

Project MIRRA: Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access

Elizabeth Shepherd, Victoria Hoyle, and Elizabeth Lomas

Introduction

Many people who grew up in care (i.e., those raised by someone other than their parents) in England have gaps in their childhood memories and unanswered questions about their early lives. In the absence of family photos and stories, they rely on records held by the local authorities and aid organizations that looked after them.

Accessing these records poses practical challenges as well as an emotionally fraught process. Care leavers must use the “subject access request” route under the terms of data protection legislation. Response times are often long and, once received, records are frequently redacted because they include information about “third parties” who are frequently family and carers. In many instances this will be redacted as an automatic response rather than considering whether the information would be known to the care leaver or whether the balance tips in favour of that person having the information. In fact, a precedent-setting case brought by Graham Gaskin, which went all the way through the English law courts to the European Court of Human Rights, ruled that access to records was a human right and, that as the records existed only by virtue that a child was a care, must be the personal data of that child and, as such, should be released. In addition to the problems of gaining access, the language and ideas contained in the records released reflect the prejudices and assumptions of the day. Some files are extremely long and confusing, whereas others only have a few pages to cover a whole childhood. The comments made are often about a child’s problems; social workers have spent little time and less space in the past recording a child’s achievements. Records may have been lost or destroyed altogether. Very few services are available to support people through the experience of accessing their information.

MIRRA: Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access is a participatory action research project carried out at the Department of Information Studies at University College London (UCL) since 2017 and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council that explores these issues. The project explored how child social care records have been created, kept, and used in public and voluntary organisations in England from 1970 to the present. The research is co-produced with care leavers in partnership with The Care Leavers’ Association and reflects on how what it is recorded about children in care can affect them throughout their lives. One significant output from the MIRRA project is the new web site *FamilyConnect*, created in 2020 by the charity Family Action to provide support and expert guidance for care leavers who seek access to their care files (see <https://www.familyconnect.org.uk/>). The MIRRA project continues to

work to try to ensure that there is better recording of the lives of children in care today, and that records are co-created and owned through time by that person. The basic human right to a childhood memory should be managed and delivered for all children.

This article republishes edited blog posts produced during the MIRRA research project at blogs.ucl.ac.uk/mirra/.

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Introducing the MIRRA project

Victoria Hoyle, 12 June 2018

Personal records, photographs and family stories help people to remember significant events and milestones from childhood: where you went on holiday when you were seven years old, what part you had in your first school play or when you lost your first tooth. But if you grew up in care these things may be missing or inaccessible. Not only that but you might have a particularly complex personal story, involving lots of foster or residential placements and people coming into your life for brief periods. As a result, care leavers often have significant gaps in their stories and unanswered questions about their lives. In the absence of family archives they turn to records held by the local authorities and charities that looked after them. These organisational records are their personal histories, helping to create and reconstruct narratives about the past.

Since the nineteenth century, vast quantities of information about children and families has been collected as part of social work activity. These files look different depending on when and where you were in care. They may have been produced by lots of people, including social workers, teachers, family, foster carers, residential care workers, health services and the police. In some cases, files can run to thousands of pages. Some may include highly personal things like photographs, letters and school reports while others are official, repetitive, and full of jargon. Either way, this “paper self” is hugely important, both for how children and young people are understood and treated while they are in care, and for how they understand and treat themselves later in life.

Asking to see your care file is a big decision that can take years to make and the process is often difficult. Some records have been destroyed and others are lost in confused records management systems. People can wait more than a year to receive any information. Where records survive they may be fragmentary, contradictory and contrast sharply with a person’s existing memories. Information about family or carers might be blacked out – “redacted” – and documents sometimes leave out the important emotional details. Photographs, school reports, swimming certificates and other personal documents only

survive in about ten to twenty percent of cases. In other words, care records often conceal or obscure as much as they reveal. Care-experienced people report feelings of powerlessness, frustration, anger, and trauma in trying to recover their childhoods from their files. This isn't the whole story – lots of people find positive things in their records, too – but it's definitely a recurring theme.

The Access to Records Campaign Group (a collaboration of voluntary organisations led by The Care Leavers Association) have been making the case for better support and resources for access to records for the last decade. Their 2016 report, *It's My Journey, It's My Life*, drew on the experiences of care leavers and social care practitioners, and set out the practical, legal, and emotional challenges faced by people who access their records. The arrival of GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) in May 2018 and the role of records in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) in England and Wales has also highlighted the value and complexity of social care files.

MIRRA is a research project that aims to support the rights of care leavers by exploring how child social care records have been created, kept and used in public and voluntary organisations in England from the mid-20th century to the present day. The acronym stands for Memory – Intity – Rights in Records – Access. It is a participatory action research project co-produced with care leavers in partnership with The Care Leavers Association. Ultimately, it aims to make positive changes to social care recordkeeping and, through those changes, improve the experiences of care leavers.

On this blog we will be sharing our research journey. We will talk in more depth about the project and what we are doing, featuring posts from the research team and from care leavers and others.

[insert Figure 1]

The MIRRA Research Team (left to right): Linda, John-george, Darren, Rosie, Brett, Isa, Gina, Victoria, Sam, Elizabeth, Emmanuel, and Elizabeth.

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Receiving my care file

Gina Larrisey, a care-experienced co-researcher on the MIRRA Project, 2 July 2018

I was around twenty-six years old when I reached a point where I started to need some answers about my life. Where had I been fostered and who was I with? I was fostered at a young age so my memory of it all was hazy, remembering dribs and drabs. I had asked my Mum at some point who had fostered me but her answer was, “Ooohhh I don't know.” I was shocked and upset that she didn't know where I had been and who was looking after her child. Although there were family issues, hence my being in the care system, I found it hard to stomach that she didn't even know where I was. There were little gaps that needed filling

in and she was my family and the obvious person to ask. It felt like pieces of jigsaw that I need to put together to complete the picture, but without knowing about that part of my life I couldn't fit things together.

That is when I wrote to Social Services requesting my care file. I retrieved an address to write to them by popping down to my local council building and asking how I went about it. There had to be a reason for this constant battle with my family. I was told it could be up to three months to hear back, but it only took a few weeks for the information to be gathered. I was then invited to a day centre to view it.

A lovely social worker sat with me when I received my file, as did my partner who greatly supported me at the time. Two great big brown envelopes were brought to me containing *my life*. I sat down and read through a lot of it straight away. There was too much to read all of it at once. There were little yellow labels to mark the most distressing parts. Some things I already knew, some had been dormant memories, others were shocking revelations. It was no wonder I had been so messed up as a child. Reading through it confirmed to me what I needed to know. I was not at fault for what had happened to me. However, I realised that it was no one else's fault for the things that happened to me in the past either.

The social worker who sat with me was very supportive and very sensitive. I have always appreciated her for that and never regretted receiving my file even though it was a huge thing to deal with. It has helped me to move on in my life and put the pieces of the puzzle together.

Gina Larrisey has written a book, From Care to Somewhere (2016), about her care experiences and her life since leaving care. It's available via Amazon.

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Reflecting on information rights for care leavers in a complex legal world

Elizabeth J. Lomas, 10 July 2018

On 25 May 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation came into force across the European Union. This legislation was enshrined into UK law through the Data Protection Act 2018. Together these laws are intended to give greater protections and rights to individuals.

All organisations that manage “personal data” (and what business, charity or public authority does not!) must demonstrate that they do so appropriately. This is termed “privacy by design.” It places the onus on organisations to proactively consider their information management processes and the documentation of these processes. The legislation brings in far higher penalties for failing to comply with data protection law (up to twenty million Euros or four percent of turnover, whichever is greater) and as such it is evident that organisations are seemingly taking notice.

As guidance emerges on the implementation and bedding down of new best practices under these laws, key stakeholders need to be part of the discussions around the management and use of their information. As a result of this legislation, it is to be hoped that better care will be taken of records as the penalties for the mismanagement or loss of information are significant. To lose the file of a care leaver could cause significant damage or distress and as such is likely to be judged harshly. However, “privacy by design” and the increasing reliance on documented risk assessments may mean that organisations will proactively destroy much more personal information unless they are given rigorous reasons why information needs to be kept. Although the records of those who are formally defined as “Care Leavers” (www.wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Health-Social-Care/Children-and-young-people/Care-leavers/Who-is-a-care-leaver.aspx) are legally required for seventy-five years from the date of the record, the records of children who have a more complex picture of social care are not necessarily given such strong protections and may be destroyed far earlier. It is important to ensure that local authorities do take into account the significance of these records to individuals as sometimes they are the only affirmation of childhood memories albeit that many may not feel a need or indeed ready to access this information for decades.

Those who are hoping that the new laws will enhance their access rights may be somewhat disappointed. The concept to access to the records of children who have been in care was enshrined in law through the case of *Gaskin v. United Kingdom* (1989) 12 EHRR 36, which relied on Article 8 of the Human Rights Act to make the case for access given that this entitles an individual to respect for private and family life. However, when authorities review files they are required to consider the duties of confidentiality owed to other parties where their information is also on record. This is a balancing exercise that is often subjective. It would aid this process if clearer guidance were provided to enable an authority to weight the Care Leavers’ rights in these cases and thus err on the side of release. Some authorities do take this stance given that the damage or distress caused to an individual when information is withheld is not insignificant.

Finally, it is to be acknowledged that many Care Leavers will not want “the State” to retain the record of their childhood and may be hopeful that the “Right to be Forgotten” under the law will enable them to request that their files will be destroyed. Sadly, the right to be forgotten is quite limited. Where authorities have a legal basis for retaining the information and in certain cases a legal responsibility to do so it is unlikely the information will be destroyed. If records have been formally archived in accordance with the exemptions provided for “archiving in the public interest” then there is an exemption from the right to be forgotten. There is also a potential exemption from subject access requests e.g. depending on the extent to which the record is accessible/structured. The new draft archival guidance in this sphere states, that whilst archives may not be legally required to respond a subject access request they can choose to do so “especially when an individual’s rights or entitlements seem to be at stake.” In conclusion, while the new legislation offers a step forward, more specific guidance is needed to make change. Care leavers are owed more

personalized consideration and regulation or at least clearer tailored guidance. I hope that through this project and other related research this can be achieved.

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Academic researchers and social care records

Victoria Hoyle, 13 August 2018

The MIRRA project is mainly focused on the *information rights* of care leavers, and on the *information responsibilities* of the people who create and look after care records. However, the project is also interested in issues affecting another group of people who regularly seek access to care records: academic researchers who use them in their work. This work might be in the social sciences, sociology and social work, economics, or history. It may involve access to large anonymised datasets, to look at trends and patterns in social services, or analysis of the records of individuals (such as case files) to better understand events or practices in context. Recent examples of research using records like this include Michael Lambert’s work on “problem families” in the North West of England between 1943 and 1974, which drew on 1,800 case histories, and Malkiat Thiarai’s research on using statistical analysis of anonymous data to support service planning in Birmingham. Several large-scale projects are now underway to make vast quantities of social care data available for this kind of research use, such as the Nuffield Family Justice Observatory.

Even so, providing researchers with access to records raises many ethical, moral, and practical questions. What rights should researchers have, and what processes should be in place to ensure they access and use the information sensitively? Should the subjects of records – children, young people and care leavers – have a say in how their data is being used? How can records be created and managed in ways that support research without contravening people’s right to private and family life?

At the moment researcher access to care records is covered by the same legislation as access for care leavers themselves: GDPR and the new Data Protection Act 2018. Section 19 of the Act allows for the “processing” of data for “archiving, research and statistical purposes,” so long as:

1. Researchers acts in ways that protect the personal data, such as anonymising information or working under strict access controls.
2. There is no likelihood that using the data would cause ‘substantial damage or distress’ to the subjects of the data, e.g., care leavers, their families and carers.
3. No decisions will be made about individuals based on the research, i.e. about their care.
4. The research can’t be done in any other way without weakening it.

The research also needs to have a “lawful basis for processing,” which is usually that “it is necessary for scientific or historical research in the public interest.” If a researcher can convince whoever holds the records that all of these conditions are met then they could legally be given access to significant amounts of information.

Most researchers will also need to convince their university’s Ethics Committee that their work is ethical, a test that is often much stricter than the Data Protection Act. For example, they will need to consider whether it is possible to gain consent from the people the records are about, and justify why if not. They will also need to think about the implications for harm, and how they will protect against it, and provide evidence of the security measures they’re going to put in place. Many universities also require researchers to register with their Data Protection Officer. Meeting all of these criteria can be challenging and time-consuming but neither the legislation or the ethics process is designed with social care records in mind, and may not take into account some of the unique qualities and sensitivities of care records.

Once researchers have permission to proceed they may find that the organisations and institutions that hold care records – such as local authorities, charities, and archives – have very different procedures and standards of access. We know from our research already that some refuse completely, while others are relatively open. Some don’t have a good enough understanding or management of their paper records to provide access, and many are using digital systems that make it difficult to export and use more recent data. Although a project might be of public interest or benefit, with stretched budgets it can be difficult to justify the time and expense of working with a researcher. In some cases, giving access to records is seen as too great a risk. All of this may limit the potential for learning from records.

We’re interested in understanding more about all of these issues from the researcher’s perspective, so that we can put them in the context of the views of care leavers. How do care leavers feel about their files being used for research? It may be a very upsetting prospect to think about a researcher reading your file, often unredacted, when you haven’t been allowed to see all of it yourself. At the same time, it might be positive to think that your experiences are contributing towards improving care in the present, or a better understanding of the care system in the past. We hope to come up with some best practice guidance to help researchers and the people who manage the records navigate the moral and ethical questions better and more consistently.

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For the record

John-george Nicholson, originally published on his blog, *Own Two Feet*, where he writes about his childhood in care, 17 September 2018

Recently I've started writing about my experience in care. I don't know what all the words will become, but I'm enjoying doing it. As a kid I was never a big writer. I liked writing when I had to do it for school, but that was about it. But what got me putting pen to paper was getting my care file a few years ago.

Let me take a step back ... one day I was sitting in a training session at work, one of those ones you have to go to that is normally a waste of time. It was on data protection (making sure you kept people's addresses and dates of birth and stuff like that safe). I didn't think it meant a lot to me, but in the session the trainer said everybody is entitled to see any data that anyone holds on them.

It got me thinking. I realised there must be loads of stuff held on me from when I was in care (social worker reports, carer reports, police reports, psychologist reports, school reports, etc.). I was living in Birmingham at the time, but phoned up Wandsworth Social Services and asked if I could have all the information they held on me. The woman didn't have much of a clue what I was talking about, but said she would look into it. Time passed and I forgot about it.

About six months later a parcel arrived. I was late for work, quickly signed for it and stuffed it in my bag. That day it was pouring with rain. Typing now, it seems like yesterday. I remember I was still drunk from celebrating a promotion the day before. In the rush I put on the clothes I was wearing the day before. Great way to start the new job. Anyway, I ran for my bus, got it, sat upstairs at the front and remembered this random package in my bag. I opened it up and inside was a red folder. I was confused and wondered if it was for me. I began reading.

It was my life in care written by other people. It started with a chronology of all the places I had been and then there were pages and pages of different reports. I wasn't ready for it. I put my hood up and sat on that bus for an hour and cried my eyes out. I read the whole thing and cried all the way to work.

When you live in care you block out a lot of stuff. Anyone in care reading this will know what I mean. There's so much stuff to deal with that some things you just have to block out. It doesn't stop it happening, but you make a place for it and you stuff all that shit in there (you don't have to be in care to have that place, we've all got it, but some are just bigger than others). I've still got that place, but more and more as I get older I find myself visiting that place and remembering, trying to work stuff out. Some stuff I never will, but I think when you're ready It's good to go back and look at things with fresh eyes.

So back to the file. I got off the bus, dried my eyes, and went to work. I hid the file away and didn't look at it for a long time. One of the things that hurt was that in all the words that the file possessed, mine were missing. There was hardly anything from me. I don't know, have times changed now? Do young people fill out their own reports to add to all the other people's reports? Someone out there please tell me? Do young people get the chance to have their say and to write that say down on paper?

Words said out loud often get lost in time, but words on the page stick. These words in my file have certainly stuck with me and are still a big influence on me. But as I've got older I'm starting to find my own way around them and around my time in care.

I'm starting to build my own history. I'm more than the file. I'm more than someone that was in care. I once let being in care define me, but now I'm much more than that. But the file is still important to me. It's like an anchor to my childhood. It's like a map of where I've been. So I started this blog saying I wasn't sure where I was going and here we are and I think I've already written too much. I just want to finish by saying to anyone who is in care that you have the right to see all the stuff people write about you. That's your right. But be careful if you ever want to see your file. I wasn't ready when I got mine. I didn't get any warning and to be honest it messed me up for a bit. But now I'm so glad I did get it and still have it. Now I see it as a gift. It's not an easy read, but as much as there is a lot of pain in there, there is also a lot of joy. I've been given memories that would have been lost.

Now I'm not saying that I agree with everything in the file, some of it is outright lies. You know how social workers and foster carers can be. They don't always get it and their version of things is sometimes not how it was, but nobody's perfect. I know my version of some things is definitely not perfect. It's funny looking back now at the file because sometimes the people writing the reports so didn't get it, so I would advise maybe keeping your own file, writing down your own thoughts (of course just for yourself, you don't have to share them with anybody) so that when you get your file one day like I did you can have something to compare it to.

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Recordkeeping with love

Victoria Hoyle, 21 January 2019

Over the last year I've spoken to a lot of people about accessing their social care records, and about their experiences in care and as care experienced adults. I'm currently working back through the interview transcripts and focus group recordings, doing primary data analysis based on the [coding framework](#) we co-designed last year. I've been struck by how often the conversations turned to solutions. Not just to recordkeeping problems but to the bigger issues of the lack of identity, belonging and mental wellbeing that so often motivate people to go looking for their records in the first place. Revisiting these discussions has been powerful and illuminating, challenging me to think about what we, as a research team, can do to improve people's lives.

The most common answer I've heard is "more love." People have often talked about how the absence of love, and of simple expressions of care like hugs and cuddles, left lifelong wounds for them. Accessing records is often part of the process of healing, through understanding what happened to them and why. Unfortunately, records and the access process can reinforce – rather than help – the hurt. This is because records are often the product of loveless or careless "care": they are the tangible evidence of the way a child or young person has been turned into a task, a job, and a statistic. The process for accessing records can be similarly dehumanising. Long waiting times, lost files, heavy redactions, and poor (or non-existent) aftercare seem to underline the message that you're not important. Several people have shared common experiences of being told "oh we can't find you, according to the system you don't exist." Others have been advised, at the point of accessing their records, that "there's nothing very interesting in there" or "I've seen much worse." This way of speaking and thinking about the records is felt as a commentary on the person themselves, even if that's not what is consciously intended. To hear that you don't exist, or that the most important events of your childhood are uninteresting is very hurtful. Generally, it shows a lack of empathy in social care recordkeeping that begins at the point of creation and carries on right through to access in adulthood.

What can MIRRA do to make an appreciable positive difference? Part of the answer is compassionate guidance and better training, and strong evidence to support fairer legislation, but how to make the case? Especially at a time of diminishing financial resources, huge social work case-loads, and the highest number of children in care since the 1970s. In thinking about this question, I've been coming back again and again to love.

In a 2016 TEDx Talk, Scottish care leaver and residential care manager Laura Beveridge emphasizes the need for a revolution of love and equality for children in care (see youtu.be/E-wp7HN9Zvs). She talks about what it's like to live in a world where "you don't call your parent mum or dad, you call them staff," where you have to sign an official form to get your pocket money, and where what you can do and where you can go depends on a risk assessment. She talks about leaving care with a box of administrative papers rather than a memory box of photographs and mementos.

This further convinced me of the fundamental importance of love in recordkeeping. Social care records have a statutory and official role in Children's Services, but surely they also have a critical function in capturing and demonstrating the love that we want all children and young people to feel. If a commitment to social records created with and for love ran right through the recording function and on into the access process then "files" could be better in lots of ways. Better at supporting and informing child-centred social work practice; better at capturing the key moments and memories of childhood; and better at helping to answer the lifelong needs of care-experienced adults. Drawing on the work of psychologist Gerard Egan (2000), archivists Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor (2016) have challenged recordkeepers to bring

“radical empathy” to their work. They define radical empathy as “a willingness to be affected, to be shaped by another’s experience, without blurring the lines between the self and the other.” By rethinking the value of social care records as evidence of love, and coming to a better understanding of why records matter to everyone involved in making and preserving them, we might come to see them as tools for caring rather than for surveillance and judgement. Increasingly, bringing more love into recordkeeping has to be a key aim of research outputs.

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How can practitioners change records for the better?

Victoria Hoyle, 17 June 2019

Social care recordkeeping is a complex system, with dozens of people involved in contributing to, preserving and providing access to just one person’s file. Multiply that by the more than seventy-two thousand children and young people currently in care means that there are hundreds of thousands of practitioners involved in producing and maintaining social care records all across the country. If changing and improving recordkeeping practice is the goal, then reaching that audience is a high priority. In 2019 an additional £15,000 of funding was secured for the MIRRA project to share the research more widely and talk to social work and information professionals about records issues and why they matter. A close partnership with the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the Archives and Records Association (ARA) was formed to reach out to sectors that very rarely talk to one another.

As part of a programme of events (including our final symposium on 18 July 2019) we recently hosted two workshops with practitioners in London and Manchester. With more than 60 people attending – from a range of backgrounds in the public, voluntary and private sectors, and from children’s home managers to information governance managers – a lot of brilliant and interesting discussion was generated. Many of the topics will be familiar: the challenge of depleted budgets and resources, both for Children’s Services and records work; the complexities of digital recording systems; and the legacy of less-than-ideal practices from the past. At the beginning of the session a short documentary video premiered about the MIRRA project and our care-experienced research team (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xs28tczL3yA&list=PLIxEKZAfBRCij3qPuX98ucTnAhq2a09QH&index=10>), which helped to keep the debate rightly focused on the impact records have on care-experienced people.

A visual minute taker joined us at both events to illustrate the conversations as they developed, and help us to see both consensus and actions emerging. These artworks highlight some of the key priorities the

workshops identified, which in turn will help us to develop the resources practitioners need for better recordkeeping. The first step was convincing people they needed to act, and now the second will be providing them with tools to help. This is something I will be focusing on during the next five months as the project comes to the end of its first phase. Here are just some of the most critical lessons we learned during the sessions:

- Social care teams and information/records management teams rarely work together or communicate regularly. They inhabit very different worlds, culturally and practically. All of the guidance we produce has to speak to both sectors and encourage practitioners to work together. The less fragmented recordkeeping is the better.
- Training in recordkeeping is needed at all levels. We've often talked about training for social workers or records managers, but the complexity of the system means we need a holistic approach. Everyone who works with children and young people or their records should have training.
- The regulatory and inspection regimes provided by Ofsted and the Information Commissioner's Office are very important but can have a negative impact on recordkeeping, creating risk averse and inflexible approaches. Children, young people and care leavers get squeezed out by processes that are designed to fit a standard rather than support the individual. Activism is needed to work with the regulators to establish child-centred, care-centred recordkeeping as best practice.
- Thinking about records in terms of retention schedules, performance management and accountability doesn't properly reflect their importance as memory and identity resources. If we shift our thinking about **who** records are for and **why** they are so vital then we can make small changes that support people. For example, we can write records in children's own words rather than paraphrasing them, and we can extend the time we keep them beyond the minimum retention to the life time of the person they are about. Small actions like this, taken on a case-by-case basis, can make a huge difference.

[insert figure 2]

Visual Minutes from the London Workshop, by Raquel Duran (More Than Minutes).

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A goodbye, thankfulness and new beginnings

Victoria Hoyle, 23 September 2019

Research often feels like something that happens behind closed doors. Over the two years that I've worked on the MIRRA project I have spent many hours alone in my office (or at my dining table!) – just me, a

computer screen, and the clack of my keyboard. This is undoubtedly where a lot of the work of thinking, analysing, understanding, and writing has been done; but it isn't where the meaning or satisfaction in my job has come from. That has come, without fail, from the amazing people that I have worked alongside and from the change we've started to make together. When I was doing my PhD I often quizzed myself about my decision to go into research, and worried that becoming an "academic" would take me away from the real world and the real-life concerns of people. I'm inexpressibly grateful that my first full-time job as an academic researcher proved those fears were wrong, in so many ways. Research is what we make it, and with MIRRA we have all had an opportunity to make something powerful and heartfelt.

That's an emotional way to begin this post, but it seems fitting since MIRRA has been an emotional project: It's about memory, identity, and our need to understand ourselves, which are all very emotional things. I've often felt full of feelings while working on it. I am full of feelings now as the project, at least this phase of it, comes to a close. The current funding for MIRRA finishes in mid-October 2019.

I am grateful and humbled that I have had the opportunity to work with my care-experienced colleagues on MIRRA. Prior to starting on the project I had very little knowledge or understanding of child social care, and no personal experiences. I was an outsider, but people welcomed me in. I would like to particularly thank the core and extended research group – Darren, Andi, Gina, Linda, Isa, Rosie, John-George, Jackie, Emmanuel, Brett and Sam – but also all of those who shared their life stories or experiences and placed their trust in me, in person, by email, or on Twitter. Practitioners and other researchers have also been very generous, both with their time and their thoughts. It's safe to say that while I have learned a lot about care and care experiences over the last two years, I have learned even more about how to be a good researcher and a good human.

The MIRRA project doesn't end here though! The other members of the research group at University College London – Elizabeth Shepherd, Elizabeth Lomas, and Andrew Flinn – will be picking up the reins and carrying the work forward. They will be continuing to work with legislators and regulators on improving recordkeeping and access to records, and creating and sharing guidance for care leavers and practitioners. Twitter and the website will still be updated. They will be joined by a new colleague, Anna Sexton, who will be leading on follow-on funding applications to extend and expand the work. Anna isn't completely new to the project, as she worked on the original pilot study back in summer 2017. The aim is to keep records high up on people's radar, and to emphasise the role they play in shaping our lives as both individuals and as citizens.

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Spreading the word!

We have been trying to further spread the word about our recordkeeping recommendations for local authorities, information and data professionals, and social workers:

- **Records should be co-created by all those involved in a child’s care.** They should include the voices of children themselves, taking into account their life-long needs for memory, identity and justice.
- **Best practice guidance for records creation and management should be established** for all organisations with safeguarding responsibilities and guardianship of children’s memories.
- **New standards for access to records for all care-experienced persons should be developed.** New standards should address the rights of care-experienced people and the responsibilities of institutions.

Publications from the research project:

Hoyle, Victoria; Shepherd, Elizabeth; Flinn, Andrew; and Lomas, Elizabeth (2019). “Child social-care recording and the information rights of care-experienced people: A recordkeeping perspective.” *The British Journal of Social Work* 49(7), 1856–1874. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcy115>

Hoyle, Victoria; Shepherd, Elizabeth; and Flinn, Andrew (2020). “Recordkeeping and the life-long memory and identity needs of care-experienced children and young people.” *Child & Family Social Work* 25(4), 935-945. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12778>

Shepherd, Elizabeth; Hoyle, Victoria; Lomas, Elizabeth; Flinn, Andrew; and Sexton, Anna (2020). “Towards a human-centred participatory approach to child social care recordkeeping.” *Archival Science* 20(4), 307-325. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09338-9>

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