

Voluntary Action History Society

- Recent Papers
- Call for new papers



Voluntary Action History Society

Spirit of Friendly Rivalry? Voluntary Societies and the Formation of Post-war Child Welfare Legislation

Institute for
Volunteering Research

Facts & figures on
volunteering in the UK

Research summaries

Voluntary Action
journal

News from the
Institute

In 1947 Miss Harris, matron of the Swansea Orphanage Home for Girls, wanted to retire. Like most single women who had devoted their lives to caring for children, accommodation was a problem for her, and she asked the management committee of the orphanage if they could set aside a flatlet within the home for her retirement. Although the committee was very sympathetic, it decided that her request could not be met because sooner or later the home would be requisitioned by the government and Miss Harris would have to leave the flat. Furthermore, the committee thought that, owing to the dwindling number of children sent to the home by local authorities, the cost of maintaining the home and the probability of it being nationalised, it would be expedient to hand it over voluntarily before this took place.¹ This paper will consider why Miss Harris's retirement plans were thwarted and why the government did not nationalise voluntary children's homes.

I

In recent years, historians have paid increasing attention to the role of voluntarism in welfare policy. Attempts have been made to describe the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector; most of these descriptions use the concept of a 'boundary' between two separate spheres. This paper will argue that such a model is misleading, and that the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector was far more fluid and dynamic than the 'boundary' concept would suggest. To illustrate the complexity of this relationship, the role of two children's charities, the National Children's Home (NCH) and Barnardo's during the period 1946–1953, will be considered. This period is particularly significant because it has often been described as having been barren for the voluntary sector; indeed, in many areas voluntary effort was completely superseded by the state.

A study of child welfare provision reveals a complex set of choices for the voluntary societies involved. Children and child welfare have never been the concern of any single agency, and this has meant that the sphere of child care represents the voluntary-state boundary at its most plastic. The constraints of budgets, differing models of child care and the political complexion of local authorities all acted together to determine forms of child care provision. At the level of central government, the Ministry of Health, Board of Education and Home Office all had an interest in child welfare and each department claimed a particular expertise in the area.

Voluntary agencies had to deal with all these departments of central government, with their differing priorities and agendas, as well as with local

authorities. It was open to the agencies, therefore, to appeal to one department over another, or to appeal to central government over a local authority. The patterns of care advocated by the various ministries were different, and the voluntary societies were sometimes able to exploit these differences to their own advantage. However, when the ideas of a government department conflicted with the priorities of the voluntary society, the influence the department could wield could be irresistible.

II

In 1945 Lady Astor observed that 'the country has become child conscious'.² Six years of war had focused attention on children in a perhaps unprecedented way.³ They had become appreciated as an important national asset, and anxiety was expressed that children psychologically damaged by the experience of war were in danger of becoming the maladjusted adults of the future.

The disruption of war had presented child care professionals with a unique opportunity to study children in a variety of settings: day and residential nurseries, evacuation billets, children's homes and hostels. The experience of evacuation looms large in the historiography of the establishment of the post-war welfare state, and child care workers hoped that evacuation would enable them to accumulate a corpus of knowledge about children that they could apply in the post-war world. Over-estimates of the number of orphaned and displaced children that would have to be cared for after the war added to the urgency of the situation, as did concern for the stability of the family and the rising divorce rate.⁴

The situation was publicised by Lady Allen, who campaigned for the reform of welfare provision for children 'deprived of a normal home life'. Her letter to *The Times* in 1944 provoked a flood of correspondence, most of it critical of existing provision for children – in particular, the division of responsibility for them. A child living apart from his family might find himself under the care of the Ministry of Pensions, the Ministry of Health, the Board of Education, the Home Office or a voluntary society, depending on how he was referred. This division of administrative responsibility caused confusion and the child's welfare was in danger of being overlooked. The death of Dennis O'Neill at the hands of his foster father in January 1945 demonstrated how dangerous the lack of co-ordination could be.

Public concern following the death of Dennis O'Neill, together with the need to consider the position of orphaned and deserted children after the break-up of the Poor Law functions of the local authorities, led to a public enquiry. A committee chaired by Myra Curtis was appointed and published its report in 1946. The committee investigated all forms of child care provision, by both the state and voluntary societies. Its most damning criticisms were reserved for local authorities that placed young children in adult public assistance committee institutions, sometimes with elderly and infirm adults. However, the committee almost unanimously found a lack of personal, nurturing interest in children cared for away from their parents. It made more than sixty recommendations, which can be divided into those concerned with administration and those dealing with child care practice. The committee recommended that central responsibility for all children 'deprived of a normal home life' should reside with one central government department to avoid the current confusion of responsibility. The report advised that, at local authority level, children should become the sole

responsibility of an *ad hoc* committee and be cared for by a Children's Officer answerable to this committee.

The recommendations of the Curtis Report on child care practice were to have repercussions for the voluntary sector. The report claimed that the best way of providing for children without families was adoption. If this was not possible, children should be 'boarded out' or fostered, with adequate safeguards. The least favoured method was to be children's homes – the type of provision that dominated the voluntary sector.

The Curtis Report did not condemn the voluntary societies, however. The Rev John Litten, a member of the Curtis Committee and principal of the NCH, ably defended the voluntary principle in residential care. Other members of the committee were also sympathetic to the voluntary sector: for example, the civil servant John Moss (who later investigated the work of the voluntary societies that sent children to Australia). The Curtis Committee had found examples of good and bad practice in both the state and the voluntary sectors, and to be fair would have had to condemn both sectors or neither. It chose to condemn neither but to stress the need to bring all children's homes up to the standard of the best. The Curtis Report recommended that both the state and the voluntary sector should continue to provide residential care, and commented that the dual provision of residential care by both sectors had advantages and could work to raise standards through a 'friendly rivalry between the two types of home'.⁵

III

Lady Allen was disappointed by the recommendation of the Curtis Committee that the voluntary children's societies should continue to care for children. She feared that children in the voluntary homes would continue to be subject to the 'chill winds of charity' and she highlighted the 'overlapping of children's charities and possible waste of effort'.⁶

Allen called for all children in care to be made 'wards of state' and made clear her attitude to the voluntary sector: 'May it not be that private philanthropy belongs to a youthful stage of our society out of which we are growing as we reach a maturer outlook?'⁷

As the wife of a Labour peer, Lady Allen typified a strand of thought within the Labour movement which regarded philanthropy as outmoded and undesirable, an anachronism within a 'welfare state'. Many in the voluntary sector feared that the welfare reforms of the post-war Labour government would spell the end for voluntary welfare provision. The fact that this did not happen requires some explanation.

Recent studies of the post-war Labour government have highlighted the role of 'ethical socialism' in Labour thinking.⁸ Tiratsoo et al have argued that, for many within the government, the aim was to bring about a new society based on an active, participatory citizenship. The welfare state and full employment was, he claims, 'only half of what was on offer in 1945'.⁹ Fielding also argues that the Labour government wished to promote an idea of 'active citizenship', where 'service' and 'responsibility' would be the hallmark of a new social order. Within this vision, voluntary societies, far from being outdated, could, it was felt, promote a greater participation of the population in the creation of this society and foster an enhanced sense of community and social cohesion.

Many in the voluntary sector supported the government's vision of 'active citizenship', and saw voluntarism as a humanising force, a defence against the creation of a totalitarian state. A pamphlet issued by the National Council for Social Service declared that:

[i]f we develop the habit of looking to the state as the institution which, as distinct from ourselves, is responsible for the removal of ills or the provision of goods . . . then we are in danger of ceasing to be living members of a society in the fullest sense. We may nationalise a system of . . . financial payments . . . We cannot "nationalize" goodwill.¹⁰

Post-war welfare legislation in many instances incorporated the voluntary principle. The NHS Act 1948 may have 'nationalized' the hospitals, but the management of the new service was to be overseen by committees that included volunteers. The Children Act called for the employment of Children's Officers, but they would be answerable to a Children's Committee of locally elected councillors and co-opted unpaid members. Clearly, the idea of participatory voluntary service accorded well with the aims of the Labour government. The debate in the House of Lords in June 1949 demonstrated unequivocally the attitude of the government towards voluntary effort. Lord Pakenham outlined the government's position and listed the benefits of the voluntary sector. Voluntary effort would 'elevate the whole democratic process'; it could 'express the social ideals of a minority' and would lead to the 'enrichment of personality through community life'. Finally, Lord Pakenham equated voluntarism with socialism, observing that 'all forms of democratic government were dependent on that same spirit, but the socialist form most of all'.¹¹

Finlayson has argued that, in the drawing of boundaries between the state and the voluntary sector, debate focused on what the two sectors 'should' and 'should not' do. Within this debate there were those who feared that state intervention in family life would go too far. The upbringing and care of children has always been an emotive issue, as the debates surrounding early educational reforms bear witness. In 1948 the Archbishop of York, writing in *The Times*, warned that:

parental responsibility had been weakened by the way in which the state now took over the education, nutrition and health of the children. What was once the duty of parents was now the responsibility of the state . . . The Church, the state and public opinion must all contribute towards arresting the further decay of home life.¹²

Such views accorded with conservative fears that the welfare state would weaken the individual's sense of responsibility and duty.¹³

The voluntary sector therefore enjoyed the support of both the major political parties, albeit for different reasons. Supporters of voluntarism within the Labour party saw it as a means to increase popular participation in local democracy and as an expression of service to one's comrades. For the Conservative party, the voluntary sector could help to check the authority of the state, protect individual freedom and foster a greater sense of personal responsibility and duty.

Within the field of child care, there was a great deal of public support for

improved state provision for children deprived of a normal home life. However, this was tempered by a concern that parents should not be allowed to shirk their responsibilities, and that children should also be given an appropriate religious upbringing. The voluntary societies considered that in their religious care of children they provided something the state could not and that, as the local authorities had a duty under the 1948 Act to provide for children referred by the courts and could no longer refuse to be named in 'Fit Person orders' (as had been the case under the 1933 Children and Young Persons Act), the state provision would become stigmatising in a way which voluntary provision would not.

IV

Although there was goodwill in parliament towards the voluntary sector, in 1946 this was by no means obvious to the voluntary children's societies. Many feared that they would be excluded from child care provision and that residential care would be the sole preserve of the state. That this did not happen was partly due to the enthusiasm of the Labour government for voluntarism and the benefits that could accrue from a healthy voluntary sector, but also partly to the efforts of the voluntary societies themselves to promote and protect their own interests.

During the war, the voluntary societies had been beset by many common problems. Arising out of these shared concerns, a closer relationship between the various children's societies developed. Informal meetings between the 'big six' children's charities (Barnardo's, NCH, Church of England Waifs and Strays Society, Jewish Board of Guardians, Catholic Children's Rescue Society, Shaftesbury Home and the Arethusa) resulted in the formation of a more formal organisation, known as the National Council of Associated Children's Homes (NCACH). In the early post-war years, therefore, when criticism of the voluntary homes grew, the voluntary societies already had a mechanism in place that enabled them to speak with a united voice in their own defence and a platform from which they could promote the cause of voluntary welfare provision.

The NCACH carefully monitored the passage of the Children Bill, and prepared a memorandum that was sent to all members of both houses and to all the chairmen of local authorities. They also employed a parliamentary lobbyist to put their case. It was noted with satisfaction in March 1948 that 'the Government's policy is to work through two systems, of voluntary organisations and local authorities, in the work of child care'.¹⁴

The voluntary homes had clearly been stung by some of the public criticism they had received since 1944, and in their publicity they stressed that most of the recommendations of the Curtis Committee (which had been appointed to investigate the plight of children deprived of a normal home life) were already common practice in the voluntary homes and that the voluntary sector had set itself the task of providing a standard of care for the local authorities to follow. The NCACH was clearly an influential body by the late 1940s and as far as the Children Act 1948 was concerned, had successfully promoted and protected the interests of the voluntary sector.

V

The Children Act 1948 failed to prescribe the relationship between the state and the voluntary sector. Although the Curtis Report of 1946 had called for co-

operation between the two, no formal mechanism had been established to enable this. In the parliamentary debates, this anomaly was most clearly exposed by Lord Beveridge. A staunch supporter of the voluntary principle in most spheres, Beveridge pointed out that the Children Bill had failed to define the position of the voluntary homes in relation to the state:

Where do the children who are now in homes managed by the voluntary organisations stand in this matter? Are they children without parent or guardian, so that they automatically come within the scope of the local authority, or are they not?¹⁵

Beveridge called for greater state control of voluntary homes and for a uniform code of care: for example, the Bill did not compel voluntary organisations to 'board out' their children whereas the local authorities had a duty to do this. A further anomaly was that, although the Bill required local authorities to try to maintain links between the child in care and his parents, the voluntary societies were not so instructed; the same was true of child migration. Such criticisms were all the more forceful coming from a supporter of the voluntary sector, and Beveridge astutely observed that the Bill was 'not merely dealing with children but it is making a new experiment in the relations between the public authorities and voluntary agencies'.

The Children Act 1948 did indeed establish a new relationship between the state and the voluntary sector, but the anomalies in the Act no doubt encouraged an atmosphere of suspicion between the two sectors rather than the 'friendly rivalry' envisaged by the Curtis Committee. Local authorities were free to place children they had accepted under the Act in voluntary homes, and were free to negotiate the level of maintenance payment for the child with the individual society. This arrangement caused serious under-funding of the voluntary sector in the early post-war period and was a continuous source of conflict between the societies and the local authorities.

In 1948 the NCACH investigated the level of payments that the constituent societies received from local authorities. A wide variation in payments was discovered: from 10/- to £3 per week per child, with the average being £1. The average weekly cost of maintaining a child was calculated by the voluntary societies to be around £4 (or more if the child was placed in a specialised branch: for example, one offering nursery care, where the staff-child ratio was greater). The National Council noted that one society which cared for more than 400 children placed with it by local authorities was subsidising the care of these children by around £7,000 a year.¹⁶ Armed with these figures, the NCACH in 1950 negotiated a formula for funding whereby the Home Office would reimburse local authorities for children placed by them in voluntary homes at a rate of £3 per child per week for those under 5 and £2 10/- for those over 5. By setting this rate at well below the true cost of care, the Home Office was implying that the voluntary sector could and should subsidise the state.

Central authority for overseeing the new service established by the 1948 Act was vested in the Home Office, and it was thought that this would end the confusion over authority that had existed before the war. However, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education retained responsibility for certain groups of children cared for by voluntary organisations. For example, residential special schools came under the Ministry of Education, irrespective of the fact that a number of the children cared for in the schools may have been there primarily

because they were 'deprived of a normal home life'. Thus, the voluntary societies were able to alter the description of their homes and so come under the authority of a different government department.

By the end of 1952 the NCACH had initiated a meeting with the Municipal Corporations Association and representatives of the County Council Association to discuss problems that had arisen between the voluntary societies and the local authorities. Among the topics discussed was how responsibility for 'local authority' children in voluntary homes could best be delegated. As a result of this meeting a 'code of conduct' was drawn up that attempted to define a working relationship between the local authorities and the voluntary societies. The 'code' provided for a standard form of account, called for voluntary homes to consult with Children's Officers regarding the care of 'local authority' children placed with them and agreed that, as a guarantee against extravagance, 'the voluntary organisations would maintain a reasonable proportion of the children and so have an incentive to economy which might not exist if all, or almost all, the children in the voluntary home were being paid for by local authorities.¹⁷ However, this attempt at a recognised agreement failed, as not all the local authorities would agree to it.

The lack of guidance the Children Act offered concerning the correct relationship between the voluntary and statutory sectors safeguarded to a considerable degree the autonomy of the voluntary societies, maintaining their freedom to admit children without reference to the state. There was no mechanism for consultation between the voluntary societies and the state at local government level. Instead, the societies enjoyed a parity with the local authority children's departments under the Home Office.

Perhaps the only distinction made between the work the two sectors could perform was the care of children placed by the court under Fit Person Orders, but this difference had in theory been established by the Children and Young Persons Act of 1933. Under this Act, a Fit Person Order could not name a corporate body as the 'fit person'. In practice, magistrates continued to name societies such as Barnardo's and the NCH in Fit Person Orders and the Home Office, stretched to its limits during the war, decided to turn a blind eye to the practice.¹⁸ The Home Office kept records of the number of children under Fit Person Orders for whom permission had been given to be accommodated in a voluntary home. However, the records were incomplete. The Home Office's own figure for children under Fit Person Orders admitted to the care of voluntary societies in 1941 was thought to be 238, but subsequent correspondence revealed that Barnardo's alone had 239 'fit person' children admitted that year. Had more guidance been given by the Children Act 1948 and some mechanism set up for consultation between the two sectors, a better working relationship may have been established. This was not achieved until the Children and Young Persons Act 1969.

VI

The emphasis of the 1948 Act was on fostering in preference to residential care. Where residential care was deemed unavoidable, the home should be small and the child integrated into the life of the community. The voluntary sector had, like the local authorities, cared for children in large groups, and had inherited an outdated infrastructure of large homes or of groups of homes forming isolated communities. These branches were clearly out of step with the spirit of

the Act. However, by altering their client base and thus coming under the auspices of another government department, the societies could continue to use these large homes. One example of this change in direction (which was to be repeated) occurred in Lancashire, at the Edgworth branch of the NCH.

The transformation of the Edgworth branch into a residential special school for (to use the terminology of the time) 'educationally subnormal' children involved considerable negotiations with both central and local government. The branch was large, and before the war had provided accommodation for over 270 children. The NCH had planned to develop the home into a branch for children aged 11 plus and to continue to provide education on site, but such a plan was clearly out of step with post-war thinking on child care provision. The plan had been based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Education, which had, at the request of the NCH, reviewed the organisation and reported on the findings in 1936. However, the Edgworth branch was not then closed. In 1950 the executive of the NCH opened negotiations with the Ministry of Education seeking to convert the home into a residential special school.

The NCH had envisaged caring for special needs children in small groups mixed by age and gender, as it had tried to do in its ordinary branches. However, the plans were modified by the Ministry of Education, which would not agree to mixed groups. It was pointed out that, if the accommodation was for a 'single sex' group, the dormitories could sleep up to eight children without needing partitions. To underline their point, the Ministry refused to sponsor a building licence for the work involved in adapting the house for mixed occupation, as this would be less economical. The NCH had little option but to agree. The Ministry then pressed the NCH to increase the number of children it would accept. This caused problems with the residential staff, who had been promised by the executive of the society that, in recognition of the greater demands of caring for 'special needs' children, the size of the 'family groups' would be reduced to eight. The Ministry wanted the society to accept groups of around thirteen children to be accommodated in each house. Staff resignations followed. In this way the Ministry of Education was able to override and change the policy that the NCH had been pursuing in co-operation with the Home Office. By 1955 the residential special school was well established and had 102 resident pupils, the majority of whom had been referred by local education authorities and came from as far afield as Kent and Berkshire.¹⁹ The branch then ceased to be inspected by the Home Office and came under the auspices of the Department of Education.

Although many of the children living at the Edgworth branch could be considered to be 'deprived of a normal home life', the standards applied to their care under the Ministry of Education differed greatly from those applied to 'normal' children under the supervision of the Home Office. Although for several of the children Edgworth was purely a boarding school and they could look forward to going to their relatives for holidays, for others the school was their home. The 1948 Children Act had sought to end the confusion over authority for children living apart from their parents, yet it was still possible for such children to be the responsibility of different government departments. Consequently, it remained possible for different standards and priorities to be applied to these different groups of children. The infrastructure of the Edgworth branch, accommodating more than 100 children as it did, would have been frowned upon for the care of 'normal' children under the supervision of the Home Office, but was perfectly acceptable for 'educationally subnormal' children

under the Ministry of Education. Correspondence between the Home Office and the Ministry of Education in the early post-war years shows how arbitrary the arrangements for inspection of such homes was. For example, the NCH also conducted a home and school for 'crippled' children at Chipping Norton. Although the Home Office was aware that around half the children at this establishment were able bodied children 'deprived of a normal home life', the inspection of the home was passed over to the Ministry of Education, with the proviso that it should look into the residential and welfare aspects of the establishment as well.²⁰

Although the Children Act 1948 had encouraged the fostering of children, the Executive of the NCH remained committed primarily to residential care. However, its ambitious programme of building work to divide large houses into smaller 'family units' ran into difficulties, and there was a suspicion within the NCH that local authorities were looked on more favourably when applications for building permits were considered, and government grants for capital projects proved difficult to obtain.

Barnardo's shared these suspicions, as it too was trying to replace its larger homes with smaller properties. However, it also had other, unique concerns. Barnardo's had always 'boarded out' a percentage of its children, and now, encouraged by the 1948 Act, it sought to increase this proportion. Here, the ill defined relationship between the state and the voluntary sector caused major problems. Miss Dyson, the officer in charge of Barnardo's boarding-out arrangements, attempted to make contact with as many of the new Children's Officers as she could. She found wide variation between local authorities in their interpretation of the 1948 Act, which appeared to allow voluntary societies to supervise their own foster homes where they had the resources to do so, but delegated supervision to the local authority where resources were inadequate. It was unclear whether the onus was on the voluntary society to ask for help or for the local authority to assure itself that a voluntary society could fulfil the task. Barnardo's also found it difficult to compete with local authorities in finding foster homes and to match their rates of payment to foster parents.

By 1949, the Deputy General Superintendent of Barnardo's had reached the conclusion that, in future, local authorities would assume increasing responsibility for routine child care. His reports from the early 1950s reveal areas of antagonism between the organisation, the local authorities and central government. The admission figures for 1952 show that, although the Children's Officers may have considered the majority of child welfare work to be their own exclusive preserve, in practice this was far from the case. During that year 215 children were received by Barnardo's from local authority children's departments. Added to that were a further 68 children referred by the local authority education and welfare committees and regional hospital boards. These referrals by the children's departments, together with the society's own relatively high rate of private admissions, may have encouraged Barnardo's to continue seeing its role in terms of routine cases and may have discouraged a more rapid extension of its work into other areas.

By the end of 1953 certain trends had become apparent to Barnardo's, and these reflected the experience of most voluntary children's societies. There was a reduction in the need for residential care for most children, and boarding out had become increasingly difficult to arrange. The demand for places for 'special needs' and maladjusted children seemed to be increasing, although local

authorities denied that they were referring their most disruptive children to the voluntary societies. Barnardo's also experienced difficulty in recruiting staff and in matching local authority rates of pay. The average period a child stayed in residential care gradually declined, as reception into care no longer necessarily meant that the child would never be restored to his parents. There was also concern that local authorities were 'using' the voluntary societies as temporary accommodation, and recalling children when a place became available in their own children's homes.

When the Select Committee on Estimates met in 1952 to consider the costs of the local authority children's services, the voluntary societies were held up as shining examples of sound financial management. Local authority Children's Officers were asked why local authority homes appeared to be so much more expensive than voluntary homes, and it was suggested by the select committee that 'financial control was rather looser with public money than with voluntary contributions'.²¹ The Select Committee recommended an even greater use of 'boarding out', on the grounds that it was both economical and in the best interests of the child. The Committee stopped short of encouraging local authorities to place more children with voluntary societies on grounds of economy, as it was recognised that there was reluctance among some Children's Officers to delegate care, and it was not clear whether the voluntary sector had the wherewithal to provide for large numbers of additional children. The committee also noted that if voluntary societies became known as providers of residential care for the state, the charitable public would be less willing to donate to them. Unwittingly, the voluntary sector had become a yardstick – not for standards of child care, but for economic efficiency.

Within the world of child care, the financial contribution that the voluntary societies made has not been acknowledged and to a large extent has been hidden. The societies provided subsidised care for children accepted into care by the local authorities and placed in voluntary homes. Also, by accepting children referred to them by the parents themselves, they may well have relieved the local authority children's committee of the burden of care (although how true this is depends upon the admission policies of the voluntary societies and local authorities being broadly similar). A further hidden financial contribution by the voluntary societies was staff training: both the NCH and Barnardo's trained staff, some of whom went on to work in the public sector. At the local and national level, then, voluntary activity made a significant contribution by providing subsidised child care.

VII

An energetic and healthy voluntary sector had many advantages, even within an extensive welfare state. Voluntary organisations could complement and supplement state provision: they could pioneer new methods of care or explore new areas of need, and provide advice or assistance in areas considered to be controversial. As far as the voluntary children's societies were concerned, they aimed to set a high standard of care for the state to follow and to act as a watchdog on the public sector. It may have been that, since residential child care was deemed by the 1948 Act to be the least favourable method of care, and therefore was in some minds controversial, the government was happy to let this form of provision remain partly in voluntary sector hands. Although the voluntary homes did supplement, and therefore duplicate, the work of the local authorities, this did not result in empty beds in local authority homes and the

consequent higher costs. On the contrary, the knowledge that the local authorities had voluntary homes to fall back on allowed them to reduce their residential provision to a minimum. Here the voluntary sector acted as a safety net for the state.

The early 1950s was a time of negotiation for the voluntary societies. By 1953 it had become clear that many local authorities preferred to provide their own residential care rather than refer cases to voluntary homes. Within the NCH there had been moves towards providing a new specialised service for distinct groups of children (for example, the residential special school at Edgworth), but the society wanted to retain its interest in the routine care of children wherever it felt that the religious ethos of its care would make an important contribution. However, by 1954 the Home Office was urging the voluntary societies to become involved in specialised care for children with special needs and in work that the local authorities could not do, such as preventive family casework. It seemed that there was no role for the voluntary societies in routine child care provision, and that the voluntary residential care of children would die a natural death.²²

However, local authorities were not able to discontinue the use of voluntary homes altogether, and the existence of voluntary home accommodation allowed local authority provision to be kept to a minimum. The picture is further complicated by the influence that local councillors and local politics could wield: for example, Kent County Council relied quite heavily upon voluntary residential provision, and the children's committee chairman had to justify why his committee was not making an even greater use of voluntary homes. There were several reasons for this reliance. Firstly, the Kent Children's Committee included representatives of Barnardo's, who pressed the case for voluntary child care. Secondly, the financial benefits of utilising the voluntary societies were appreciated by the Council. Thirdly, voluntary societies were historically well represented in Kent and the Council had a tradition of using these homes before the 1948 Act.

A study of voluntary children's homes during this period reveals a complex pattern of relationships forming between voluntary agencies, central government and local authorities. Although mutual suspicion still existed between local authorities and the voluntary sector, there was evidence of a greater willingness to co-ordinate their work, and a recognition by the voluntary societies of the need to broaden the services they offered. Organisations such as Barnardo's and the NCH were involved in complex negotiations with central and local government, and could manipulate a situation by changing the profile of the children they provided for (as the NCH did at Edgworth), or by seeking representation on the new local authority children's committees. However, tension existed between the voluntary children's societies and the Home Office, as there seemed to be a conviction among some civil servants that residential care should become almost a thing of the past.

References

1. University of Liverpool Special Collections and Archives (hereafter ULSCA) D541 J78/1/1, Minutes of Executive Committee, Swansea Orphanage for Girls, 24 March 1947.
2. Quoted in Cunningham, H., *The Children of the Poor*, Oxford, 1991, p. 224.

3. For a discussion of the impact of the First World War on child welfare, see Dwork, D., *War is Good for Babies and Other Young Children*, London, 1987.
4. See Parker, R.A., 'Gestation of Reform: the Children Act of 1948' in Bean, P., and MacPherson, S. (eds), *Approaches to Welfare*, London, 1983, p. 197. Parker claims that in 1943 an informal committee within the Ministry of Health feared that as many as 10,000 children would be unable to return to their homes for various reasons after the war and that provision would have to be made for their care. The numbers proved to be much smaller, and in 1948 the local authority children's departments took responsibility for around 1,500 children displaced by the war.
5. Report of the Care of Children Committee, HMSO, Cmd 6922, London 1946, pp 160ff.
6. Lady Allen of Hurtwood, *Whose Children?*, n.d. [circa July 1945], p.31.
7. Lady Allen, op.cit., p. 11.
8. See Tiratsoo, N. (ed), *The Attlee Years*, London, 1991.
9. Fielding, S., Thompson, P., and Tiratsoo, N., *England Arise!*, Manchester, 1995, p. 218.
10. Radford, A., *Goodwill in a Great Society*, NCSS, 1948, p. 13.
11. Hansard Parliamentary Debates (House of Lords), Fifth Series, vol. 163, col. 119, 23 June 1949.
12. Dr Garbett, *The Times*, 29 December 1948.
13. H.O. Jones has argued that Conservative welfare policy in the early post-war years was the product of tension between the 'paternalist' and 'liberal' sections of the party. Both sections, however, would view voluntarism favourably. To the 'paternalist', voluntarism emphasised the individual's obligation to others, whereas to the 'liberal' the voluntary sector could be a stimulus for individual effort and enterprise by reducing public spending and the tax burden. See Jones, H.O., *The Conservative Party and the Welfare State*, PhD thesis (unpublished), University of London, 1992.
14. ULSCA D239/D3/3/a, Minutes of the NCACH, North East Region, 18 March 1948.
15. Hansard, Parliamentary Debates (House of Lords), Fifth Series, vol. 153, col. 939, 10 February 1948.
16. ULSCA D239/C1/5/3, Minutes of meeting, 5 November 1948.
17. ULSCA D239/D3/3/a/8a, Minutes of the NCACH, 6 February 1953.
18. Public Records Office (hereafter PRO), MOH 102/1288, Memorandum, 17 June 1943.
19. ULSCA D541 J27/1/9, Minutes of the Local Committee, Edgworth.
20. PRO ED32/1878, Letter from Miss MacGregor (Home Office) to Mr Neyland (Ministry of Education), 26 August 1949.

21. See *Sixth Report of the Select Committee on Estimates*, HMSO, 1952, pages xxii–xxiv.

22. In an address to the NCACH in January 1954, Miss Rosling of the Home Office Children's Department suggested that voluntary organisations should concentrate on areas of provision that the state could not provide and should move away from duplicating statutory provision. See ULSCA D239/D3/a/8a, Minutes of NCACH, 29 January 1954.

Other papers produced by the Society:

- ▶ Voluntary but not Amateur: Philanthropic Responses to Poverty 1847-1854
Read
- ▶ The Origins of Flag Days
Read
- ▶ Voluntary Action of Membership Organisations: Countrywomen Organise their Own Education
Read
- ▶ The English University Settlements 1884-1939: A Social Movement Becalmed?
Read

registered charity no: 1044549

Voluntary Action History Society,
c/o Dr Justin Davis Smith,
Institute for Volunteering Research,
8 All Saints Street,
London N1 9RL.
UK
Tel: +44 (0)20 7520 8900
Fax: +44 (0)20 7520 8910
E-mail: Instvolres@aol.com
www.ivr.org.uk/vahs.htm