

Back to the future: Archiving Residential Children's Homes in Scotland and Germany (ARCH)

The Scottish Findings



Phase Two
Briefing Report

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1. Introduction



The ARCH Project was conducted over three main phases. This briefing outlines the Scottish findings from Phase Two, exploring the development, creation, and use of a digital ‘living archive’ of everyday group life in residential care with and by young people, staff, and care experienced adults.

Phase Two of ARCH was interested in finding out how children, young people and adults capture and record everyday life in the house. This included the normal, day to day routines as well the people who lived and worked there. We were also keen to learn more about how the out of the ordinary events like celebrations, holidays, birthdays were recorded and remembered. We wanted their views on a shared digital archive which might enable this type of record to be kept and potentially accessed by care experienced people throughout their lives (without having to gain access through a gatekeeper in the organisation).

The report contains an overview of the ARCH project and the overarching research questions it set out to answer. It includes a brief summary of the methods used to collect the data and discusses some of the key findings from Phase Two. It links to the results from Phase One. The findings, and their significance for policy and practice are outlined.

No identifiable details are given in this report. Please follow the project website at www.archproject.stir.ac.uk for further information and publication details.

Project Overview

The ARCH project was a collaboration between the University of Stirling and the University of Osnabrück which set out to establish a more nuanced and critical understanding of what types of information, objects, and relationships are central to supporting care experienced children, young people, and adults in developing an understanding of their shared past. The project focused on residential care and how the everyday experience of living together is captured, cared for, and made available.

To do this, the project worked across five main areas, each of which was shaped by a central research question. This briefing presents the findings in relation to questions 2 and 3.

1. **Understanding:** How was the everyday, collective experience of group care recorded and archived in care settings in the past? (This question was addressed in the Phase One Briefing)

2. **Development:** What do today's young people, staff and former residents choose to record about their lives together?

3. **Creation:** How are tensions about public and private care and the recording or not of shared lives managed by those involved? How can collective memories be safely managed, stored, and made accessible?

4. **Tracking:** Who uses the archives and why?

5. **Sustaining:** Who takes ownership of the collective past in the form of the 'living archive' and how is this determined? An overarching concern of the project is the ways in which taken-for-granted legal, political, cultural, and professional factors influence the practices of recording for the group.

2. Rationale for the Project

Donald (2001) argues that autobiographical memory is dependent on external sources of data or information. He refers to these as 'exograms'. Exograms can include photographs or other objects that serve to mobilise autobiographical memory and contribute to identity construction. These memory objects play a vital role in remembering the people, places and events in childhood, and can be central to developing and maintaining a sense of self and identity.

There is a growing body of evidence which suggests that people who were in care as children have very limited access to both information about their childhoods as well as to memory objects. Many people encounter significant barriers to accessing and navigating their care records and describe feeling devastated by how little information and childhood materials they contain (Goddard et al. 2008, Duncalf 2010, Morton, 2019). In addition, a number of people with care experience have criticised the one-sidedness of the representation of events by care workers and others in authority, as well as the lack of recording of their own voice and perspective as a young person (Shepherd et al. 2020). More recently, projects, such as the MIRRA project at University College London and the Rights in Records by Design project in Australia, have gone beyond research to design and develop innovative, practice focused and technological solutions to these issues (Golding et al, 2021; Hoyle et al, 2019).

Much of the research undertaken in this field has focused on the social work 'case file' as the primary source of information. ARCH has a focus on memory- and record-keeping within residential care and has developed from a recognition that care experienced people's access to materials collected by residential care providers has traditionally been limited (Anderson, 2019; Hoyle et al, 2020; 2019; Goddard, 2008). 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.

3. Methodology

In this section, we provide a brief description of the Residential Children's House (RCH) where the research in Scotland took place before explaining the approach and adaptations made by the Scottish research team in terms of methods of data collection and analysis. The team had to amend the originally intended methodology of development workshops and instead used a combination of participant observation and interviews to better fit in with the needs and wishes of participants.

The Residential Children's House

The RCH is in a large town in Scotland and provides care for up to six young people. It has been in operation for approximately ten years. At the start of data collection, the young people living there were of mixed genders and aged 9, 14, 16, 18, 19, and 20; however, this age profile changed over the course of the project as some young people moved on, and others moved in. Two young people who used to live at the house, aged 19 and 20, were in regular contact with the RCH one of whom agreed to be involved in some aspects of the project. The house is staffed by a team of residential workers, senior residential workers, a manager, and a depute, who operate a shift rota to ensure that at least three members of staff are available to the six children. Additional support workers also work in the RCH to provide targeted support where it forms part of a young person's care plan (for example, extra educational support).

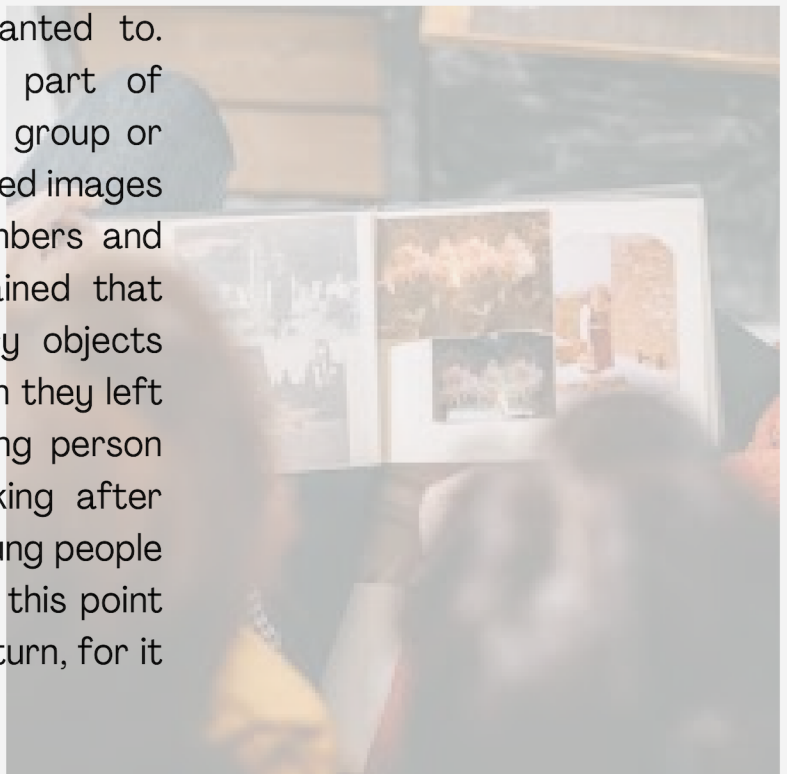
In addition to standard record-keeping on the organisational recording system (daily diaries, health information, social work reports, etc.) the RCH had an established practice of keeping individual memory objects for children prior to ARCH. Some staff and young people collected and displayed items such as photographs and drawings in the shared spaces of the building, often of group experiences and events. Staff appeared to take responsibility for ensuring that memory objects were also retained for potential future access by the young people. For example, staff members collated individual 'memory books' for the young people alongside other digital and non-digital objects. The physical books contained photographs of events and activities such as holidays and were often collated in themes and had artwork attached.

Sometimes the memory book collation took place in collaboration with the young person; however, staff saw this as their role even if the young people did not request them or refused to engage with the process. One residential worker, Abbi, explained why they kept these items for the young people:



It's important and I know, when they get older, they will want or need it and that we have to do it. I value their memories – we have to value their memories (Abbi, extract from fieldnote, 9/11/22).

In this way, whether the young people participated in the study or not, they could still potentially access a collection of memory objects in the future if they wanted to. However, these items remained part of individual collections rather than a group or community archive and only contained images of the individual child, family members and adult staff. Staff members explained that these memory books and memory objects were offered to young people when they left the house at which point the young person then became responsible for looking after these materials. However, some young people did not take their memory book at this point but returned, or said they would return, for it at a later date.



Participatory Research

Participatory research has been described as a style or orientation towards inquiry rather than a specific set of methods (Bergold and Thomas, 2012; Reason and Bradbury, 2008). Any method of data collection or analysis can potentially be made participatory through the involvement of individuals or groups from the communities whose lives and actions are studied. Participatory research has the potential to reap considerable benefits. It 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 knowledges that are produced benefit the individuals and communities that they concern (Fraser et al, 2022; Bussu et al, 2022; Bergold and Thomas, 2012; Kindon et al, 2007). Although participatory research often seeks to achieve social change through collaborative processes between participants and researchers, specific social action is not a prerequisite.

There are challenges, risks, and limitations associated with participatory research. For example, meaningful collaborative research with communities of individuals who have faced prejudice and marginalisation requires considerable time and resources. These risks and challenges are arguably magnified when undertaking research alongside children and young people. One of the young people (aged 19) who lived at the RCH agreed to be involved as a co-researcher and subsequently undertook joint training along with the research fellow on service co-design and facilitation. As co-researcher, the young person was a key member of the ARCH team, assisting in achieving active participation in the project, methodological design, data collection and analysis. In terms of informed consent, the young people were clear and comfortable in giving or refusing their consent to be involved in the activities during each visit.

The ARCH project was guided by archival and care experts and underpinned by both the British Sociological Association's Statement of Ethical Practice and International Council on Archives code of ethics. This research was approved by the General University Ethics Panel at The University of Stirling. Informed consent was obtained for all participants in this project and pseudonyms have been used throughout to protect their identity.

Data Collection

Having met with the young people and staff to explore our proposed methodology it was agreed that rather than running a series of group workshops, one of the research team would instead visit the RCH regularly to undertake participant observation. These visits allowed for relationships to develop and created informal spaces to ask questions about current recording practices, views on memory keeping and memory objects. It also afforded ad hoc opportunities to gather opinions on the creation of a group archive on a one-to-one basis or in very small groups whenever young people and adults were available and willing to engage. Seventeen observational visits took place over a period of a year. Most of the young people agreed to participate in the observational visits and ad hoc discussions. In addition, four photo-elicitation exercises were conducted where the researcher laid out photographs of the RCH that they had taken and used them to explore with young people and adults what the content of a group archive might include.

We conducted interviews with two young people who lived at the RCH, eight staff members and a senior manager from the organisation which ran it. One young person who used to live there was involved in a photo elicitation exercise and we interviewed two adults who had lived in other RCHs as young people to explore their views on the archive, memory, and memory-keeping. We also conducted follow up interviews with two staff members and one young person to reflect on their experiences of being involved in the project.

To complement and support this data, we also undertook interviews with adults working in other residential children's homes including seven from a small, independent organisation and three who were working in a local authority children's house. These interviews focused on memory, memory-keeping, and opinions on the concept of the archive. In the data, these adults are referred to as 'Other Residential Worker' alongside their pseudonym.

The data, which comprised of fieldnotes and verbatim transcripts, were analysed thematically in a three-stage process. The data were organised into initial themes by one of the research team and then discussed, developed, and reshaped in a collaborative process involving the whole research team (five researchers) over three analysis meetings.

4. Key Findings

In this section we present the key findings from Phase Two of the Scottish side of the ARCH project. These have been organised into four themes: collective memory and remembrance; responsibility: present vs future need; record keeping vs memory keeping; and the group archive: challenges and limitations. It is important to note that many of these themes are interconnected and overlapping.

Record-Keeping vs. Memory-Keeping

Much of the research and practice work relating to memory keeping for children in care has focused on care records. Whilst these can, and should, be a vital source of information, particularly about the assessment of family life, family histories and



decisions taken in relation to children's care and protection, they rarely contain materials and information about the everyday childhoods being experienced.

Interestingly, data gathered in Phase Two highlighted that, in the main, people who live or work in residential childcare **think differently about memory keeping as opposed to record keeping.** When asked about memory keeping, adults would often reflect on their own experiences of having materials kept for them or holding on to, and valuing memory objects for themselves. **These were often talked about with great feeling, with a tenderness and reverence, and were most often connected to relationships with others.**

By contrast, records and record keeping were seen as a formal process that had to meet the needs of different audiences, including organisational needs as well as the potential future needs of children and young people.

Things. Other than paper records, I don't know what's kept. I don't think anything's kept, so what comes down. When a child leaves here, the [residential house], what comes down to the office for storage are paper files, and that's about the daily recording, instant reports, and that kind of thing. I have never seen amongst that stuff objects, things. Well, very rarely even pictures, although a lot of what we do now is online, so we have fewer paper files. Even in that, pictures are a problem.

Interviewer: Right, so no photos or kids' drawings, or anything like that.

No, really.

Interviewer: More the organisational records.

Yes. (Beryl, Other Residential Worker, Interview, 22/3/24)

One staff member noted that the amount of information kept for children and young people in residential childcare may exceed what is typically kept for children by their families.




I think for me, the memories, and the records - one of the good things, sometimes we think that they're a barrier, but families maybe don't write the story. Some people do diarise their lives, but hopefully, by the time I can meet this person, we can see the records and we can say things like, do you remember the time? (Raymond, Staff Member, Interview, 31/7/23).

Many adults who worked in residential childcare noted that there had been changes to the way individual records were being recorded in recent years such as changes from 'case notes' to 'daily diaries'. A further change had been that these daily notes were often written directly to the child.

Whilst many regarded this as a positive change, there appeared to be a **disconnection of children from the wider context of relationships** within the house. Concerned by adhering to what were regarded as General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) requirements about information relating to other people (especially other children) being recorded in individual records, children were often described in isolation. This concern extended to the photographs kept in individual records.

No, see that's what we need to get better at it, I think as a whole. Even things like the photo album because you couldn't put photos of other kids in it. It was like there'd be a day out at the - wherever you're out - and there's a group photo of you and all the other kids and staff, but you weren't allowed to put that in because of GPDR [sic] whatever. They make excuses. Whereas the mainstream view of an activity or when they're there, a trip can need photos of your pals from school, and nobody would bat an eyelid. In care, for some reason, we can't be giving out photos of other kids (Gregor, Other Residential Worker, Interview, 22/3/24).

It was striking however, that where activity was seen as memory keeping rather than record keeping, adults appeared to approach it in markedly different ways.



I think we're really good if one of our kids leave. We're very good. It's not just a whole black bag situation. Our team put together videos of everyone saying bye, and sharing their memories with one of our kids, who's floating about, but with one of our kids. That was really amazing, seeing all that come to life and sharing memories. It was really good (Vivian, Staff Member, Interview, 20/4/23).

Here, the ‘record’ (a video and other items) was being given directly to the young person rather than being put in their official record or case file. This included images of, and messages from, the people with whom they had lived. The spontaneity of this more informal activity may be one example of **how the mindset of memory keeping differed from that of record keeping**. There may also be a relational aspect to memory keeping in the sense of who does what for whom. There was a desire for someone who ‘knew’ the young people to be involved with capturing and recording of memories for children:

“

It has to be relational, so it wouldn't be genuine if I was to sit down and do a memory book with someone I've only known for a year and maybe we don't have the best relationship, or the strongest. We did have someone move out, and the way I was able to give them some things; I wrote them a wee letter before they left, and maybe it wasn't a full memory book, but it was something that they could keep

(Jack, Staff Member, Interview, 6/3/24).

”

Collective Memory and Remembrance



“I had a nice letter from Annie Garden, I was surprised to hear she lives near the Home, it’s through Lizzie I got in touch with Annie, whom I also remember quite well. I have made up my mind to give the old place a visit next summer if all goes well, along with Lizzie and Annie. I’d love to show my children where I spent my younger years”

(Letter to the Aberlour Orphanage Magazine from Jeanie Kane, 1947)



In Phase One we found that, in their letters to the Aberlour Orphanage Magazine, former residents of the orphanage sought to tell their story and reach out to others who had shared their experiences. This same **need for connection and a chance to revisit experiences with others was a key feature in Phase Two.** Participants referred to the importance they placed on both private and collective memory objects in digital and physical forms. They described valuing the opportunity to reminisce with those they had shared experiences with and the chance to tell their stories to others. When talking about his own experiences of memory keeping Jack referred to holding on to photographs and toys that represented experiences that he had shared with others.

Honestly, most of the things I do keep are probably shared with other people because that's where I get my joy. If it's anything else, I don't know if I would keep anything if it wasn't shared with someone

(Jack, Staff Member, Interview, 6/3/24).

The objects that participants referred to as important to remembering commonly represented an aspect of a shared experience. However, it was the story behind the object that was often the important memory.

Having a shared space, like a digital group archive, was seen by many as a valuable place to remember together. It also offered a way for children and **young people to take ownership of a 'record' of their time in care and of these points in their childhoods.** Unlike other forms of record keeping, a group archive was felt by many to be more **akin to a family album**, albeit in digital form. Some participants were keen to explore the possibility of collective recording for the archive so that the shared activity also produced content.

Having a group archive **offered an online space for people to be able to come back to these memory objects and interact with each other again about them.**

It would be nice if the adults and the children could record a wee something, do you know, or even just sing a song together, or tell a story. I think that would be quite powerful, where you can watch the most powerful memory (Joanna, Staff Member, Interview, 14/4/23).



Say it was a photo of [E] and I go on in ten years' time and make a comment, she would get a notification to say, 'Oh look, I was just looking back on these photos and found this cracker. Remember this day, [E*]?' (Lewis, Other Residential Worker, Interview, 29/4/23)*



Both adults and young people suggested that often these types of pictures, materials or objects were seen as more useful for prompting memories of childhood than written records.

If we could take photographs of them, they're more visual for them. Say [Donald] who's been here, and [Sean] who's here. They grew up together, they were like brothers. They had their moments, but [Donald] and [Sean] are still really, really pally. If they could look back on the archive of photographs when they were younger, their journey coming through [here], I think it would be so much more beneficial than having to actually sit and read through everything (Jacqueline, Staff Member, Interview, 22/4/24).

When reflecting on their own experience of reminiscing and reflecting on past relationships, events and experiences participants noted the **importance of having other people to do this with**. As a result, participants were keen to explore the ways that the archive could help young people to reconnect with each other through sharing stories about experiences aided by memory objects stored in the archive. “

I think it is really important for children to be able to look back on memories and having it all there and them being able to even comment on it and go, 'Oh, I remember that time', I think that would be quite a positive thing for them to have. I think that would be quite beneficial (Diane, Other Residential Worker, Interview, 22/3/24).

Young people wanted to hear and tell stories to each other about shared experiences.


In talking about the concept of the living archive, Iona thought that the archive will be a valuable way to be part of conversations about the past.

Definitely, 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 [fellow young person in RCH] 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? (Iona, Young Person, Interview, 13/3/23)

Adults who worked in residential childcare understood the need to remember the collective experience based upon their personal and professional experiences, and there was evidence of practices within the RCH that supported this.

There's an example where I've had young people that have obviously moved on and stuff like that and then they'll get in touch with you after they've left. They'll be like, 'Oh, I made your secret recipe for spaghetti Bolognese. It was the first thing I made when I moved into my house.' She was like, 'Oh, I just wanted to remember what it was like when I was back there.' That's touching memories for them as well but then you remember all the times when you sat and you showed them how to do that. So it's like you're sharing that memory a wee bit but obviously there's loads of stuff that you've got great memories of and stuff like that and they come back and they speak a bit about it (Abbi, Staff Member, Interview, 7/4/23).

For people with care experience having ways to reconnect to a past time and place was important. They wanted to have opportunities to think about the everyday aspects of their time in care.



It would have been nice to have pictures for the other things as well. The communal meals that we used to have were a huge thing as well, cause that was like quite, so quite kinda new to be having a meal in a shared living environment, with all these different people. But it was actually a really nice experience, just that culture of going and doing that and I suppose learning, for me to communicate and socialise. (Alice, Care Experienced Adult, Interview, 2/6/23)

There was recognition, particularly amongst the staff members, of the **particular context of residential care**. Relationships between children and between children and staff could often become deeply felt and significant however they viewed that the nature of residential childcare could result in relationships changing suddenly and being difficult to maintain.

Well, it's really hard because sometimes relationships just get totally severed. Like, one day, they're in your life for the past eight years, and the next, they're not. You've moved on. Even though you would like to try and keep in contact, it's hard. Like, what if we're here, and then you're away up in Aberdeen? Do you know what I mean? (Ainsley, Other Residential Worker, Interview, 22/3/24)

The relationships established whilst living in residential care were seen by many as key to their lives as children and indeed to their sense of identity.

Some participants were keen to keep up connections with important people with whom they had previously lived.

But we would just have gone up to visit [name of staff member]. OK. It's cause she was the cook [...] there was a few of us would go up and visit her and keep in touch with here ... And she was always the one [...] she was like oh like, aye, a granny really and she was ... I don't know if the place would have ran without [her]. (Paula, Care Experienced Adult, Interview, 28/6/23)

Adult staff members also talked about **young people who would return to the RCH or get back in contact, specifically to reminisce about shared experiences or to tell stories about their lives since leaving the house.**

I had a kid the other day. [L] must be his late 20s. He's probably about 28, 29 now, and he had actually messaged me. It was a couple of weeks ago, actually, and he's message me and said, 'See that restaurant you took me on my 16th birthday in [G*], was it such a...?' He had a photo. It was some kebab place, kebab, one of these places. He was like that, aye, that's it, that's. He says, 'Oh, I was down in [G*] with my girlfriend. I thought that was it. We went in and I thought, this is where you took me for my 16th birthday.' It was lovely (Gregor, Other Residential Worker, Interview, 22/3/24).*

Responsibility: Present vs. Future Need

As the project progressed, it became clear that while the young people were interested in the idea of the archive, they felt that the overall responsibility for thinking about and keeping hold of information, materials and memory objects belonged to adults. They argued that adults in the RCH already took responsibility for memory-keeping and recordkeeping such as collating memory books and other materials for young people. Donald extended this responsibility to the archive during a photo elicitation exercise.



Interviewer: would you want the ability to upload stuff yourself or would you want the staff to do that or...?

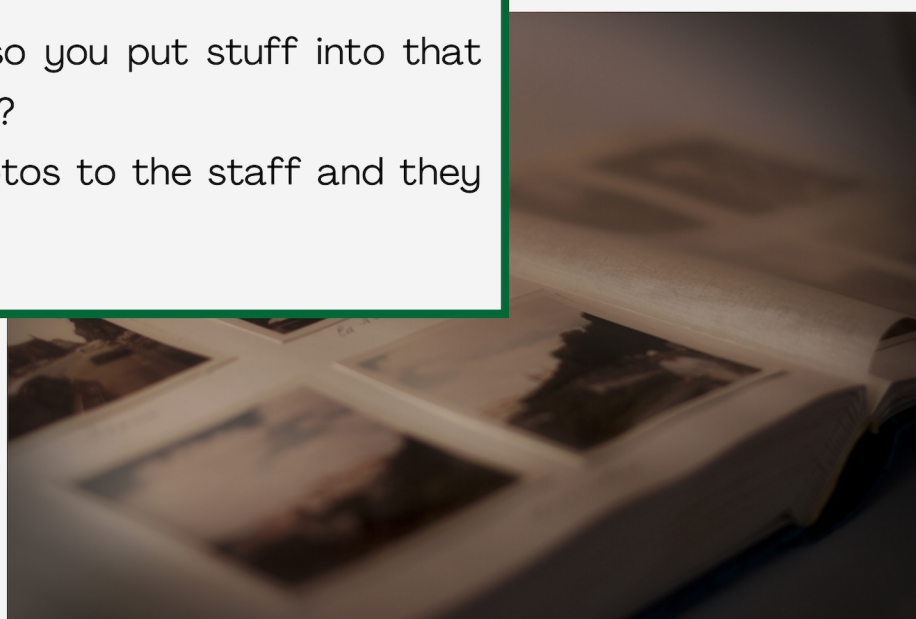
Donald: The staff to do it probably. [...]

Interviewer: Cause, I know, I know, for example, you've got a memory book, is that right?

Donald: Aye.

Interviewer: Aye, so you put stuff into that yourself, don't you?

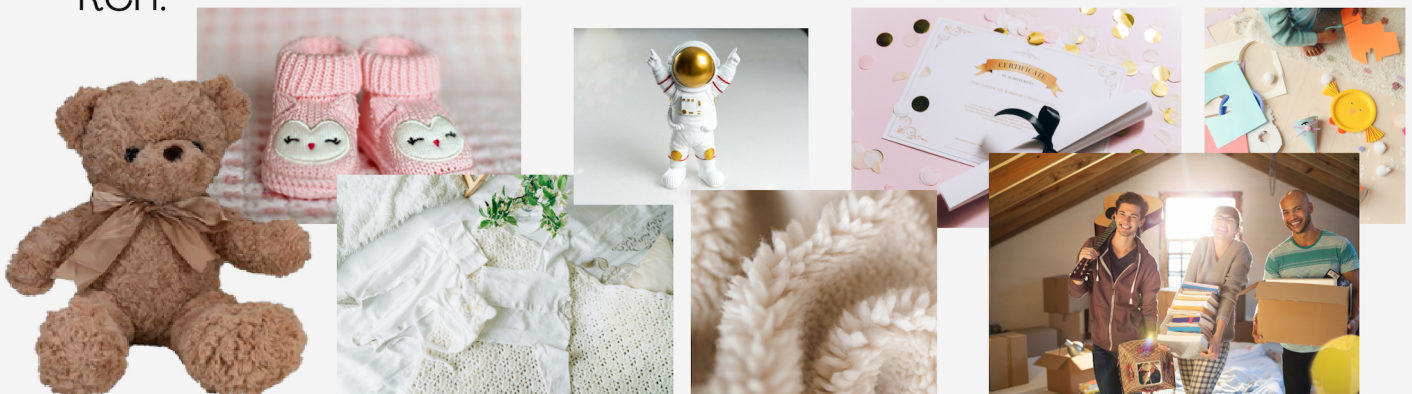
Donald: I gave photos to the staff and they stuck it in.



The above example illustrates that whilst Donald collected materials himself, he suggests that the responsibility for storing these items and keeping them safe lies with adults. This aligns with the experiences of most children and young people whose parents or carers look after the objects of their childhoods, keeping them safe until needed or wanted in later life. In the RCH, the adults understood and took on this responsibility and had been doing this prior to the project. For most, the archive would involve an extension of this responsibility, with adults managing the archive.

*I think as the adults in the house we've all got a responsibility to do that, and to upload things, and to make sure that they've got a record of what they've done. It is **much more of a parent sort of thing to do** when the kids are younger isn't it, you take the photos, you take the videos, you're the one that organises the trips and all that sort of stuff. Aye, I think it's important for us to take that on*
(Evan, Staff Member, Interview, 11/3/24).

A generational distinction came up between adults and children across the interviews. **Adults in their capacity as parents or as professionals within the RCH, expressed their responsibilities to preserve and protect objects for young people.** To some extent, this stemmed from their personal experiences, in which their own parents had kept items from their childhood with many still storing them in attics and cupboards for their adult children. In some ways staff drew parallels with their own personal experiences, as parents and children in their attitude towards memory-keeping for young people in the RCH.



The responsibility of memory-keeping by adults was deemed to be important for several reasons. Many children and young people are not clear on what they want or need in the future, and the mental time travel required to think about what one might want in the future to help with remembering or what they might want in and from the type of archive that ARCH was proposing was a challenging task.

Interviewer: What would be the kinds of things that you'd want to be in it if you were going to use it, do you think?

William: I don't know.

Interviewer: Not sure.

William: Pictures, I guess.

Interviewer: Would you want videos in there?


William: Maybe. I don't know.

Interviewer: It depends on what they are.

William: Yes.

Interviewer: Okay. Is there anything that you think you definitely wouldn't want in there?

William: No (William, Young Person, Interview, 4/4/23).



Therefore, it seemed to be incumbent upon adults to **anticipate the possible future needs of young people in relation to memory objects**. Moreover, staff members suggested that children and young people may struggle with the responsibility of keeping objects for a variety of reasons, including fluctuating emotional reactions to objects. Across the interviews with adults who worked in RCHs there was **evidence of them taking action to preserve and protect objects for young people to ensure that they were available to them into the future.**

So, what I did was, I laminated it with her permission, and also photocopied it and uploaded it, so even if she was to destroy that one, I could get it printed again out for her. I used to do a lot of the backup things for the kids (Joanna, Staff Member, Interview 14/4/23).

Definitely, but then sometimes, like, if they're having a difficult day - we keep the memory boxes, and then we'll just bring it out as an activity because, just from the trauma background and stuff, they might destroy it. So they might just rip all the photos up, just destroy everything, and then they've not got it anymore. Then they might regret that in the future, but in that moment, that's how they felt (Ainsley, Other Residential Worker, Interview, 22/3/24).

Some participants thought that the **archive may be an effective way of preserving items and preventing them from being lost or destroyed.**



I think as well, the memory books and that and the photos are all really valuable, but they know what happens sometimes if a bairn is distressed, but you can't really destroy the archive. It's going to be there forever. So, I think that's quite a good thing. We could get the photos back off of that again if they want to destroy anything else that they had that was hard (Islay, Other Residential Worker, Interview, 29/4/24).



However, it is important to note that, in line with GDPR, the archive has a function that allows individuals to remove all their data from the archive permanently under the 'right to be forgotten' principle. In this way, digital data could be lost in ways that physical objects are not because adults feel able to keep them.

This issue of responsibility will continue to be a factor for those who use the archive as groups negotiate the types of content to be kept and who can access them.

Challenges and Limitations to the Group Archive

The data gathered in Phase Two highlighted that the creation of a shared, digital space to store and access group memory objects (‘the residential care family album’) would introduce **multiple areas of complexity including ethical considerations, technological issues, and regulatory and practice implications**. Most of these challenges were felt by the staff rather than the children and young people or those who had had care experience. The following section outlines some of the challenges identified by participants.

Challenges

In the early stages of Phase Two, a key question that participants tussled with centred on who should, and who would want to be, involved with the archive. The response to this had implications for how the archive would be used including the type of content that is stored, who captured and uploaded it, who decided what was kept and who can access and moderate it.

I think it really depends on - do you know what? Some of our kids can have their own phones and stuff like that and they take pictures. So, we need to have scope for if they're wanting to upload those and they have their memories and stuff like that. They should be able to have a space to do that but then that system needs to be able to work with the level of consent on that. Really, we should be taking our own and doing that because not all of our kids want to do that (Abbi, Staff Member, Interview, 7/4/23).

Participants held a range of views about the type of content such an archive should store, although most participants felt that it would only include what they perceived as 'nice' content which captured events like holidays, special occasions, and fun times spent together. In this way, the archive was perceived much like a family album or scrapbook.

No, I would only maybe say photos, like silly ones, or like nice photos can go in open access (Donald, Young Person, Photo Elicitation, 13/12/22).

It's more like a happy thing. It's going to be where you think, 'Oh, I want to go and remember some really good times and remember these people.' They could go back, and they could see it as a nice memory. So, I think that's quite good (Wendy, Staff Member, Interview, 14/4/23)

There were some however, who felt that a wider range of experience could be captured in the archive.

No, I think the good, the bad, and the ugly should really be in it. Do you know what I mean? It's not all positive (Ainsley, Other Residential Worker, Interview, 22/3/24).

Indeed, one care experienced adult thought, with the right care and attention, the archive could be useful to young people and care experienced adults for **processing their experiences**.

And writing in a sensitive manner about happy and maybe not so happy events is, having a different way of seeing things or can help to process stuff at different points in the future (Alice, Care Experienced Adult, Interview, 2/6/23).

It seemed then that any form of group archive needed to **involve negotiation among group members regarding the overarching aim of the archive, the type of content that could be uploaded and the tone it presented**. Our findings would suggest that finding agreement between all members of the archive may be challenging.

There were also a range of views presented when discussing the issue of consent. Some young people indicated that they would like to be asked for their consent for every picture being uploaded while others were more relaxed about this and described feeling happy to give a general consent for pictures to be added. It was also recognised by many participants that views on consent could change over time and those who were included in the archive may wish to give or withdraw consent at different times in their lives.

So, I would obviously like to be asked, at the start, if it was a website or whatever, this is your sign-in details, do you consent to blah, blah, blah, do you consent to photos, would you like to get notifications when photos are posted, and you've been tagged in them (Iona, Young Person, Interview, 13/3/23)

I wouldn't want asked every time but, like, maybe if there's one where, I don't know, [...] If I didn't like it, I'd be able to just text them and say 'gonna get that down please'? That kinda thing? That's the only option really (Donald, Young Person, Photo Elicitation, 13/12/22).

While all participants discussed the importance of consent and of consent processes, some also acknowledged the complexity of managing this over time and the potential for choices made at particular times to have implications into the future as indicated by a senior manager, Raymond.

I think we need to be quite brave around consent. So, for me, the consent needs to be implied. So let's put the picture up there. When I think about the historic abuse, the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry, I hear about people who have been victims of abuse - which is horrendous - have asked for their records and have received photographs in which faces are pixelated. For me, that's an affront to us on the basis of, we're depriving people of their memories (Raymond, Staff Member, Interview, 31/7/23).

Participants suggested that often group needs were curtailed by current legislative and policy frameworks in terms of GDPR and consent.

As some staff members explained, the group experience forms part of the everyday living experience a child or young person has, yet individual consent decisions (or fears about wrongly applying GDPR) may impact on the experiences and memories of others.

In a residential child care context, the adult staff as well as children and young people are members of the group life. Again, there were mixed views on whether adults should have ongoing access to a group archive even when they no longer worked in the house. Generally, **young people were open to adults continuing to be part of the archive** and to have access to it although there were some variations which appeared to relate to the strength of the relationship with the adult and how long they had worked in the house. As detailed by Iona in response to a question about who should have access to the archive.

I would say people who work here rather than people who have worked here. Unless they've worked for a really long time and the only reason that they've left was retirement (Iona, Young Person, Interview, 13/3/23)

For adults, the picture was **more complex, and issues of risk and professional boundaries** featured heavily in their responses to these questions.

Well, that's a bit of a Catch-22 on that one because sometimes people maybe don't necessarily work in this job for a particular reason. So, we need to consider that, yes [...] Yes, or maybe something has happened and then - obviously contracts have been terminated or whatever [...] It can create difficulties, like not quite knowing where that line is. I think that's something we also need to consider, our professional boundaries (Abbi, Staff Member, Interview, 7/4/23).

Abbi's example highlights the ways in which the **practice and regulatory environment** influenced the ways in which staff members thought about their potential roles in relation to the archive. Other aspects of regulation were at play in shaping their views including how they thought about data protection and the ways in which their current practice was influenced by this. On the whole, data protection, in the guise of **GDPR was seen as something to fear and which created a landscape where what were seen as 'normal, family like practices'** relating to displaying photographs, other forms of memory objects and sharing news of people who had moved on, were curtailed.

Even when data protection came along... Before, there used to be lots of pictures of kids that used to live here and then we were asked to remove them (Wendy, Staff Member, Interview, 14/4/23).

These types of experiences meant that staff members were quick to think about the **risk implications relating to the group archive and how they might balance such risks with the potential benefits such a resource might offer.**

Yes, because culture and expectations and policy and everything changes so much, most of the time for the better, but data protection and confidentiality just went crazy, I think [...] and then you constrict what you can record and what you can share with the kids, and that's not fair, then, for kids (Joanna, Staff Member, Interview, 14/4/23).

I feel like that would be really cool, but obviously data protection and that, we need to jump through some hoops before that happens (Vivian, Staff Member, Interview, 20/4/23).

Many staff recognised that the ways in which data protection regulations had been implemented impacted on their practice and the types of information and records that children and young people could access.

Our data clearly demonstrated that the regulatory and practice environments, now and into the future, have implications for both the type of materials and information that could be recorded in a group archive and for who can access it. Indeed, we hoped to pilot the archive in two other residential settings who were initially keen to trial the software. GDPR concerns were included among the reasons that these did not go ahead along with concerns about technical support for the software.

Challenges

In discussing memory, many of the participants indicated the value of physical things that they had kept from the past. The sensory evocation of memory and emotion through touch, smell, and sound as well as vision was a prominent theme in our data.

I have the original copies; no one else has them. So, holding an original copy photo knowing that I'm the only one that has it. Whereas you could screenshot it a thousand times on your phone but is it really the same holding it and knowing how many people have held it, and that at one point my dad went to the shop to pick up the developed photo and was going through it and showing people and going, 'This is the day my daughter came home.' (Iona, Young Person, Interview, 13/3/23).

Here, the history of the physical object is as important as the object itself. How important this photograph was to others, the efforts that were made to get it, and who has held it previously all contribute to Iona's story and to the personal significance of this photograph to her. Others discussed the texture or feel of objects as well as how and where they were shared, such as being on display in places in their home. Clearly, a digital archive is unable to recreate these types of memory experiences.

Another limitation of the archive is the extent to which it will **enable or facilitate joint recollection through storytelling and relationships**, which were other prominent themes in our data. To be able to share one's story with others with shared experiences and within new relationships seemed to be an important aspect of how people 'do' memory as was revealed in the first theme. Whilst the archive currently offers a space to comment using text, it has limited scope to take the place of an in-person interaction.

5. Next Steps

Phase One: The Past

Phase One examined historical records between 1920 and 1980 in order to explore how everyday group experiences were recorded within the different historical, social, and cultural context in both Germany and Scotland.

Phase Two: The Present

We worked in partnership with young people, care experienced adults, and care workers to explore what types of everyday information or records they would like to be able to access, at what point in their lives, and why. From this, we worked together to create a 'living archive' that is accessible to those who live and work, or have lived or worked, in the residential children's home.

Phase Three: The Future

We will continue to monitor how the group archive is being used and whether other organisations begin to use the software to develop their own archives. This stage will be important for understanding the complex ethical and moral challenges of recording a shared past in the context of care and the various legal and regulatory frameworks associated with it. We are developing a resource pack to support organisations to use the group archive software and are also creating a training resource to help adults think about the need for memory and well as record keeping. Keep an eye on the website for updates on our activities and publications.

The team are keen to keep in touch with anyone interested in the work of ARCH and in memory keeping for children and young people in care.

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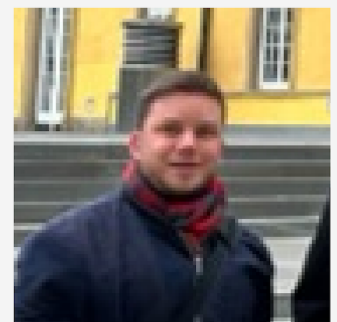
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We are aware that you may have personal experience of being looked after by Aberlour or have someone you care about who was. If you want to know more about accessing personal records held by Aberlour, please visit the 'contact us' page at www.aberlour.org.uk.



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9.Contact ARCH

You can find out more about the ARCH Project at:

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Please contact us if you require this briefing in an alternative format.

Accessing Archives

The Aberlour Children's Charity Archive is held in the University of Stirling Archives. Access to personal care records is managed by Aberlour directly.

The University of Stirling Archives is improving access to Aberlour's historical records through a programme of cataloguing and digitisation. Additional information on the history of Aberlour Orphanage has been added through the generous donation of the personal collection of Ron Aitchison, a resident of Aberlour Orphanage from 1950-1965.

For further information or to look at the materials from Ron Aitchison, please contact our Archives team at archives@stir.ac.uk.