UCL INFORMATION STUDIES

UCL

‘My lack of voice’: human-centred recordkeeping and the MIRRA project

Elizabeth Shepherd

Project blog: https//:blogs.ucl.ac.uk/mirra

UCL INFORMATION STUDIES

UCL

The MIRRA Research Project

- A two-year Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project, exploring information rights and responsibilities in child social care records.
- Led by University College London (UCL) from the Department of Information Studies and in partnership with the Care Leavers' Association.
- A short film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xs28tczL3yA

UCL INFORMATION STUDIES

UCL

MIRRA

Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access

Protecting the memories, identities, voices and rights through time of care experienced and adopted people

Professor Elizabeth Shepherd – PI
Dr Elizabeth Lomas – Policy Lead
Dr Anna Sexton – Initial Concept and Co-I
Dr Victoria Hoyle – Research Associate
Dr Peter Williams – Research Associate

Arts & Humanities Research Council

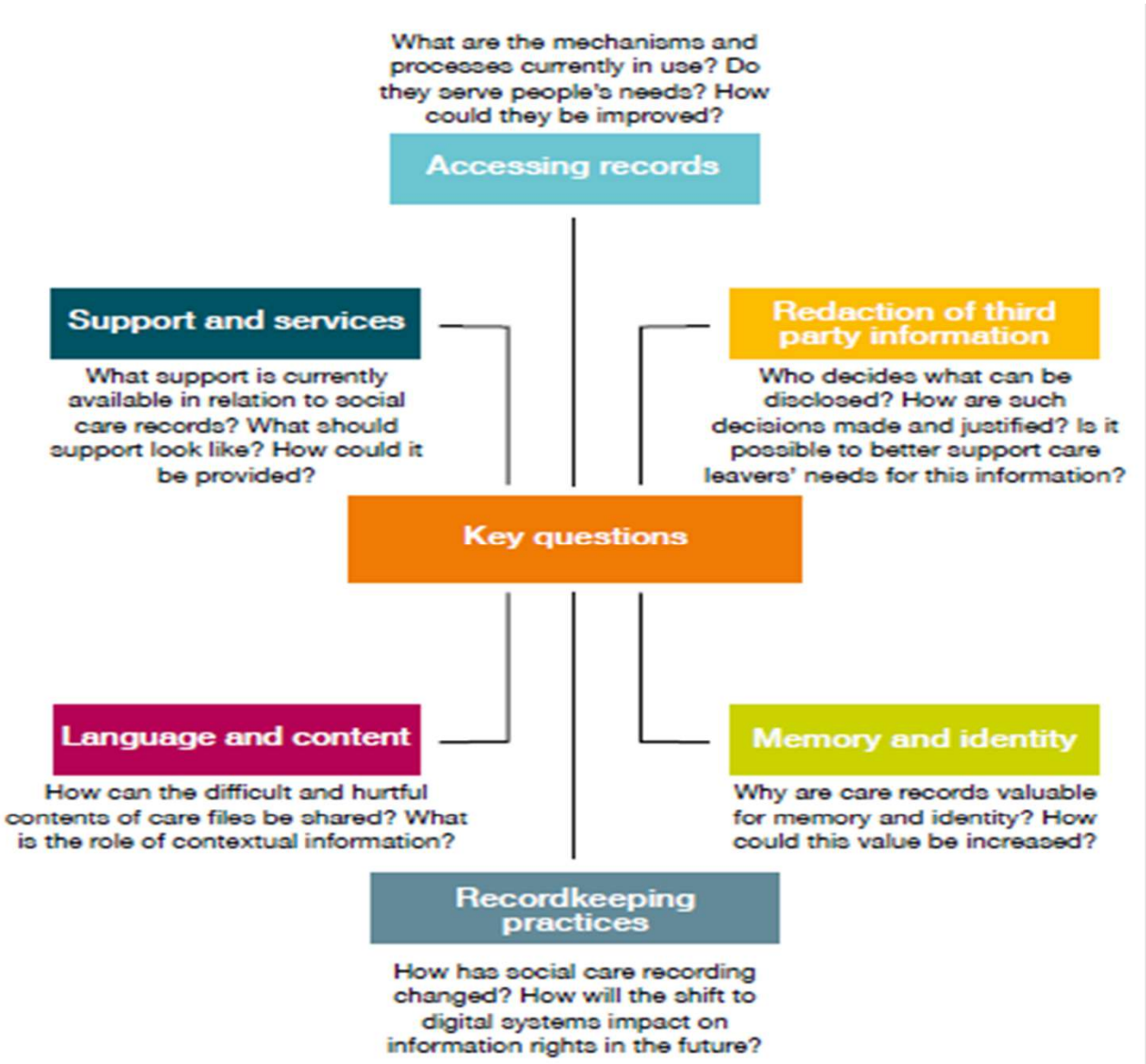
UCL

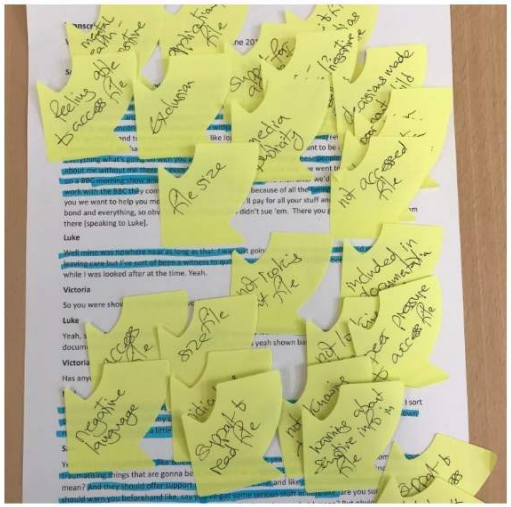
The Care Leavers' Association

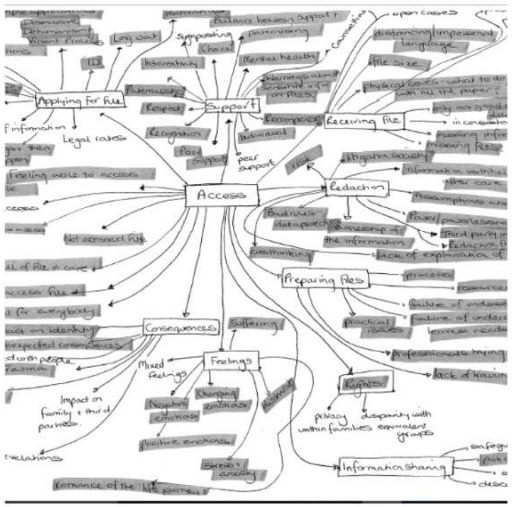
UCL INFORMATION STUDIES

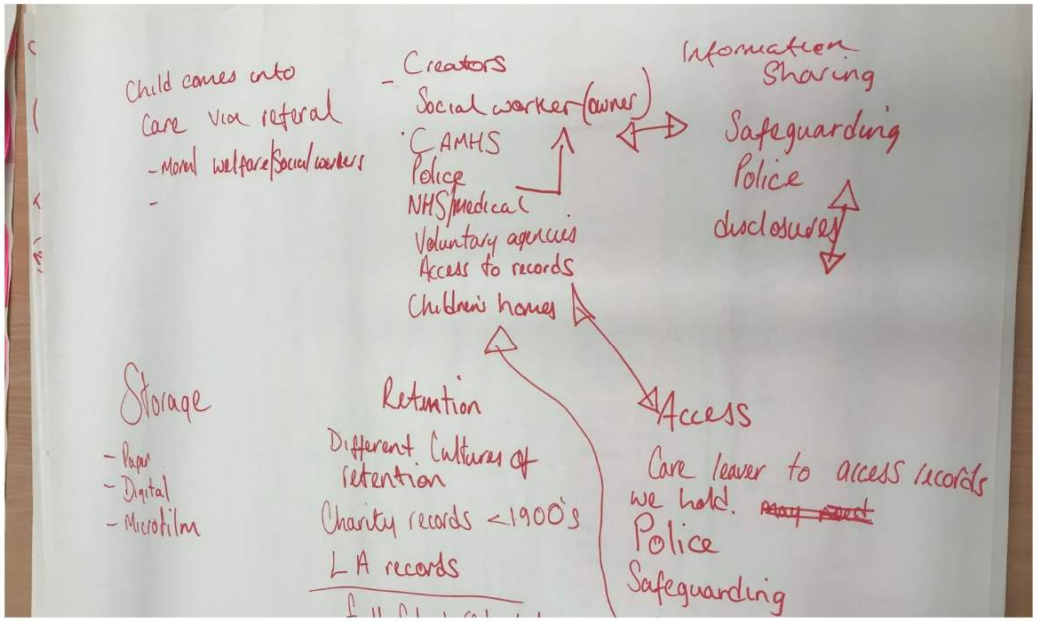
UCL

MIRRA project team:
Memory –
Identity –
Rights in
Records –
Access


What are the mechanisms and processes currently in use? Do they serve people's needs? How could they be improved?
Accessing records
Support and services
What support is currently available in relation to social care records? What should support look like? How could it be provided?
Redaction of third party information
Who decides what can be disclosed? How are such decisions made and justified? Is it possible to better support care leavers' needs for this information?
Key questions
Language and content
How can the difficult and hurtful contents of care files be shared? What is the role of contextual information?
Memory and identity
Why are care records valuable for memory and identity? How could this value be increased?
Recordkeeping practices
How has social care recording changed? How will the shift to digital systems impact on information rights in the future?




Access
Applying for file
Support
Receiving file
Redaction
Preparing files
Consequences
Feelings
Information sharing


Child comes into Care via referral
- Moral welfare/Social workers
Creators
Social worker (owner)
CAMHS
Police
NHS/medical
Voluntary agencies
Access to records
Children's homes
Information Sharing
Safeguarding
Police
disclosures
Storage
- Paper
- Digital
- Microfilm
Retention
Different Cultures of retention
Charity records <1900's
LA records
Access
Care leaver to access records we hold.
Police
Safeguarding

Everyone has a story

‘I think we have organisations that just don’t understand why older care leavers come back to access their files, they just don’t understand it, because there’s no culture of recognition of the life experiences of someone in the care system. …there’s a cultural deficit… there’s a deficit in terms of the understandings of why an individual wants to access their file. We’re simply interested in people being able to access their history and reclaim some element of their past because it *matters* to them.’

Darren

‘There came a point where I wanted to know where I’d been, I wanted to know who’d fostered me, because there was little chunks of my life missing, like where I’d gone to school? Did I have any friends? How long was I there? And then somebody mentioned to me ‘Why don’t you get your files?’, …that’s what spurred me on to do it, because I wanted to know, I wanted to fill in these bits that were missing in my life. That’s why I did it.’

Gina

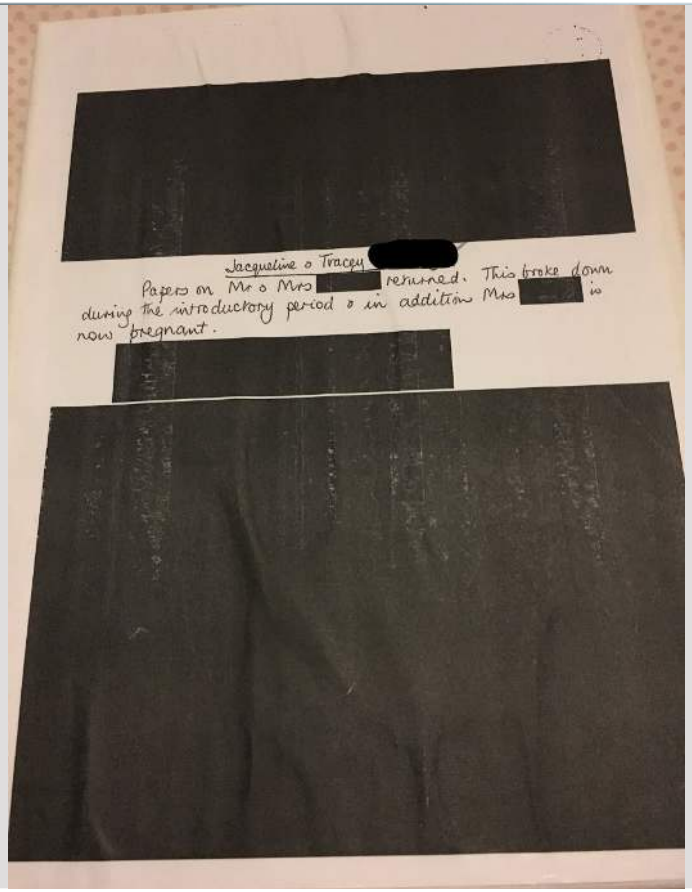
‘What I wasn’t prepared for was the language. The absolutely terrible language, the way that I was written about. I just can't imagine myself writing like that about a distressed, traumatised child… any time you’re writing about a child always think that child could go back and read that, and really think about how you're writing stuff, because words are so powerful. The way you write about kids, that follows them… what they write could affect the rest of that person’s life.’

Linda

UCL INFORMATION STUDIES

UCL

‘One of the most profound things for me about the file, and it screams the loudest, is my lack of voice. And I just appear, my scrawled out writing, on like page 52. My voice is totally stolen and words are put in your mouth, saying this is how you feel about certain occasions and certain people, and at times there’s conflict with what I believe.’ [John-George]



There's other pieces of paper that are just blacked out, and there's absolutely nothing on them and you just look and think 'why have you given me that piece of paper?' What's it actually telling me? And then there's other pieces of paper where there's just a sentence in there. And I'm looking at it … and all it's showing me is I've been rejected again.

Jackie

UCL INFORMATION STUDIES

UCL

‘I think local authorities need to be less fearful of being honest about what’s in the file, and be honest about what they’re redacting and be clear about why they’re redacting stuff, because I think it's a bit of a myth that all care leavers are trying to sue local authorities. Most people are probably quite heart broken when they read their files and so saddened, they haven’t got the energy. That wasn’t what I wanted at all, and most people don’t think like that.’

Rosie

UCL INFORMATION STUDIES

UCL

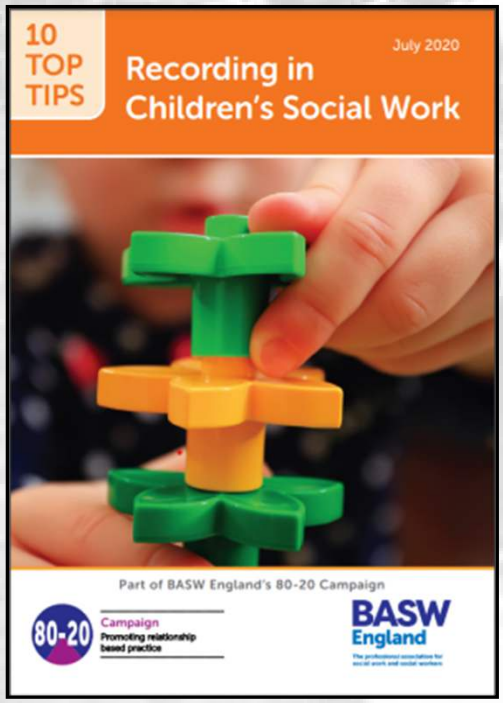
MIRRA project themes

UCL

MIRRA Project Actions

1. **Support care leavers' rights to information, memory and identity.**
   - Through the creation of access to useful resources.
2. **Influence public policy debates about social care records.**
   - Through a brief targeted at influencers and decision-makers.
3. **Support professionals in their recordkeeping responsibilities.**
   - Through the co-production of a recordkeeping framework.

MIRRA outputs



https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/recording-children

https://www.familyconnect.org.uk/

UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

UCL

UCL INFORMATION STUDIES

UCL

Principles for Caring Recordkeeping in Child Social Care

First principle

Care-experienced people (children, young people and adult care leavers of any age) should be able to participate in every stage of child social care recordkeeping, if they choose; including

- the creation of records while they're in care
- management of records during the period of retention, and
- the provision of access to records at any stage of life.

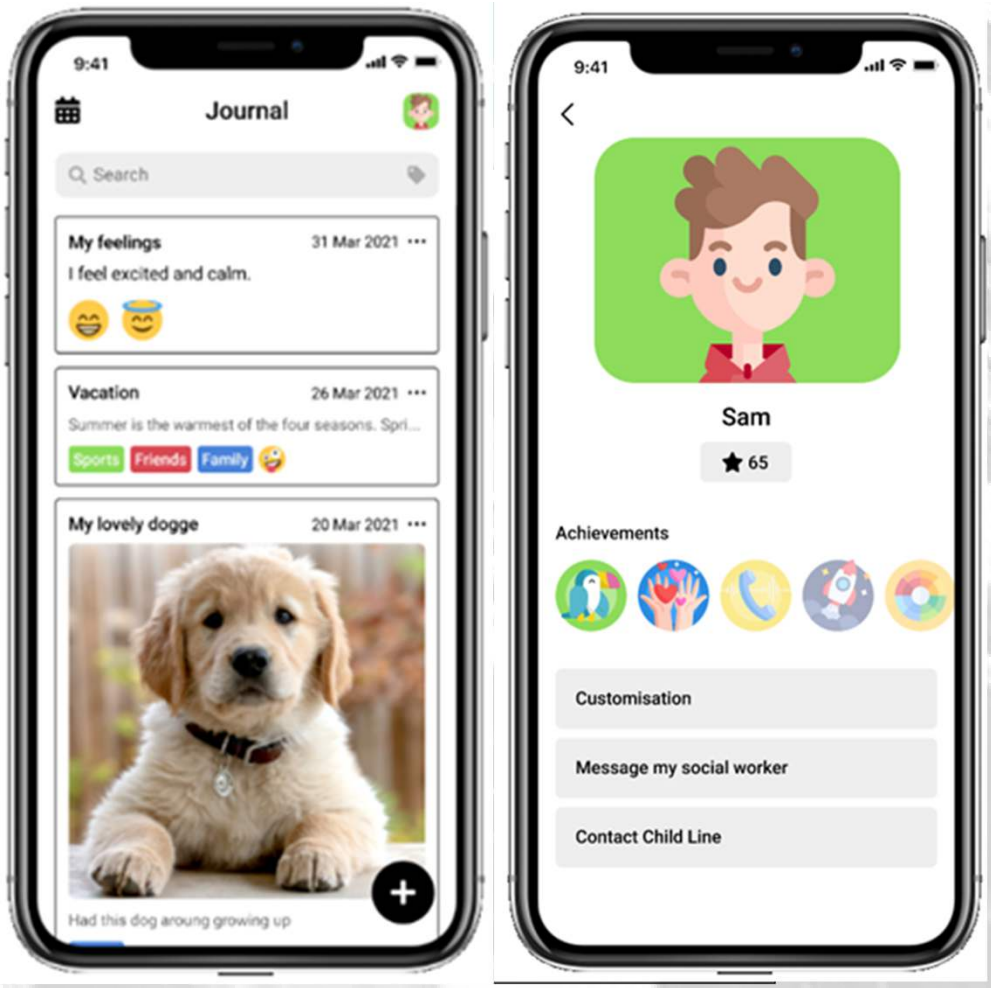
Archives & Records Association
UK & Ireland

Chief Archivists in Local Government Group (CALGG) of the Archives and Records Association (UK and Ireland)

The records of adopted and care-experienced people – good practice guidance for record-keepers and care professionals (England and Wales)

The Archives and Records Association (UK & Ireland), The Keep, Creech Castle, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 2DX
www.archives.org.uk

February 2024



MIRRA

Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access

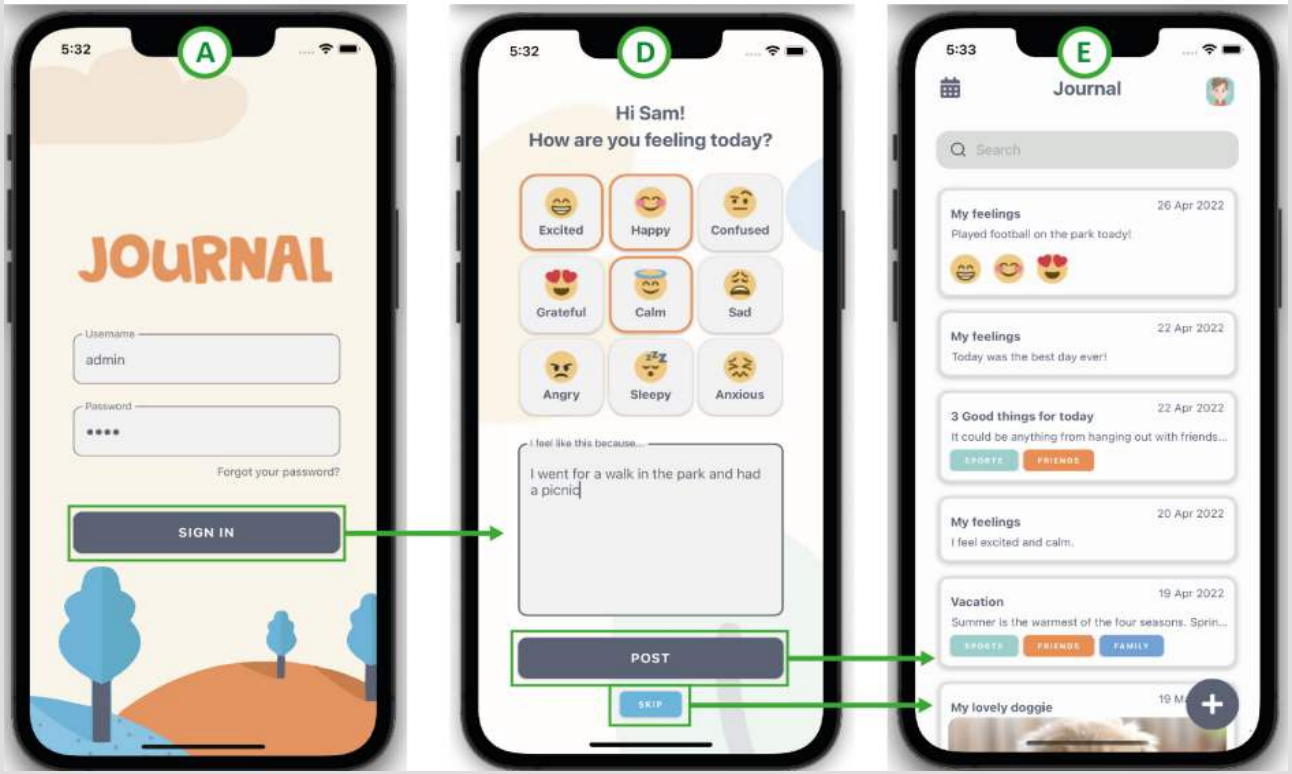
MIRRA+ (2020-2021)

#mirra @mirraproject

Arts and Humanities Research Council

UCL

Login Screen(A) → Greeting Screen(D) → Journal Feed Screen(E) flow



coram·i
Insight • Innovation

After Cloud

Empowering children in care to own their stories forever

Storyteller is a place where content can be collated and curated for, with and by children in care. Anyone important to the child can upload images, record videos and audio voice clips plus write or dictate personal letters, for the child at the centre to own forever.

As children in care can often be looked after by different people throughout their childhood, as they grow older they may find it challenging to form and retain strong memories, which can be detrimental to their mental health, self-confidence and sense of identity.

Storyteller

aws

All content stored in a secure cloud-based environment

ORCHA CERTIFIED

UKRI Innovate UK EDGE

My life, my records: Child-centred social care record keeping and access symposium

- My life, my records: Child-centred social care record keeping and access Tickets, Thu 10 Apr 2025 at 09:30 | Eventbrite

- Free in person seminar at UCL on 10 April brings together researchers and social care practitioners

Keynote speeches by Essex Children in Care Council (Missing Chapters Peer Led Research), MIRRA (University College London), Copenhagen University College and Dr Joanne Evans, Monash University, Australia.

UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

UCL

UCL
6TH JUNE
MEMORY
IDENTITY
INFORMATION
RIGHTS
PARTNERSHIP
SUPPORT
Influence Public Policy Debates
Everyone has a story
THERE WERE GAPS IN MY HISTORY
THAT I WANTED TO FILL IN
ACCURACY
TRANSPARENCY
Keep
Adapt
Bin
RECORDS BECOME PEOPLE'S HISTORY
IT IS ABOUT UNDERSTANDING YOURSELF
GUIDANCE
LANGUAGE
ACCESS
What happened to you when you were a child
YOU NEED TO BE EMOTIONALLY READY TO DEAL WITH THAT
WITHOUT IDENTITY THERE IS NO LIFE
IT'S NOT JUST A PAPER
its my life
SKILLS AND TRAINING
ADAPT TO TECHNOLOGY
HOW SHOULD WE APPROACH CHILD SOCIAL RECORDS
IT IS ABOUT
INDIVIDUAL PRIVACY
we love
Care
ACCOUNTABILITY
Care Leavers for a better world
We need to Know the NEEDS OF THE PEOPLE THAT WE ARE SERVING
Family
connect
life story work
project
THERE IS A LACK OF CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION
BETTER COMMUNICATION
information has changed
WHAT IS THE IMPACT ON THE CHILD
the Protection of information is very IMPORTANT in Child Care
CONSISTENCY
IN ACCESS TO RECORDS
CHILD SOCIAL CARE
PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY
SHARE PRACTICE
WE ARE WORRIED ABOUT SHARING INFORMATION
MIRRA project
HOW COULD RECORDS BETTER SERVED?
RETENTION OF RECORDS
HOW LONG THEY CAN BE KEPT
THERE IS A LOT OF REGULATION LEGISLATION
WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT CAN BE DISCLOSED
CARE Leavers
CREATE
NARRATIVE
We don't want to miss your Voice
IT IS ABOUT
Working together
~MORETHANMINUTES~

UCL INFORMATION STUDIES

References:

Project blog: https//:blogs.ucl.ac.uk/mirra Video: MIRRA: Memory, Identity and Rights in Records for Care Leavers

Hoyle, V., Shepherd, E., Flinn, A. and Lomas, E (2019) Child Social-Care Recording and the Information Rights of Care-Experienced People: A Recordkeeping Perspective. *The British Journal of Social Work* https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcy115

Shepherd, E., Hoyle, V., Lomas, E., Flinn, A., Sexton, A. (2020). Towards a Human-Centred Participatory Approach to Child Social Care Recordkeeping. *Archival Science*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09338-9

Hoyle V, Shepherd E, Lomas E, Flinn A (2020). Recordkeeping and the life-long memory and identity needs of care-experienced children and young people. *Child and Family Social Work*. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12778

Research in Practice podcasts: https://www.researchinpractice.org.uk/children/content-pages/podcasts/reflections-on-accessing-care-records-and-supporting-good-recording/

Shepherd, E, Sexton, A, Lomas, E, Williams, P, Denton, M, & Marchant, T. (2021). MIRRA app SRS: Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access Research Project: a participatory recordkeeping application Software Requirements Specification (SRS). Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5599430

Lomas, E., Shepherd, E., Hoyle, V., Sexton, A., & Flinn, A. (2022). A framework for person-centred recordkeeping drawn through the lens of out-of-home childcare contexts. *Archivaria.* 94: 64-93

Williams, P. Shepherd, E. Sexton, A. Lomas, E. (2024) Working with care leavers and young people still in care: ethical issues in the co-development of a participatory recordkeeping app. *Archival Science* 24: 41–60

Professor Emeritus Elizabeth Shepherd
Department of Information Studies, UCL
e.shepherd@ucl.ac.uk

#MIRRA @mirraproject

The Care Leavers' Association

Arts & Humanities Research Council

UCL Information Studies