

Document Title	SCAI: key recordkeeping learning points
Document Type	Briefing note
Date	March 2023
Audience	Social Work Scotland Historic Abuse Practice Network Review Group; Scottish Government NHS Records Management Code of Practice Review
Protective Marking	Official
Authorship	ASLAWG Inquiries Working Group
Notes	

ASLAWG

ASLAWG (the Archivists of Scottish Local Authorities) is an Archives & Records Association (ARA) group that promotes the development of best practice amongst Scottish Local Authority Archivists & Records Managers. The Inquiries Working Group (WG) is active in helping develop best practice & contact with the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry (SCAI) as well as both the Scottish & UK Covid-19 Inquiries. The WG represents ASLAWG on the COSLA C-19 Inquiries Steering Committee.

Stakeholder partnership

This note is prepared & issued by ASLAWG with the support of the Scottish Council on Archives (SCA) & the Information & Records Management Society (IRMS) Scotland Group & with the knowledge of the NRS Public Records Scotland Act (PRSA) Implementation Team.

Purpose

The purpose of this note is to offer an overview of the key recordkeeping learning points coming out of both SCAI & also the other related Child Abuse Inquiries. It is hoped that flagging these key learning points can open a channel for the involvement of the above Stakeholder Group in dialogue that will help develop better recordkeeping & record accessing practices moving forward.

Structure

This note looks at each area of learning in turn. Within each area, particular facets are highlighted. The approach taken is of necessity an overview look only at each area. The intent is to ask the question & in some instances suggest an approach- not to provide a detailed hard & fast answer.

My Story, my Memory

All adults have been children. Everybody has a story- but how do we know that story? A child raised in kin group/nuclear family environment can very often access their own story, perhaps in various versions & whether good or bad, from members of their family group/s. But what about the child in care? How & where can they find their story? Where were they? Who looked after them? What happened? Care records play a critical role in a former child in care knowing their own story.

Telling the Story

In recognising the need for records to tell the story of the child's journey in care, themes include

- Content: does the content of the records tell the whole story of the child's journey in care? Is there more about the context of the moment that the record could say on occasion?

- Accessibility: are the records created understandable to the child in care?- both at the time of their creation (for records created regarding older children & young adults in care) & also to the former child in care seeking to find their own story across their lifetime. Are records equally accessible to the child in care when they are in care & afterwards?
- Ownership: who owns the records of the child in care? The organisation responsible for providing that care?- or the child & then the adult themselves? Does that ownership change over time? This question is in some ways less important for digital records where a copy does not differ substantively from the original. It is however a major consideration for paper records where the paper original may represent a tangible link to the past in the way that a copy may not.

Retaining Memory

In order to be able to help tell the story, records created need to be there to be consulted and they need to be accessible. Looking at records retention practice from this perspective, the right records need to be identified to be retained for a sufficient period so as to be available across the child's life. In this context, the right records may be not only the key records relating to a child's journey in care but also other records that may have little or no enduring operational value for the Organisation but which may be extremely valuable to the individual looking to find their story as a child in care. Such documents can include 'cherished items'- family letters & photographs & minor operational records such as Foster Care Diaries that record the minutiae of daily life.

Accessing my story

Individuals who have been in care can find it difficult to approach what is most often the same organisation as provided that care in order to find their story. Best efforts should be made to make sure that, in addition to records telling the story (being comprehensive), being in language that the individual can understand & being available (i.e. retained), that the experience of accessing their own story should be simple & straightforward. This may mean that access is facilitated and/or that the individual has a right to taking the primary copy of their record/s away with them.

Organisations- recording what they do- knowing why they did it

In addition to the records needing to tell the story of the child's journey in care for the individual involved, the Organisation responsible for providing that care also needs to ensure that such records are created & retained that both evidence the care provided and, importantly, evidence why that care was being done in that way at that time (some documents here are relevant minutes, policies & procedures). The Organisation also needs to ensure the appropriate long-term retention and preservation of these documents as well as making provision for their easy access.

Note: where a choice is made to hand over original records to a former child in care, organisations must ensure that copies are taken of records that also maintain appropriate organisational memory.

More information/next steps

For more information on the above, or to discuss next steps in opening up a dialogue involving the defined stakeholder group, please contact either ASLAWG Inquiries Working Group lead Meic Pierce Owen (meic.pierceowen@fife.gov.uk) or ASLAWG Chair Zarya Rathe (ZRathe@eastlothian.gov.uk).