Institution: University College London		
Unit of Assessment: 34 – Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management		
Title of case study: Enhancing care-experienced people's access to records and improving child social care recording practice in England		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010–2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	**Role(s) (e.g. job title):**	**Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:**
Elizabeth Shepherd	Professor, Archives & Records Management	1992-present
Andrew Flinn	Reader, Archival Studies & Oral History	2004-present
Elizabeth Lomas	Associate Professor, Information Governance	2015-present
Anna Sexton	Lecturer, Archives & Records Management	2018-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: October 2017 – 31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Social care records are a vital resource for memory-making and identity for adults who were in care as children. The Memory, Identity, Rights in Records, Access (**MIRRA**) project (2017-2019) worked with care experienced adults in England to understand their experiences of accessing their care records. MIRRA identified deficits in recordkeeping practice for looked-after children and ways in which information and data legislation could be better operated. MIRRA produced practical guidance for care leavers to access their records enabling them to exercise their information rights better; changed policy makers' understandings of the implementation of the Data Protection Act on looked-after children's information rights; and improved records management and child social care recording through the provision of new Principles for Caring Recordkeeping.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Research at UCL's Department of Information Studies analyses information rights in records, professional practices of information and records managers, citizens' rights in records, and how recordkeeping facilitates or impedes access to information. Since 2007, research into the recordkeeping role in information rights has identified how recordkeeping affects the user experience of Freedom of Information [**R1**], established the significant benefits of participatory and community methods in creating and maintaining archives [**R2**], proposed models of trust, consent and risk critical to information governance for government administrative data [**R3**] and identified the recordkeeping contribution to accessing open government data [**R4**].

Child social care recording affects the lives of 75,000 children and young people currently living in care, as well as an estimated half a million care leavers in England today (Department for Education, May 2019). These children grow up seriously disadvantaged by their childhood experiences. The AHRC-funded study 'Navigating the Public Information Rights Ecology: A recordkeeping perspective on supporting information rights', established the Memory, Identity, Rights in Records, Access (MIRRA) project, which focused on the needs of care-experienced people to access their own records and mapped the complex legislative, regulatory and practical challenges that they face. It explored the information rights ecology in the public and voluntary sectors to enable care-experienced people to exercise their access rights to information about their childhoods, and ensure that public authorities understand their rights and obligations under data protection.

The research was co-produced with a group of eleven care-experienced adults and the Care Leavers' Association (**CLA**) – the most active peer support network for care leavers in the UK, engaging over 7,500 individuals – and drew upon qualitative data from over 80 further participants. MIRRA focused on the creation and management of children's social care records held by voluntary and public authorities and established key findings [**R1-2**]:

- Care-experienced people of all ages often have a deficit of self-knowledge about their childhood which impacts on their identity and sense of self. Many care leavers turn to their

'care files' (organisational records of out-of-home care) for answers. Accessing records has life-changing impacts for them, positive and negative. However, care leavers lack guidance about how to access their records and the emotional and practical support needed [**R5-6**].

- Social care records often reinforce information inequalities, lack personal memory objects and rarely include life story work. Instead records are designed to fulfil legal, legislative and professional requirements of the care provider. None of the contributors felt that their voices or versions of events had been captured in their file [**R5**].

- Records management across public and private sectors is inconsistent and in many cases paper and digital records are incomplete, inaccurate, lost or destroyed. Information professionals have limited resources, poor physical and intellectual control of records and lack adequate training [**R6**].

- The legislative and regulatory landscape for recordkeeping is fragmented, making it difficult for care leavers to exercise their information rights and for information and social care practitioners to understand their responsibilities. Critically, when information is redacted (removed) from records, redaction was risk-averse, inconsistent and rarely explained [**R6**].

- Digital records systems marketed for social care recording constrain the changes which participants want to make. Systems place control of the record with social care and information governance professionals: they are not designed to facilitate access and participation by the care leaver [**R5**].

MIRRA research demonstrated the needs for participatory recordkeeping practices [**R6**]. For care-experienced individuals, greater control of records relating to their out-of-home care can play an enduring therapeutic role in resolving issues of identity and self-image. For social care practitioners, the adoption of person-centred participatory recording helps to fulfil policy objectives for child-centred approaches. Information governance practitioners who reframe child social care recordkeeping as a caring activity rather than bureaucratic necessity, would be better able to navigate key legislative requirements such as the Data Protection Act 2018 in socially just ways.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R1. Shepherd, E., Flinn, A., Stevenson, A. (2010). Information governance, records management and freedom of information: a study of local government authorities in England. *Government Information Quarterly* 27:4: 337-345. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2010.02.008

R2. Stevens, M., Flinn, A., Shepherd, E. (2010). New frameworks for community engagement in the archive sector: from handing over to handing on. *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 16:1: 59-76. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13527250903441770

R3. Sexton, A., Shepherd, E., Duke-Williams, O., Eveleigh, A. (2018). The role and nature of consent in government administrative data. *Big Data & Society* 5:2: 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951718819560

R4. Shepherd, E., Bunn, J., Flinn, A., Lomas, E., Sexton, A. et al (2019). Open government data: critical information management perspectives. *Records Management Journal* 29:1/2: 152-167. http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/RMJ-08-2018-0023

R5. 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* 25:4: 935-945. https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12778

R6. Shepherd, E., Hoyle, V., Lomas, E., Flinn, A., Sexton, A. (2020). Towards a Human-Centred Participatory Approach to Child Social Care Recordkeeping. *Archival Science* 20: 307-325. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09338-9

All outputs are in peer-reviewed international journals.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

UK citizens have significant rights to access the records and data created for and about them by government and third sector organisations, as conveyed by the Freedom of Information Act (FOI, 2000) and Data Protection Act (DPA, 2018). MIRRA has improved care-experienced people's lifelong access to their records through human-centred professional practice and public policy changes, having identified three groups whose rights and responsibilities need to be in balance to enable rights in records to be exploited for the public good: **care-experienced people, information and social care professionals,** and **public policy makers**.

Improving care-experienced people's agency and understanding of their information rights as citizens and providing expert guidance through *FamilyConnect* and the Care Leavers' Association

Eleven care-experienced co-researchers had a central voice in the MIRRA project which led to greater agency and understanding of their information rights. They significantly influenced the research and its findings, by shaping the data collection and analysis through four research design workshops and co-producing a framework of Principles for Caring Recordkeeping that centralised their needs and voices. As John-george attests, through this process 'I have been able to make something very positive out of what have been some of the most difficult times of my life, by sharing these experiences with UCL's researchers in the hope that they can use this information to improve the experience for others receiving their care files in the future by giving a voice through their work to people like me' [**A**]. Care leaver voices are heard on the MIRRA blog (3000 visits, Nov 2018-May 2019 [**B**]), four tell their stories in a leaflet, and a short documentary film enabled eight care leavers to tell their stories of the practical challenges and emotional impacts of accessing their records (3092 views as of 31 December 2020[**B**]). Involvement in the project improved care leaver Gina's sense of self-worth: 'this made me feel really important, like my story is worth telling' [**A**]. After presenting MIRRA's findings to 120 people at a conference, care leaver Linda explained: 'I just wouldn't have done this two years ago…on a personal level certainly it's given me the confidence to speak' [**A**].

MIRRA research has directly influenced the Care Leaver's Association (**CLA**) campaigns. CLA 'worked collaboratively [with MIRRA] to expand the evidence base for change to legislation, regulation and practice in child social care recordkeeping', characterising this as a 'mutually-beneficial relationship' that 'has had significant impact: our care-leaver led approach has strengthened the validity of the research findings, which in turn has helped to build the case behind our work programmes and campaigns'. 'As such, it has helped to change perceptions of the importance of child care records within the wider sector within which the CLA operates' [**C**].

MIRRA's Principles for Caring Recordkeeping shaped the design and provided the content for a new web resource, *FamilyConnect*, created in 2020 by Family Action, a charity that provides practical, emotional and financial support to disadvantaged families across the UK. MIRRA's care experienced co-researchers reviewed the content, design, and look and feel, making significant changes to the language and visuals proposed. [**D**] *FamilyConnect* provides support and expert guidance for the 4000 care leavers who seek access to their care files annually and was viewed by 2,264 users; 12,317 page views by December 2020 [**E**]. One adoption specialist called the website 'a unique source of help and advice for these people. It's a much needed resource which will continue to grow and aid this community' [**E**]. *FamilyConnect* won the 2020 UCL Public Engagement Community prize.

MIRRA's *The Conversation* article (4144 reads) and two BBC Radio interviews about why children's voices are not in their care files (BBC West Midlands March 2019, 214,000 weekly listeners; BBC London Oct 2019, 565,000 weekly listeners) engaged a wider public with debates around access to care records. Responses included: 'This is so accurate – and, it doesn't have to be. People who haven't been looked after get photo albums & to hear their history spoken by family. Care experienced people have "records" which are functional & spread between multiple agencies/entities' and 'I couldn't agree more with this. The use of language is also very important - "…a culture of caring record-keeping"' [**F**].

Improving recordkeeping best practice for information, data protection and social care professionals

British Association of Social Workers's (**BASW**) *Top Tips: Recording in Children's Social Work* (published August 2020, 578 downloads, 634 views) cited MIRRA's research to explain why it is important to capture children's voices in their records and proposes practices that will improve child social workers' ability to record reflective, person-centred records efficiently. As a BASW Professional Officer explained, the guide 'featured prominently in a recent [December 2020] week of action at BASW where the final webinar…was on better recording' attended by 100 social workers and is shared by BASW at 'fortnightly children and families forums' and the 'Friday forum supporting newly qualified social workers' (5-20 social workers) [**G**].

MIRRA has improved information management and child social care practitioners' awareness of care leavers' information rights and needs by providing opportunities for them to hear directly from care-experienced people. MIRRA researchers presented findings from [**R5**] and [**R6**] at 34 professional and practitioner conferences, workshops and meetings across the UK, Europe and Australia, to a total audience of over 2553 (2017-2020) [**H**], in a 2019 article in *Community Care* (a social care professionals website, 118,119 unique monthly browsers [**F**]), and on social media (656 followers on Twitter with 220,725 impressions [**B**]). MIRRA's video short about making practitioner work person-centred [**R6**] has been viewed 460 times [**B**]. Feedback from social care practioners at the MIRRA symposium in July 2019 emphasised how hearing personal testimonies of care leavers changed their understanding of care leavers' perspectives: 'We're dealing with human feelings and not just paperwork'. They attested to the importance of accessing MIRRA resources to effect practical change to align with the Principles for Caring Recordkeeping: '[I will] Develop better signposting to potential other resources so that those searching for their own records never receive just 'no' as an answer'. Record practitioners said they would 'take back a more person centred and less risk averse approach' to access requests and redaction. Social care professionals were influenced to shift practices towards participatory recordkeeping and to 'Be a driver to ensure the voice of child in records' and 'Make it easier for children to access records' [**I**].

In 2019 Gloucestershire County Council (**GCC**) incorporated MIRRA's documentary film into training to improve practices around information management for staff in children's services teams. Attended by 40 managers, 500 practitioners from children's services and 40 members of the Information Management Service (**IMS**), the training aims to 'highlight the impact of poor information management on the children in our care' and 'the importance of [practitioners'] work answering Subject Access Requests to the recipients, especially … care experienced people'. A link to the film was also included in the slides sent out after the training. 'The feedback … was that the film had a profound impact both emotionally and professionally, and really helped to hammer home the importance of recording and sharing information appropriately' [**J**]. GCC has improved access to records for care-experienced people through improved online guidance for requestors and practitioners and by 'streamlining processes for children's services and IMS to work together when answering Subject Access Requests from care experienced people to ensure that as much information is released as possible and appropriate'. GCC attested that 'The MIRRA project has been instrumental in informing, underpinning and reinforcing the improvement work we have carried out so far … much of the progress we have made at GCC would not have been possible without the knowledge and experience that I have gained from the project and […] shared with my GCC colleagues' [**J**].

Improving policy makers' understandings of the operation of the Data Protection Act on looked after children's information rights

MIRRA represented the voices of care leavers at the highest levels of public policy, governance and decision-making across the UK, advocating with them for regulatory and legislative change. Symposium feedback emphasized this: 'I have been campaigning for many years about rights and needs of adult care leavers, but MIRRA has made such headway in such a short time' [**I**]. For example, MIRRA researchers spoke at a roundtable discussion of the Access to Care Records Campaign Group convened by Baroness Young at the House of Lords in 2018 [**K**]. MIRRA influenced public policy through policy briefings individually targeted at regulatory and policy oversight agencies. For example, MIRRA's brief on Records and Recordkeeping Practices (July 2019) drew on [**R6**] to call on the UK Information Commissioner (**ICO**) to provide stronger guidance to organisations about retaining information, give greater consideration to the management of subject access requests for care-experienced people,

minimise redaction, and build access by design into social care systems. The Director of Freedom of Information Compliance at ICO stated that MIRRA had 'demonstrate[d] vividly that… records not only shape people's memories, but help to shape how people see themselves today', acknowledging that 'some organisations are not thinking carefully enough about the journey of the data they hold, and recognising that personal data has a value' [**L**]. The UK's Information Commissioner, Elizabeth Denham, acknowledged the impact of MIRRA's findings on her understanding of the experience of care leavers accessing their records (Opening Address, Symposium, July 2019): 'MIRRA has found [that] the records that some of you have been trying to get access to have been incomplete […] and that is not good enough', leading her to ask 'how do we make sure that the way that records are documented about children in care, are documented with sensitivity and an eye on the future.' She stated that ICO 'haven't taken enforcement action against individual organisations for exercising their discretion in subject access requests' thus encouraging practitioners to reconsider risk averse redaction practices. Denham also reflected 'lessons learned from MIRRA' when addressing other audiences internationally. She attested, 'MIRRA made so clear there is always a link back to data protection where these decisions impact so personally and tangibly on individuals'. [**L**]

Co-creating participatory digital social care recording
OLM Systems, a leading social care systems developer with 30 years of experience in child social care, attested that MIRRA's research [**R5**, **R6**] 'alerted us to the emotional, personal and identity dimensions of recordkeeping in child social care and confirmed our own experiences of the complex challenges involved in the creation and management of child social care records in the UK' [**M**]. OLM stated that 'based on the research, we are now actively investigating how we build a fairer more collaborative recording system for young people'. For example, 'After our knowledge sharing with the MIRRA project, we started recommending that [functionality enabling capture of media such as pictures, audio and video] was used for holding some of the other information about a child to paint a picture of the care leaver's life in care', and 'we found a new use for an existing feature which allowed the recording of one, or more, physical storage locations … because our collaboration with the MIRRA team had reiterated to us that it is not uncommon for care leavers trying to access their records to be told that the records have been mislaid.' OLM explained that 'MIRRA research has confirmed our experience that record keeping for care leavers should be collaborative and participatory' and inspired their embarkation on 'creating a new system for record-keeping' which will be open source because 'We would not want the ability of a care leaver to access a record to be dependent upon a high-priced commercial offering' [**M**]. OLM Systems have partnered with MIRRA to develop an open-source specification for a participatory digital social care recording system funded by AHRC.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)
A. Email/letter from care experienced co-researchers: John-george Nicholson; Gina Larrisey; Linda Whyte
B. MIRRA blog https://bit.ly/2OLHsqn; Twitter https://bit.ly/2Nbkmcg; YouTube playlist https://bit.ly/2LYOzuA
C. Care Leavers' Association, testimonial, CEO and Project Manager
D. Transcript of web development workshop and discussion, Family Action
E. FamilyConnect website https://bit.ly/3dfNxWl; email, Independent Adoption Consultant; testimonial, CEO, Family Action
F. The Conversation article and reader comments on Twitter; Community Care article
G. British Association of Social Workers (BASW)'s Top Tips: Recording in Children's Social Work (08/20); testimonial, Professional Officer, BASW
H. Impact spreadsheet for MIRRA events (host, dates, numbers, speakers, 02/2018-11/2020)
I. 175 feedback postcard transcripts from 11 MIRRA events (08/18-11/19)
J. Testimonial, Corporate & Digital Records Manager, Gloucestershire County Council
K. Access to Care Records Campaign Group, Baroness Lola Young at the House of Lords, 27/11/18, https://bit.ly/3u5LeLd and https://bit.ly/3u7gqK2
L. Testimonial, Elizabeth Denham, UK Information Commissioner, 23/12/20; Denham opening address at MIRRA symposium 16/07/19 https://bit.ly/37k7Hue; Gill Bull, Director of FOI Complaints and Compliance, ICO, Bond Lecture 11/19
M. Testimonial, Group & Systems Product Director, OLM Systems Ltd