EASTERN COLLABORATIVE CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL NETWORK (ECCRN)
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Welcome to our ECCRN newsletter, we hope you find these useful. This month we are contemplating the idea of 'home' and 'homely' – (what connotations do these words have for you?) – with a thought-provoking little piece. Why? Because we like nothing more than to prompt you to reflect on the care you give to the children and young people in your services. As the philosopher John Dewey said, "We don't learn from experience we learn from reflecting on experience". Please absorb and enjoy!

In the Guide to the Quality Standards it states the setting (children's home) should be *(a) "nurturing environment - welcoming, supportive, appropriate boundaries in relation to their behaviour"…* in most cases, be homely, domestic environments that comply with relevant health and safety legislation (alarms, food hygiene etc.) but without being too 'institutional".

The idea of 'home' is physically, emotionally, psychologically important. It is a part of our 'secure base'. Having the feeling of 'home' internally enables us to explore the world externally.

How does thinking about what home means to you and the children and young people you care for help to inform the creation of a home-like environment?

What is home?

To be child-centered we need to look at the setting through the eyes of a child. This means putting aside our assumptions of what we think of as 'home'. Our assumptions may not be those of the child.

What we come to think of as 'home' or 'homely' we develop through our experiences. - what happened 'at home', what did others in the family think of as 'home', what did 'home' look like (e.g. how big, how warm).

Many children coming to residential settings will bring a 'fractured sense of home' (Clark et al, 2014).

Docherty et al (2006) explain that what staff perceive to be a homely environment may not be what young people would choose. In their research they found children and young people tended to focus on the aesthetic qualities whilst staff commented more on the functional aspects of space or features. Children and young people wanted to be able to personalise their bedrooms as well as other communal areas of the house. The personalisation of spaces is important for the experience of safety (Verso, 2011), the development of both autonomy and connection and as symbols of young people's developing identities, giving expression to who they are, what they like and are interested in. At issue is the sense of ownership of the living environment. Whose home is it? (Clark et al, 2014).

In the review by Mallet (2004) it is noted that 'home' is variously described in the literature as related to house, family, haven, refuge, self, gender, and journeying alongside ideas of being-at-home, creating or making home and the ideal home.

HOMES…

have boundaries that are permeable and/or impermeable.

can be singular and/or plural (a child can hold on to the idea of having more than one home).

can be associated with feelings of comfort, ease intimacy, relaxation and security and/or oppression, tyranny and persecution.

can be fixed and stable and/or mobile and changing.

can be associated with family or not associated with family (sometimes homes house more than one family, or the extended family, or a group on unrelated by birth people).

can be an expression of one's identity and sense of self.

can constitute belonging and/or create a sense of marginalisation and estrangement.

Mallet observes the experience that is important to carry around with us is of 'being at home in the world' where the experience of home is in the shared activity, contribution, and voice you have in shaping your environment.

Reflections

- *How have you conceptualised and experienced the idea of 'home' in your life.*
- *How did you come to understand more about what 'home' means to a child or young person?*
- *How do you support a child to experience 'home'?*
- *How does thinking about what home means to you and the children and young people you care for help to inform the creation of a home-like environment.*

Physical environment

In a therapeutic environment, the physical structure plays an important role in helping children and young people to feel safe, contained and supported to develop control of their behaviour, emotions, and lives rather than be controlled (Bailey, 2002). Thus, the physical environment must be developmentally and culturally sensitive and support the meeting of developmental and cultural needs.

A range of important messages are being symbolically and subliminally communicated

• You are important and valued (or not)

• We care about you (or not)

• This is a safe place (or not)

• What you think and feel matters (or not)

• This is somewhere we can have fun together (or not)

• We respect you (or not)

How space is configured to regulate physical distance between people, is an interesting and important environmental consideration. Closeness might be experienced as comforting or threatening. If distance is too great, through the child's eyes, it might be experienced as isolating (Akamas, 2007).

The external spaces are as important as the internal spaces in communicating care and belonging. Verso (2011) highlighted the importance of the outside of houses looking like other houses in the street as important to children and young people. Access to outdoor areas and recreational equipment is critical for children and young people and staff to have fun, to expend energy or as strategies for calming and regulating. Curtis et al (2007) have highlighted how outdoor space can be psychologically beneficial for a child to find a sense of calm. The therapeutic use of gardens, trampolines, and sporting equipment all provide opportunities for connection, shared activity, and regulation.

Recommended Reads

Changing the interior design of a children's home to engender ownership and connectedness to the environment | Iriss -Rice G, Duncalf Z, Wilson L

Designing with Care - Interior Design and Residential Child Care Final Report - University of Strathclyde - Docherty , Kendrick A, Sloan P, Lerpiniere J
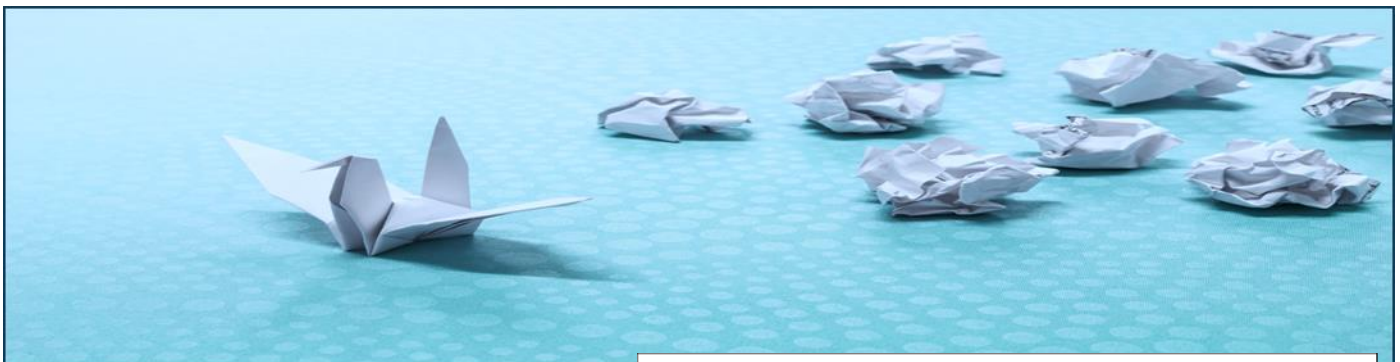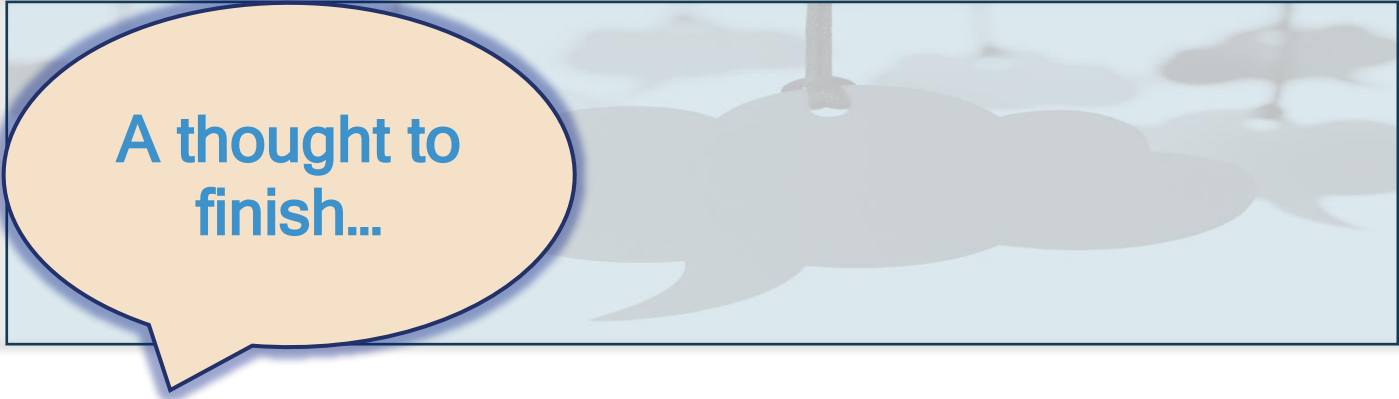

Practice Development

Three Islands: Kate Iwi

Three houses: Andrew Turnell

Social Graces: Social-GGRRAAACCEEESSS-and-the-LUUUTT-model.pdf
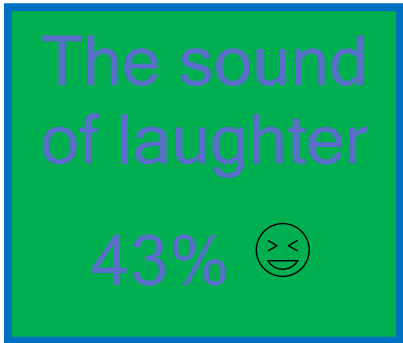
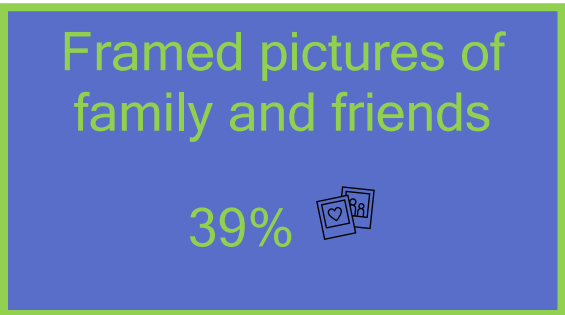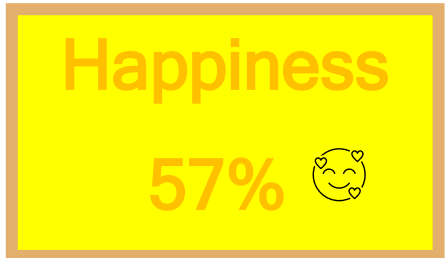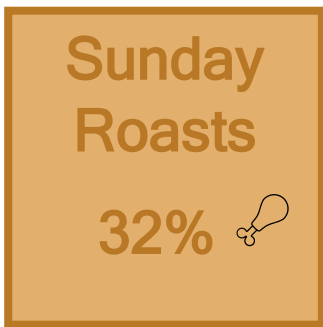Ecomaps: ecomaps-practice-guidance.pdf
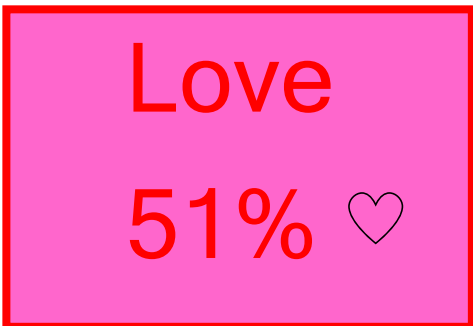
A thought to finish...

How do you 'do home'?

Milligan (2003, 2005) emphasises that home is as much a social and emotional concept as a physical one. Social and emotional connections strengthen the link between home and identity.

A House + Homeliness = A home

Here are of the **Top 30 things that make a house a home** according to British homeowners – Which ones resonate with you? What would you add?

Love 51% ♡

Sunday Roasts 32%

Happiness 57%

Framed pictures of family and friends 39%

Freshly laundered sheets each week 39%

The sound of laughter 43%

Contact us

Please let us know if you wish to be removed from the distribution list or if you wish to add a colleague for future issues. We would also love your feedback for future editions

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