making, giving them the opportunity to see and respond to any records made relating to them. This co-productive approach is gaining traction in residential care, being viewed as a means of empowering children and young people and giving them voice.[42]

In Phase Two of ARCH, our data highlighted some challenges to this approach. Many of the children and young people who participated in Phase Two were clear that the responsibility for preserving their memories and childhood materials belonged with the adults who look after them. Although many identified photographs or objects that they had held on to and kept with them, they saw the adults who cared for them as being primarily responsible for ensuring that they kept what they might need in the future.

> Yes, but if you think about that, that's something people do as parents anyway. Well, some people do. They keep those things and stuff like that. So, when you do get a bit older and you're like, oh, what did we do on this? Then you can pull that out and you can show someone. Even seeing those things can bring back those memories, I suppose.[43]

This chimes with much of the work undertaken on memory keeping in a family context. Marcoux describes young people consigning ephemera and memorabilia to their parents' care, safe in the knowledge that they can be retrieved later when needed.[44] This act of holding on to material objects for young people serves as a symbolic means of extending the parenting role. Indeed, Owen and Boyer suggest that it is the parents' role as carers to protect and curate their child's material biography.[45] In families, there is a shared

understanding that adults do this material, symbolic, and emotional work for children and in turn hold on to both their role as parents and to their child's 'imagined future.'[46]

In ARCH, young people shared with us that it was hard to know what they needed to have access to as future adults. Overall, they did not want to take part in recording and regarded such an activity as yet another experience of difference from other children. The staff who took part in the study agreed and felt that they were more able to consider the future needs of the children they were caring for. The complex role of staff as both 'substitute parent' and professional carer extended beyond bureaucratic recording based on assessment and decision-making to the curation and retention of more personal information. This was, for some, considered more akin to being a good parent; wanting to hold on to childhood material for the future. At times, this posed challenges both as a result of how and where objects and memorabilia could be stored and, more immediately, as children would, often at times of distress, ask for objects, photographs, or materials to be destroyed. Staff recounted situations where they had overridden the child's view, believing that they knew best what was needed for the future:

> So, you have to have a future person in mind, really. So, they might not be asking for it just now, but they might want it in the future. I know we've spoken before about young people coming back and asking for things when they'd originally said they didnae want them.[47]

Again, this resonates with research on parents' role in curation of memories. Owen and Boyer suggest that we draw on our experiences as adults to know what we value from our childhoods and that these materials play a key role in 'forming emergent identities as reasons to keep and store things.'[48] Children in our study valued this sense of an adult collecting and caring for memories of their childhood as explained, by a young person, Donald, during a photo-elicitation exercise:

> Andrew: would you want the ability to upload stuff yourself or would you want the staff to do that or . . . ?
>
> Donald: The staff to do it probably.
>
> [. . .]
>
> Andrew: Cause, I know, I know, for example, you've got a memory book, is that right?
>
> Donald: Aye.
>
> Andrew: Aye, so you put stuff into that yourself don't you?
>
> Donald: I gave photos to the staff and they stuck it in.
>
> Andrew: Do they put stuff in that as well for you?
>
> Donald: Yeah.
>
> Andrew: And then you see it when it's in, and that's been alright? Do you see it [this archive] in a similar way to that?
>
> Donald: Yeah yeah yeah.[49]

A further challenge for contemporary record keeping is the move to digital platforms. Whilst many of the young people talked about their familiarity with social media and

smartphones as a means of curating their own biographies, many held on to material objects and what they represented:

> My nana had this [photograph] and she gave me the copy and knowing that she had this up on her wall as one of the only photos of my mum and my dad and me as a baby for years and years. If you put it up to the sun, you can see where it's been sitting on our mantelpiece and the sun's hit it every single day for 12 years and then she's given it over to me, and every single day she's looked at that and she's like, my granddaughter, my first granddaughter, every single day she's looked at it and she's thought, I love the wee photo of that.[50]

They were also aware of the limitations of social media as a reliable source of long-term preservation, and many were mistrustful of where and how this information could be seen and used, noting that phones can be lost and contact numbers changed.

## Collective remembering

Many of the young people acknowledged the importance of the relationships they had with the adults and children in the house and that it was with them that their day-to-day childhoods were being lived. One young person summed this up when talking about her imagined future self and the relationship she had had with a child she had grown up with:

> . . . we've known each other since we were eight or nine. I think it would be amazing to look back, because we've spent so long waiting on me turning 18 and waiting on him turning 18 and then we had the party, and it was just amazing. What if we never got to think about that again? It'd be nice to be able to have that somewhere that we could both access it and both go, do you remember? Do you remember doing this and doing that?[51]

A key theme emerging from Phase Two data was the centrality of shared memories and the importance given to opportunities for collective remembering. Many felt that spaces to come together with others to remember should be available throughout young people's lives. We were interested to note that young people felt strongly that, should this be in a digital form, such shared remembering ought to be moderated to make sure that the space could not be used to cause harm or distress. There was recognition that remembering could be emotionally hard for some people to take part in. What emerged was almost a scrapbook approach which provided stimulus for remembering rather than narratives around events or people. This contrasted with what young people and staff viewed as the function of care records where a narrative of events and decisions was expected. Young people and care experienced adults talked about what looking at an image could evoke and how this might change over time. They wanted the platform to allow for this rather than for it to present a storied version of an event, as shown by a care experienced adult reflecting on looking at a photograph she had been given by a previous social worker:

> Oh it, it kind of brought back like, ken, what it did bring back. It was kind of like, I looked so innocent in that photo [. . .] But there had been so much stuff going on and you can't tell that from this photo and how I viewed myself at that time as well and oh you ken it brought that back like 'Oh my God I was I was a bairn and ken aye' [. . .] but you didn't feel like you were a bairn at the time, again because you had all this stuff going on. And you kinda grew up so quickly, but when you seen the photo of yourself it was like oh my goodness ken, just that

young innocent face ken, and all this stuff had gone on and oh I see it kind of brought that up ken. Oh but, so but it was nice to see it and think of yourself in a kinder way.[52]

Once the discussion moved to the practicalities, adult caregivers and young people diverged in many aspects. Whilst all agreed that people needed to consent to have their images and comments available to the group, staff were much more concerned about the potential risks relating to what might be breaches of data protection and to ongoing relationships with children and staff. This seemed to be in tension with their desire to provide life-long relationships with children and their view of themselves as taking on a loving, parental role. Access and retention appeared to take staff members away from what felt 'natural' as a parent to what was 'appropriate' as a professional.

I'm protective because it is my job, but also we've got... I don't have policies with my kid, or procedures, or guidelines. Obviously, there's your intuition, but I've not got any of that stuff to look after my kid. It's trusting her as a parent to make decisions, whereas I make decisions here based on my experiences, but also the guidelines and everything else that goes with that.[53]

## Discussion and conclusion

The International Council on Archives Universal Declaration on Archives points to the wider power and value of keeping records, describing 'the vital necessity of archives for [...] establishing individual and collective memory, for understanding the past.'[54] Here, we can see how the sense of the value of records within the record keeping profession align with the observations within The Promise that recorded statistics alone are a poor resource for capturing full and transformational stories of care-experienced people. Moreover, the curation and preservation of these stories for the benefit of care-experienced individuals and groups align with the values of social work practice and practitioners.

In Scotland, the ambition to improve record keeping and record preservation for people with care-experience has been hugely helped by the Public Records Scotland Act. The Act's specific focus on supporting the care sector in the wake of the Shaw Report was noted in the Scottish Parliament in 2011 by the then Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Europe and External Affairs, Fiona Hyslop, who said:

Public records are our collective memory and the basis for individual rights and obligations. [PRSA] aims to create an improved standard of consistent record keeping that will protect the rights of all members of the public by ensuring information about them is managed properly. It is my sincere hope that in future people who have been in care will never again experience the grief and frustration of discovering that records about their earlier lives are incomplete, inaccurate - or simply not there.[55]

PRSA has created a new climate of accountability and responsibility, of changing the culture of information creation and management across Scotland. It is in this context that our roles as record creators and managers should be defined. The records which a care-experienced adult may seek out long after leaving care will have been shaped and impacted by the ethical approaches and practices of the social work professionals and recordkeepers responsible for their creation and preservation. This raises important questions about the ways in which social work and record keeping professionals need

to work together to keep meaningful stories with and for children and young people in residential care, which will be a resource for them through their time in care and beyond.

In the analysis of both the historical archive and the contemporary experiences shared in Phase Two of ARCH, it appeared that important information was found beyond the individual care record. Accounts of everyday life, special treats or events all undertaken with other children and adults were seen as additional rather than vital. Childhoods were often accounted for in atomized, isolated ways, with the role of others and the dynamics of group life marginalized or absent. Strikingly, this dislocation appeared to be a feature of more contemporary practice, driven by concerns relating to information sharing and the much-dreaded GDPR. In the historical archive, many of the organizational records included descriptions of groups of children and of the routines and rhythms of daily life. Such records were kept for the benefit of the organization and not with the child in mind and therefore these accounts appear almost accidental rather than motivated by a desire to present a comprehensive account of everyday life. By contrast, the pivot to child-focused or child-centred recording practices would appear to have had an unexpected ramification, namely the erasing of the collective experience. This appears at odds with the wishes of children and young people, both historically and currently, to have the chance to remember with others. They want the memories of their lives to be dynamic and relationally re-experienced, not simply read from a flat page or examined through a still photograph.

Perhaps more fundamentally, our findings highlight the parallels between the role of parents as the curators and protectors of childhood memories and that of the role of care staff. By limiting the debate to the language of record keeping, we suggest that there is a danger of side-lining the role that adult caregivers ought to play in capturing memories of everyday childhoods, not just of state care decision-making.

Despite being in the role of 'corporate parents,' the responsibilities for capturing, caring for, and making available the material of childhood are not clearly understood or owned. Through the move to empower children in actively participating in their care recording, we risk further othering them. We suggest that, in the context of residential care, recording could helpfully be reframed to include memory keeping and adult caregivers supported in thinking about this from a starting point of 'what would I want for my own child or what did I want as an adult from childhood.' This process of humanizing record keeping must, we suggest, be central to any advances in the field.

## Notes

1. Hoyle et al., "Record keeping and the life-long memory"; and Golding et al, "Rights in Records."
2. Shepherd et al., "Towards a human-centred participatory approach."
3. Hammond et al., "Life story work for children"; and Baynes, "Untold stories."
4. Anderson, "Care experienced information rights"; Goddard et al., "Managing access to child care files"; and Hoyle et al., "Child social-care recording" and "Recordkeeping and the life-long memory."
5. More information on ARCH can be found on the project website: https://archproject.stir.ac.uk/.
6. Scottish Government, "Children's Social Work Statistics."
7. Steckley and Smith, "Care ethics in residential child care."

8. Brown et al., "Residential child care workers."
9. The Independent Care Review, https://www.carereview.scot/.
10. Barclay and Koefoed, "Family, memory and identity."
11. Steckley and Smith, "Care ethics in residential child care."
12. Shaw, "Historical Abuse Systemic Review."
13. The 2011 Act is distinctive and progressive in its intention to reach out of the public sector and into the private and third sectors to protect records being created on behalf of named public authorities under contract in delivering public functions, like care services.
14. The Promise, https://thepromise.scot/.
15. The German partners on the project at the University of Osnabrück carried out a similar study covering the same time period with the Bethel Archive in Bielefeld.
16. Zaft, "Der erzählte Zögling."
17. At the time of writing, the development of the digital archive is still underway and will be reported on in future publications.
18. Bergold and Thomas, "Participatory research methods."
19. Bergold and Thomas, "Participatory research methods"; and Bussu et al, "Engaging with care;" Kindon et al., "Introduction: Connecting people;" and Rasmussen, "The act of emancipating."
20. Hoyle et al., "Recordkeeping and the life-long memory"; and Rasmussen, "The act of emancipating."
21. Wilson and Golding, "Latent scrutiny." 93.
22. Van der Riet, "Participatory Research."
23. Montreuil et al., "A review of approaches."
24. The research assistant provided specific consent to be interviewed and to have all the data they provided and collected to be used as part of the project.
25. https://www.archives.org.uk/ara-code-of-ethics.
26. Williams et al., "Working with care leavers," 54.
27. Hoyle et al., "Recordkeeping and the life-long memory"; and Murray, "Finding lost childhoods," 143.
28. Murray, "Finding lost childhoods," 143.
29. SCIE, "Social Work recording."
30. Muirhead, "Recording practice."
31. SSSC, "Codes of practice."
32. SCIE, "Social Work recording."
33. Stanley, "What makes an effective case record."
34. Muirhead, "Recording Practice"; and Domakin, "PSDP — Resources and Tools."
35. Hoyle et al., "Recordkeeping and the life-long memory."
36. De Wilde and Vanobbergen, "Puzzling history," 387.
37. Ibid., 389.
38. ARCH project research interview with Ron Aitchison, 15 June 2022.
39. Murray, "Finding lost childhoods," 144.
40. The writer Dorothy Haynes published an account of her childhood in the orphanage in the book *Haste Ye Back* in 1973, reprinted in a new edition in 2024. In 2013 Professor David Divine, himself a former resident of the orphanage, produced a collection of interviews with other former residents as part of a study determining the impact of time spent in an orphanage as a child on adult life.
41. https://www.stir.ac.uk/news/2022/august-2022-news/historic-childrens-home-archive-opens-with-donation-from-former-resident/.
42. BASW, "Recording in Children's Social Work."
43. ARCH project, Phase Two fieldwork, interview with staff member, 7 April 2023.
44. Marcoux, "The "Casser Maison" Ritual."
45. Owen and Boyer, "Holding on to childhood things," 200.
46. Ibid., 203.
47. ARCH project, Phase Two fieldwork, interview with staff member, 7 April 2023.
48. Owen and Boyer, "Holding on to childhood things," 199.

49. ARCH project, Phase Two fieldwork, photo-elicitation exercise with young people, 13 December 2022. "Aye" is a word used in Scotland meaning yes.
50. ARCH project, Phase Two fieldwork, interview with young person, 13 March 2023.
51. Ibid.
52. ARCH project, Phase Two fieldwork, interview with care experienced adult, 28 June 2023. The word "bairn" is a term used in Scotland for a child. The word "ken" is a Scottish term which means to understand.
53. ARCH project, Phase Two fieldwork, interview with staff member, 28 April 2023.
54. https://www.ica.org/en/universal-declaration-on-archives-uda-0.
55. Statement made in Scottish Parliament, Debate on Stage 3 of the Bill, March 2011.

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