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Finding traces of everyday life in unusual places: looking beyond case files in German and Scottish residential child care

Spuren des Alltags an ungewöhnlichen Orten: Ein Blick über den Tellerrand in deutscher und schottischer Heimerziehung

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ABSTRACT

Case records hold life-long significance for those who spent their childhoods in looked after care. Across Europe, public inquiries into the care and treatment of children in care have examined the content of records and have highlighted their limitations. This paper presents data from phase one of a wider study; 'Archiving Residential Children's Homes in Scotland and Germany (ARCH)', which undertook content analysis of the archives of two residential settings, Aberlour and Freistatt. Findings highlight that records were kept and maintained not only by the institution but also for the institution. Despite this, children's everyday lives were noticed and captured, albeit it often accidentally and incidentally. The ways in which these every day encounters were narrated and constructed suggest the power of the overarching ethos in place in the two settings and the adults' orientations towards their role and purpose. Although different in tone and remit, both archives capture traces of daily life and tell us something about what a childhood in Freistatt or Aberlour might have been like. By examining the case recording practices in the past, we raise questions about what this means for contemporary social work and its responsibilities in relation to archiving children's everyday childhoods.

ABSTRACT

Es hat sich gezeigt, dass Fallakten eine lebenslange Bedeutung für diejenigen haben, die ihre Kindheit in Obhut der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe verbracht haben. Die bisherige Forschung hat betont, dass solche Aufzeichnungen für das Verständnis und die Sinngebung von Identität in jeder Lebensphase eine wichtige Rolle spielen und als Schlüsselressource bei der Erinnerung an Kindheitserfahrungen fungieren. In ganz Europa haben sich Aufarbeitungsstudien zur Unterbringung von Kindern und Jugendlichen in staatlicher Obhut stark auf den Inhalt von Hilfeakten gestützt und die historischen Missstände der (professionellen) Praxis aufgezeigt. Weniger gut beforscht ist, inwiefern die Hilfeakten den Alltag und damit auch die alltäglich gelebte Kindheit von Kindern und Jugendlichen erfassen und festhalten. Dies ist von besonderer Bedeutung

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für diejenigen, die in stationären Heimerziehungssettings untergebracht waren, in denen das Gruppenleben eine grundlegende Rolle spielt. In diesem Artikel werden Erkenntnisse aus der ersten Phase einer breiter angelegten Studie vorgestellt. Im Rahmen von 'Archiving Residential Children's Homes in Scotland and Germany (ARCH)', wurden die Archive von zwei Wohnheimen, Aberlour und Freistatt, inhaltsanalytisch in den Blick genommen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass Aufzeichnungen nicht nur *von der* Institution, sondern auch *für die* Institution geführt und gepflegt wurden. Trotzdem wurde der Alltag der Kinder wahrgenommen und festgehalten, wenn auch oft zufällig und nebenbei. Die Art und Weise, wie diese alltäglichen Begegnungen erzählt und konstruiert wurden, deutet auf eine übergreifende Orientierung hin, die in beiden Settings vorhanden ist, und die Ziele der Erwachsenen priorisiert. Doch obwohl sie sich in Ton und Zielrichtung unterscheiden, fangen beide Archive Spuren des täglichen Lebens an beiden Orten ein und erzählen uns etwas darüber, wie Kindheit und Jugend in Freistatt oder Aberlour für die Kinder, Jugendlichen und Erwachsene gewesen sein mögen. Auf der Grundlage der Analyse der historischen Dokumentationspraxis fragen wir, was dies für die zeitgenössische Soziale Arbeit und ihre Verantwortung in Bezug auf die Archivierung des Alltags von Kindern und Jugendlichen bedeutet.

Introduction

Over recent years, residential care for children and young people has come under intense scrutiny (Hauss, 2020). Throughout Europe, inquiries concerning historical abuse and maltreatment have highlighted the, often harrowing, experiences of children who grew up in this form of care. In parallel, adult care leavers have also reported moments of nurture, joy and companionship (Scottish Child Abuse Enquiry, 2018). Arguably, despite it being far from their role and purpose, such public inquiries have offered one of the few spaces where adults who have grown up in residential care have shared memories and heard about the experiences of others.

Over the last decade, there have been several influential studies that have looked at adult care leavers' experiences of accessing individual, social work and case files (Apel, 2020; Hoyle et al., 2019; Muirhead, 2019). Together, they have highlighted the challenges involved in gaining access to records, the frequently obstructive redaction policies, the limited content of case files and the general confusion around ownership of personal information. These studies have given voice to the sense of frustration, disappointment and confusion, which often results from this process (Goddard et al., 2013; MacNeil et al., 2018; Swain & Musgrove, 2012). People with care experience have described the limited ways in which care records have contributed to constructing and making sense of their memories. Often, such records appear to lack a sense of who they were whilst in care, their everyday lives and why events in their own and in their families' lives took place as they did (Biehal et al., 1995).

Here, we look beyond individual care records to examine wider sources of archived information concerning the everyday lives of children in residential care in Scotland and Germany. The concept of everyday life is well established in sociological theory (Kalenkin-Fishman, 2013). Indeed, Pink (2012, p. 143) argues that it is '… at the centre of human existence, the essence of who we are and our location in the world'. This theoretical perspective is concerned with what had been viewed as the mundane, taken for granted activities, relationships, routines and practices which make up day-to-day life (cf Rosaldo, 1993). Sztompka (2008, p. 25) argues that this approach '… takes as its ultimate object of inquiry social events; human action in collective contexts, constrained on one hand by the agential endowment of participants and on the other hand by structural and cultural environments of action'. In the popular German Social Work tradition of life world orientation

('Lebensweltorientierung'), coming from a phenomenological tradition, the everyday of those seeking support is seen as the core dimension in respect to which professional Social Work has to act (Thiersch, 2020). Following this assumption, many studies have examined everyday life in residential care (e.g. Eßer, 2021; Eßer & Köngeter, 2015). Nevertheless, its representation in care records and archives has hardly been examined to date. It is this everyday life, as social practices, social orderings, resistance and care, that we seek to uncover in the archives of the two institutions.

This paper draws on data produced in the first phase of a wider study; 'Archiving Residential Children's Homes in Scotland and Germany (ARCH)' which covered the period 1920–1980 and included archival materials from two organisations, Aberlour Child Care Trust (Scotland) and Freistatt as part of the von Bodelschwinghsche Anstalten Bethel (Germany). For much of this time, Aberlour operated as a large-scale 'orphanage', established to offer care and education to children, from infancy to aged 15, whose parents were seen as having 'fallen on hard times'. Its origins were firmly rooted in the Scottish Episcopal Church with funding coming from charitable donations and latterly from local authorities placing children in the care of Aberlour. In Germany, the von Bodelschwinghsche Anstalten Bethel were similarly influenced by Christian philosophy and founded a sub-institution called Freistatt in 1899, which included several residential care homes. Unlike Aberlour, Freistatt limited its residential care to boys and young men, particularly those regarded as 'morally depraved' and 'deviant' whose attitude and behaviour were regarded as in need of Christian 'correction'.[1] Both organisations generated vast historic archives which contain myriad documents and ephemera, extending far beyond individual case records.

The paper aims to explore the traces of everyday, group life buried within unexpected places, punishment records, daily logs, minute books and medical logs, where young people's everyday experiences were often, almost accidently, captured. Analysis of these archival sources surfaces the differences between the two organisations in relation to the models of care being provided and the ways in which everyday lives were determined by the ethos of the setting. In turn, highlighting the ways in which children and young people, and indeed childhoods, within residential care were constructed and managed by the institutions and their staff.

Throughout this paper, the term 'residential children's home' is used to describe a wide range of institutional provision for children and young people who are unable, primarily for reasons of risk and protection, to continue living with their family (Ainsworth & Thoburn, 2014). During the period considered by phase one of the ARCH project (1920–1980), residential care was primarily considered 'group care' with a focus on the smooth running of the organisation and an expectation that children and young people would fit in to the routines and rituals provided within it (Abrams, 1999). Importantly, in this model, group members were often regarded as care providers as well as care receivers, contributing to the functioning of the collective household and its members (Smith, 2022).

ARCH project in context

There is growing professional as well as academic interest in the ways in which care records are kept, accessed and managed over time (Hoyle et al., 2019; Muirhead, 2019), although this interest has been much greater in English-speaking countries than in German-speaking. Interestingly, in Scotland, the Public Records (Scotland) Act 2011 requires public bodies to robustly manage records and information, particularly care records, under regulatory scrutiny by the Keeper of the Records of Scotland. Scrutiny is evidence-based and extends to third-party providers of public functions under section 3 of the Act. The requirement for public bodies to satisfy the Keeper on the record-keeping arrangements of third-party providers is unique among current public records legislation and sets it, and Scotland, apart from other jurisdictions. Aside from regulatory compliance, this new requirement seeks to safeguard records for future audiences for research, accountability and policy development. This Scottish innovation has occurred in a context where there has been international recognition that standards of practice in this area need to be improved (Holland et al., 2010; Murray et al., 2014). Indeed Shaw (2007), in the review of residential care in Scotland between 1950

and 1995, highlights the limitations of structured public records. By contrast, there are far fewer explicit regulations regarding care records in Germany. There is no well-established discourse about standards for the content of residential care files and these files are often destroyed after a few years or gather dust unseen in the basements of organisations. There is also a lively debate as to whether the current practices of record keeping and archiving are in line with changing legal regulations on data protection (especially with the EU General Data Protection Regulations). Arguably, the resulting concern with breaching regulations often leads to more restrictive practices of record keeping and archiving.

Practices of record keeping are just one example for how law, policy and practice around residential care, accessing records and care leavers more generally, varies enormously across Europe and North America. This spectrum of variance in residential care in the western world can be illustrated well by taking Scotland and Germany as examples, as they differ almost ideally in cultural and political terms. While in Scotland, residential care is seen as the 'last resort' catering primarily for young people from the age of 12 and for a limited period of time, by contrast, in Germany, children from age 1 and upwards live in residential care and may stay in one institution for their entire childhood and youth – although most children and young people will experience different care settings during their time in care. Historically, Scotland has conceptualised residential care in institutional terms (Emond et al., 2016), whilst in Germany models of social pedagogy and 'family likeness' (Eßer, 2021; Eßer & Köngeter, 2015) are well established alongside this concept, creating irresolvable tensions between private and public aspects of care. Practice in Scotland is shifting towards relational models of care which emphasise the enduring nature of relationships and the state's responsibility to its young people into adulthood (Furnivall, 2023). Germany frequently disposes of its responsibilities at the point young people move on from care (currently aged 17) and has a contested statutory responsibility to offer ongoing support (Schröer et al., 2018). However, it should be noted that there have been recent changes in legislation that strengthen the position of young people in care after they have reached the age of majority (Ehlke et al., 2022).

These legal and policy differences translate into how residential care is currently used in both countries. In Germany, nearly two thirds of the children in out-of-home care live in residential homes: in 2021, a total of 122,700 children and young people were living in residential homes or similar settings while 87,300 were in foster care.[2] In Scotland, this demographic pattern is significantly different with only 1286 of the 13,255 children looked after in residential accommodation (although an additional 1190 were in other forms of group living) (Scottish Government, 2021).

Methodology

The ARCH project set out to firstly explore the ways in which everyday, group care had been captured and recorded historically and then, secondly, to use this to inform the co design of digital, virtual 'living archives' of group experiences in current residential children's homes. Phase one, the focus of this paper, centred around an overarching question relating to understanding the content and context of the historical archives. It sought to answer; *How was the everyday, collective experience of group care recorded and archived in pre-individualised care settings?* To date, research in this area has focused on the individual, statutory records maintained by the case-holding social worker rather than records kept by those providing direct care to children, in this case residential care staff. They are the people who are alongside children as they grow and who have the potential to capture the everyday, often relational, experiences, successes and events that make up a childhood.

In this first phase, an analysis of the historical archives of both organisations was undertaken. It explored the traces of everyday group life found in the archives and examined what this illustrated about existing cultures of archiving in residential care. Focus was placed on accounts of group/collective experiences, descriptions or ephemera connected to the residential environment;

photographs, children's drawings or writings and accounts of everyday, routine activities that made up day-to-day life. Attention was given to how children, young people and childhoods were constructed by the records themselves and the ways in which social constructs, power differentials and values were embedded in the accounts (Eßer, 2015; Evans 2017; Zaft, 2011).

In Germany, all types of surviving archival records on residential care in Freistatt were reviewed and analysed. The examination of archival materials was supplemented by ethnographic observations of a contemporary memorial site of residential care in Freistatt. In addition to approximately 9000 case files on young people in Freistatt's reformatories, the archive also holds a relatively extensive stock of administrative records. A selection of these was examined which consisted of: a random sample of 18 case files, work reports of the von Bodelschwinghsche Anstalten Bethel, punishment records, records of unit leaders, records of pupils, Bethel today – a magazine for young people, general files and photographs of Freistatt. In Scotland, the materials consulted from the archive consisted of monthly magazines (produced for benefactors as well as ex-residents and staff), admission records, meeting minutes, daily diaries, medical logs, photographs as well as a random sample of individual case files (24 in total).

Both organisations and their archives were selected because they met the essential requirements for our complex investigation. Both were and are institutions with a history of more than one hundred years and are of great importance in their respective countries. Whilst each institution employed their own approach, they shared a broadly Christian ethos which emphasised both the rescue and 'repair' of children and young people and the importance of instilling 'good Christian values'. In addition, both organisations had their own historical archives that could be examined, which is not the case for all residential care organisations in Scotland and Germany. Furthermore, both organisations still operate residential care homes today, with which we were able to cooperate for the second phase of the project.

In addition to identifying and analysing the materials outlined above, further analysis was undertaken in both countries of supplementary interviews with 'experts' on the archives as well as, in Scotland, 'experts' made up of people who had lived in the orphanage during that time. These interviews provided data on the accessibility of these wider records of everyday life and unexpected 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 up to now.

Ethical issues

This first phase of the ARCH project was guided by archival and care experts including the National Records of Scotland, Landesarchiv Berlin, and IGFH (German section of the Fédération Internationale des Communauté Educatives) and underpinned by both the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice and International Council on Archives code of ethics.

Accessing the archives for research purposes required careful preparation of the records. We ensured that all data gathered from these sources were anonymised for purposes of analysis and publication. Both partner organisations agreed to this, and a data analysis protocol was put in place to ensure it was undertaken in both sites. Analysis of the archives took place in parallel at the University of XXX (where the Aberlour archive is held) and at the main Bethel archive, where all the available records of Freistatt are stored. Notes and findings were recorded, in situ and contained no identifying information. Both Aberlour and the main Bethel archive gave consent for materials to be used in this way.

Given the records related to children and young people who would have left these settings over fifty years ago, it was not possible to gain individual consent to access the records; however, the content and purpose of the ARCH project was publicised in local and national press through social media and the project website. It was hoped that this would alert former residents to the aims of the project and encourage them to contact the research team if they had any questions or concerns. We promoted information on how the archives could be accessed (for fuller discussion

of the ethical challenges of using archival care records see Emond et al., 2024)) and the support available to do so. Ethical approval was granted by the local ethics committee of both the German and Scottish Universities.

Findings

This paper focuses on the analysis of selected archival sources of 'everyday' life in residential care. Given the volume of archival material generated by each organisation, they have been selected as they typify the ways in which everyday, shared experiences were accidentally recorded in each setting. These documents share both a tone and style of writing with other materials from the archives along with use of language and approach to the child care task. Through analysis of both archival sources, the traces of young people's voices and perspectives are revealed and given prominence which, in turn, offers insight into how their everyday worlds were noticed, captured and recorded.

Traces of the everyday in 'punishment records': an example from Germany

In Germany, the analyses of the surviving Freistatt materials revealed that the bulk of the records contained only a few 'thick descriptions' (Ryle, 1971) of the group's everyday life and collective experiences. For example, the individual case files, in addition to numerous administrative documents, contained reports on the emotional and physical development of the young people and their behaviour in the group. However, very few descriptions of concrete everyday situations, experiences and activities undertaken in the group context were captured. Moreover, most of the other records considered in the analysis shared only a relatively abstract impression of everyday group life in the homes and largely refrained from documenting the individual and collective experience of young people. One exception to this was the punishment records. Produced by staff or heads of the residential homes they provide an account of the physical chastisement of a child. Reports were collated and sent, on a regular basis, to the Lower Saxony Youth Welfare Officer for review. Over the period 1950 (when records of this nature were first kept) until 1968 (when they ceased recording in this way) there were 705 punishment reports.[3] Interestingly, these records also included notes and external and internal communications (including legal decrees or extract from legal documents).

Narratives of punishment

These detailed accounts of physical interventions, and their sheer volume, seemed to run in contradiction to the expectations of the state who, at that point in time, regarded physical punishment as necessary 'only in exceptional cases'. Descriptions of 'slaps', 'cheek strokes', 'cane strokes' or a 'beating' were numerous and suggested that rather than being an exception, they were in fact a common part of everyday life. Smith (2022) advises caution in viewing the historical treatment of children and young people in residential care out of context, suggesting that the use of physical punishment was commonplace at home, in school and indeed in the workplace at that time. Nevertheless, there is solid evidence that in residential childcare, and particularly in Freistatt, young people had to suffer multiple forms of punishment and abuse, which cannot simply be justified by the historical circumstances of the time (Benad et al., 2009).

Through detailed analysis of the content of these records, it is possible to reconstruct the narratives used both about a young person's and of staff's own practice. The behaviour of the young people almost always appeared to be initially attributed to them as morally reprehensible, thus the action of physical punishment was constructed as a necessary and unavoidable reaction. It is noteworthy that the reasons for adults employing physical punishment seemed limitless. They ranged from behaviour that was regarded as improper:

> [young person's first name] was punished by me with several slaps because he had drawn a naked woman on his forearm with a ballpoint pen before going to bed. (penal file 1957)

To a more profound demonstration of power:

> I used physical chastisement on [young person's last name] tonight because he did not obey. (penal file 1953)

Approach to recording

As a means of enforcing the separation between young people and staff, language was employed in the records which emphasised the power of the adults and the vagaries and deficiencies of the young people which required correction. Young people were frequently described as 'cheeky', 'defiant', 'snotty' ,'thick skinned' or 'challenging' whilst staff actions were littered with terms such as 'ordering' and 'righteous'. It is important to state that not only were the negative characteristics attributed to the young people institutionally shaped, but so too was the context in which they emerged. What appeared to be at stake was the legitimisation of physical violence against young people vis-à-vis the supervisory authority, questionable even at that time. By capturing them in written records, the narratives formed by the adult representatives of the institution could not be seen by the young people involved and thus could not be verified or falsified by them.

Everyday punishment in minute books and daily logs: an example from Scotland

By contrast, the punishment of children at Aberlour, whilst present in the archive was not systematically captured in a separate record but rather featured in the minute books and daily logs. Whilst there is mention of 'black mark books' in the earlier years of the orphanage these were not retained in the archive. In this way, the account of any punishment was often more clearly embedded in the context of daily life. In Scotland, the lead up to the incident was often included in the recording practices, albeit from the perspective of, and voiced by, the adults. Interestingly, the severe punishment of children appeared to be constructed, at points, as holding an element of failure on the part of the adults. This included reference in one of the Aberlour minute books from the 1950s which describes a member of staff being sacked as a result of 'over chastisement'.

Perhaps another key factor at play in the Aberlour orphanage which contrasted with the narrative being presented at Freistatt was the sense of organisational pragmatism evident in the Aberlour records. The sheer number of children and relatively small complement of adult care givers meant that an unspoken pressure existed. It appeared that the adults were aware that given the right circumstances, children could quite readily 'overthrow' them; therefore, battles had to be carefully chosen and won. Such moments of group life seemed to suggest a more benign regime than that at Freistsatt. Daily records focussed more on the mundane, routinised aspects of physical care of the children and the house.

The punishment records held by Freistatt displayed an everyday life in which it seemed that the only acts of resistance available to young people were those of aggression, both verbally or physically or to refuse their participation or withhold their labour. By contrast, in the Aberlour minute books and daily logs children appeared to create alternative forms of protest, some of which were met with success. One example of this occurred in the 1950s when the matron of one of the girl's houses was temporarily replaced due to illness. The 'stand in' matron introduced a particularly strict application of the 'black mark' policy. All children at Aberlour were punished in line with this policy. They were afforded 'privileges' (such as pocket money) in line with their age group. If they received the requisite number of black marks, they would drop down a privilege level as well as earn other forms of physical punishment. A child had to remain without additional black marks for a certain period in order to return to the privilege level usually assigned to their age bracket. The older 'working girls' had a higher standard privilege level; this meant being given excessive black marks and thus treated like the younger girls was particularly insulting/demeaning. The stand in

matron and her over use of black marks were regarded by these girls as unfair and they refused to take part in the scheme, raising their concerns with the warden. They downed tools, refusing to undertake their chores until the matter was resolved. In this case, their protest had a successful outcome, with the policy being disbanded and 'fairer treatment' reinstated.

Traces of the everyday in medical logs: another example from Scotland

Within the Aberlour archives, one of the unexpected but rich sources of everyday life were the medical records. A series of medical log-books, from 1955 to 1967, provided fascinating insights into children's worlds and were one of the few places where accounts of their experiences were captured in their own words. Handwritten in bound ledgers, the logs were compiled by medical and care personnel and detailed the medical complaints reported by children coming to the on-site infirmary, their course of treatment and their recovery. Although written and therefore voiced by the adults, and entirely dependent on the narratives they constructed, the logs did feature children's voices describing the events leading up to their injury, often including their views on it:

> … child reported abdominal pain was 'eating green gooseberries whilst playing out in the field'. (West Block Report Book July 1960)

Adult as narrator

Medical notes were taken in relation to all children at the point of their admission to the orphanage. These were regarded as a clinical account of observations of the children and their state of health; however, they often used subjective rather than medical language. Indeed, many included descriptions of a child's presentation rather than a clinical, medical assessment. For example:

> … new girl admitted this afternoon – Clean, looks rather delicate
>
> (East Block Infirmary log 1955).

The inclusion of the initial medical assessment provided a degree of insight into the experiences children may have had prior to their admission. This offered some context to children's experiences of admission and contributed to records relating to why the admission had taken place. However, the content of medical logs was contingent on the narrator. Like many of the records held within the archive, there appeared to be differing approaches to what should and could be recorded as well as the richness and depth of information captured. Where cause for admission overlapped with medical symptoms such as malnutrition or bruising there was often a comment or judgement made by the member of staff recording it. It is unclear whether these were based solely on their observations and assumptions, or if they also had access to other external records held about the child. It was striking that the descriptions of the children contained within the medical logs tended to be more expansive than those in the individual case files. Information regarding children's backgrounds, such as the example below, was most often presented definitively:

> … bruises on back due to mother smacking them (Infirmary note book August 1967).

Arguably, the medical logs were intended as a closed, organisational record to fulfil medical standards of best practice and legislative requirements; they were not intended for wider public scrutiny. As 'group life' is incidental to this purpose the narrative appears less influenced by orphanage values in its construction, with the tone of the record primarily factual rather than persuasive. However, in places the narrator's supposition, personal judgement or feelings do emerge in the text. An example of this relates to an injury acquired prior to a planned trip to see a pantomime:

> 3 sutures to wound above right eye. To go back Tuesday to get a dressing before Pantomime!! (1958)

The importance of attendance at this event for the child (and to the adult) is evident in the use of double exclamation marks, stepping outside of the norms of medical note taking.

Everyday life at Aberlour

The ways in which injuries were reported and recorded also offered rich insight into the day to day world of children living at Aberlour. Like the German example of the punishment records, these entries covered a vast array of experiences and events which, taken together, made up everyday life in the orphanage. They highlighted the range of activities that children were involved in and the potential for injury that could occur in all of the spaces and places that children occupied. Examples included: ' *cut thumb with saw in woodwork room'* (1960) '*stuck knife in arm'* (1960) '*fell off top of swings and hurt her left arm'* (1960).

In recording children's descriptions of how they had become injured, or were responding to treatment, the logs captured facets of their lives which had taken place away from the gaze of staff. They included multiple examples of children playing together outside, roaming around the woodlands and fields which surrounded the orphanage and spending time in the local village. Adult observation, as captured in these records, only hints at the edges of these more private, peer-group spaces. Rarely did these narratives describe a singular child. Whilst the injury was evident on one child, the activities from which it had resulted were most commonly in the company of other children, most often out of sight of the adults. For example, an extract from the log written in 1958 describes treatment of a rusty nail in a child's foot. It continues '*when I decided I would put her to Doctor she couldn't be found. Off down to the village*'. Such descriptions demonstrate child led group activities such as play, their use of free time, and their freedom to leave the orphanage grounds unaccompanied. Often the examples were further evidence of the everyday ways that children resisted the rules and expectations of adults. For example:

> … told to go to bed early, was outside playing at 6pm. (East Block report book 1955)

While they do not always capture children's voices directly, the logs are the only records within the Aberlour archives which rely on the children as primary witness to their own ailment, and where narratives are recorded after direct discussion with the child. As such, the narrators are forced to record children's voices, or at least versions of first-hand narratives provided by them, even when they are disbelieved. This perhaps results in a supremacy of medical convention relating to the use of a patient's knowledge in reporting the circumstances of their ailment and nature of their symptoms as a diagnostic tool. By comparing the logs with other materials contained in the archive, it also suggests that this was probably one of the rare times when a child was alone with an adult allowing for a story to be captured unique to the child rather than the often amalgamated, generic, 'orphanage child' voice evident in many of the other archived materials.

Everyday life at Freistatt

Similarly, the punishment records provide some of the few places in the German archive where young people were directly quoted. Although their views and explanations of their actions were originally recorded only as 'evidence' to represent the need for 'punishment', many quotes illustrated the young people's collective perception of having been treated unjustly and inappropriately at Freistatt. Such a reconstructed narrative mode of voicing a young person, which documented, in particular, the expression of criticism of the conditions at the time, is shown in the excerpt below:

> When the group in which [young person's surname] was, was asked to work a little faster than before, the boy did not mind this request at all. He continued at his pace and said cheekily and defiantly 'I won't do it for 30 pennies a day'. Because of his subordination I gave him the 2 slaps in the face. (penal file 1957)

The punishment records contained numerous traces of young people's expressed criticism of their immediate environment and what was being asked of them as well, as the physical chastisement by staff. Both served as a fundamental part of everyday life and collective experiences. Many of the accounts presented in the punishment records were extensive, offering rare, thick descriptions of

everyday situations, involving multiple people and common activities. These accounts suggested an almost constant air of tension between and amongst the young people and staff. Many featured descriptions of the physical labour that young people were involved in (for example collecting and digging peat) and what appeared to be, an almost deliberate, lack of warmth or nurture provided to them by staff. Everyday group life at Freistatt during this time, even as it is displayed in these historical sources, appeared to be characterised by hard physical work undertaken under the spectre of violence, the expectation of unconditional obedience and the omnipresence of physical chastisement.

Discussion

The historical archives considered in this paper highlight that records were kept and maintained not only *by* the institution but also *for* the institution. Despite this, young people's everyday lives were noticed and captured, albeit it often accidentally and incidentally. The ways in which these every day encounters are narrated and constructed signpost the reader to the power of the overarching ethos in place in the two settings and the adults' orientations towards their role and purpose. The records offer a context to the reader, coming as we did almost a century after some of the records were created. We see in the spaces between words the ways in which children's lives were viewed and understood. Although different in tone and remit, both archives capture a certain, specific sense of daily life in both settings and – if we are ready to look carefully – offer us at least a glimpse of what a childhood in Freistatt or Aberlour might have been like for the children and the adults.

We argue the importance of recognising that a childhood lived in residential care is experienced collectively and thus the process of curating archives and maintaining them must, to a certain degree, reflect on and make room for, this collective nature of experience. This is especially important to consider given the ongoing stigma felt by children and young people as a result of living in residential care. By emphasising the collective dimension of residential child care and connecting care leavers to each other, through these shared records relating to the everyday, they may find a deeper understanding of their early lives. Having spaces and places to capture, record and revisit the everyday events and moments of childhood are vital if a robust sense of self narrative and ownership of one's own history is to be established.

The consideration of everyday life as a conceptual lens has enabled a more nuanced analysis of historic records in residential care. By exploring the everyday within the archives, we have been able to unearth some previously unheard voices of young people from the past. Although only appearing as whispers, they do emerge from the organisationally orientated records that were kept at that time and allow new insights into (not)captured aspects of everyday life in residential care and constructions of childhoods in residential care.

Arguably, there will always be a tension between the responsibilities of the organisation for which the records are produced and the young people whose stories are told within them (Merchel, 2018, p. 24). However, research has consistently highlighted that records are instrumental in answering questions or gaps for young people and supporting their recovery from earlier trauma, loss and abuse (Goddard et al., 2008; Kirkton et al., 2001). The analysis of these two archival sources has illustrated the potential that access to materials beyond the case files has in helping adults with care experience remember and make sense of their childhoods in care.

Conclusion

In many European countries, contemporary residential childcare can be seen as a 'contested space' (Brown et al., 2018) where significant public and political scrutiny has resulted in explicit concern and ambivalence about the role and purpose of such provision for today's children and young people (Johnson & Steckley, 2023). Meanwhile, modern residential childcare in English-speaking countries, at least, places the individual child and their needs more at the centre of recording

practice. Indeed, some settings use written records to communicate to and with the child or young person on a regular basis about their care experience and day to day life (Emond & Burns, 2021). It may be suggested that for some, practice has moved on in recent years where previously recording was seen as a technical/rational task by residential workers, an activity which they struggled to connect with their role and purpose (Hardy, 2012). Residential child care staff and social work/social care have in general developed a greater awareness of the impact of care records and their importance to adults with care experience. However, residential care in German-speaking countries is still a long way from this awareness of the role of case files for care experienced people.

This paper set out to explore – *How was the everyday, collective experience of group care recorded and archived in pre-individualised care settings?* By drawing on materials from the archives on two organisations, we have demonstrated that, whilst presented accidently and marginally, everyday, collective experiences were indeed captured.

We have shown that looking beyond individual care records to other archival materials ('Sachakten' in German), which have traditionally been overlooked, offer unexpected insights into the everyday and group experiences of children in residential care. As highlighted, the types of wider materials available to the ARCH project differed between the two institutional archives in Germany and Scotland in kind and in quantity but, in both cases, they provided at least traces of the everyday lives of young people, some of their views and experiences. In both countries, these archival materials have been almost buried away, with access to them limited often for data protection reasons. In addition, people with care experience are often unaware that relevant and accessible aspects about their time in care have been captured in these other types of institutional records and that they continue to exist within the larger archives.

This paper has highlighted the potential that going beyond individual case records has for people with care experience who are looking to make sense of and remember their time in care. As such wider archival materials ought to be more accessible to them and access to them supported by social work and archivists. At the same time, we have been able to demonstrate how institutional culture and practices shaped the making of these materials and their content. For those accessing such archival material, the wider context of approaches to young people and childhood, values and practices of the organisation and perspectives looking back on events should be included as a standard aspect of supporting access to archival records. In addition to the possibility of an accompanied individual search for traces of their own biography, it also seems worthwhile to enable collective (re)memories of childhood, youth and everyday life in residential care through contextualised collections of material in the form of exhibitions, presentations and the establishment of memorial sites.

Arguably, if we want to take seriously our responsibility for caring about young people's memories, they should not simply rely on individual case records as the sole source. Rather, access to wider archival materials should be supported and encouraged, with help to uncover young people's voices, experiences and stories within these traditionally buried places. We argue that the information held in individual case files could be usefully contextualised and augmented with materials from wider archival sources, bringing everyday childhood into the light rather than simply focussing on the decision making and procedures which feature heavily in individual case files.

Notes

1. Gender-homogeneous care homes for young people were very typical in Germany until the late 1970s.
2. https://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2022/10/PD22_454_225.html; date of access: 19 May 2024.
3. In Germany, young people have only had the legal right to a non-violent upbringing since 2000.

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