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Historical themes in child welfare

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Historical themes in child welfare
The emergence of early child welfare structures

Nick Frost

Introduction

This chapter explores an historical perspective on the emergence of global child welfare systems. It uses two major examples from the growth of philanthropy in the English-speaking world as a starting point and then moves on to highlight twentieth-century developments. Examples are drawn primarily from England, but it is argued that this material has a wider global resonance (the chapter is designed to be read alongside Chapter 1 of this book where Linda Pollock explores the history of childhood).

This historical material will be utilized to explore a number of key issues:

• What is the relationship between the ‘private’ nature of the setting the child is raised in – the nuclear family, the extended family or the community – and how and when should the State intervene in this private arena? (see Donzelot, 1979, for an extended discussion of these issues).
• When intervention takes place, should this come from the state, the private sector or non-governmental (philanthropic/charitable) agencies?
• What principles should the intervention draw on – should the intervention be child-centred, protective or family service-based, for example (see Parton, Chapter 17, this volume)?

These developments are explored throughout this book in detail in many of the chapters – the aim of this chapter is to provide an historical context for the discussions that follow later in this volume.

The Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital – an early child welfare institution

The Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital is often identified as an early English child welfare institution where care was provided for children separated from family or community. The institution was established in 1739 and took the first children on 25 March 1741. Earlier examples of child welfare institutions can be found (see the discussion in Frost, Mills and Stein, 1999),
but the Coram Hospital can perhaps be seen as the start of the era of dominance of the child welfare field by philanthropists. Foundling hospitals emerged across Europe and formed part of what has been referred to as a ‘European foundling system’ (see Panter-Brick and Smith, 2000). The primary example is perhaps the ‘Hospital of the Innocent’, known as the Innocenti, which today houses a UNICEF research centre. The Innocenti, for some of its history, had a depository where mothers could leave their babies anonymously (Viazzo, Bartolotta and Zannotto, 2000).

The Coram hospital use of the term ‘foundling’ is misleading: the phrase refers to abandoned babies, but usually the Coram babies were admitted by a mother who was unable to care for them. Initially babies under two months of age were admitted, although this was later increased to those under 12 months of age. The hospital provided them with shelter, nurturance and training to enable them to move to adult life. The term hospital was used in a wider sense to offer hospitality and as well as addressing ill-health (www.coram.org.uk/our-heritage-foundling-hospital/children-foundling-hospital).

The Coram ‘foundlings’ were baptised into the Church of England and given a new name in order to symbolize their rescue and their new lives. Many of the children were born ‘out of wedlock’ and suffered stigma as a result: a new start was regarded as necessary to give them the best chance of a productive and moral life. Mothers left tokens or symbols with their children – often divided in two in the hope that one day mother and child, and the tokens, would be reunited. The tokens included coins, scraps of ribbon or sometimes a label from barrel of ale. The heartache and pain of parent–child separation is graphically illustrated by this practice. The Coram website reports one such illustrative example:

‘Pray let particular care be taken of this little child’ read one note pinned to the clothing of little Florella Burley, born on June 19th, 1758. ‘You have my heart, though we must part’: the engraving on a heart-shaped, silver-coloured token.


Some children grew to be successful adults, as the following example illustrates:

For children like John Brownlow, the Foundling Hospital provided the chance of a better life. After growing up in the care of the Hospital, he became a clerk in the secretary’s office in 1814. He rose through the ranks, becoming Treasurer’s Clerk and later Foundling Hospital Secretary in 1849 with a salary of £460 a year. When he retired after 58 years of service, the governors praised his ‘benevolent and charitable’ life in which he ‘devoted himself to the discharge of his duties with an energy and zeal beyond’.


Despite these occasional success stories, the mortality rate was high (Rose, 1986, p. 2). Val Fildes, in her extensive research on the role of wet nursing in the history of childhood, reports that:

At first, the [Coram] hospital employed only two wet nurses, and in the first three months 90 foundlings were taken in at a rate of 30 a month. They were assigned to dry or wet nurses, with over two thirds being fed by hand. The relative mortality was 19% in the case of the wet nursed and 53% of those dry nursed.

Fildes, 1988, p. 60
The foundling hospital children were raised to undertake gendered occupations – mainly household service for young women and the trades or armed forces for young men.

The Coram Foundling Hospital attracted much support and what we today would call ‘celebrity endorsement’ from the nobility and middle classes – including, for example, George Fredrick Handel. Throughout its history the hospital had a high-profile Board of Governors – including successful traders and members of the nobility. The theme of class divisions being expressed through the provision of child welfare emerges strongly from this early example.

In terms of our introduction to the historical themes, the experience at the Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital suggests the following issues which are relevant throughout this study:

• The role of innovation and philanthropy in the early foundations of child welfare.
• The emphasis on separation of parent/child as opposed to a focus on supporting parents to raise their children.
• The central role of social inequality – with the wealthy and high-social status groups providing services for the poor.
• The origins of many child welfare practices – including institutional provision, meticulous case recording and ‘boarding out’ with wet nurses being amongst the examples emerging from this case study.
• The gendered nature of leaving care/training for adulthood.

While the Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital offers an example of an early child welfare institution, it remained the case that by the start of the nineteenth century very few child welfare organizations existed. Children in need could be left to die, were dependent on their communities to care for them or perhaps would be accommodated in the residual state child welfare settings (the workhouses in Great Britain, which often feature in the novels of Charles Dickens, for example).

From early origins to the dominance of philanthropy

The mid-period of the nineteenth century saw the emergence of child welfare organizations in England many of which are still with us today – albeit with different names, as demonstrated in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 illustrates the significant growth of child welfare organizations during the mid-nineteenth century. The forces leading to this are complex and numerous and are related to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Original name</th>
<th>Contemporary name</th>
<th>Year founded</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Barnardo’s</td>
<td>Barnardo’s</td>
<td>1868</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Waifs and Strays Society</td>
<td>The Children’s Society</td>
<td>1881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Children’s Homes</td>
<td>Action for Children</td>
<td>1869</td>
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wider conceptions of childhood that are reflected upon by Linda Pollock in Chapter 1 of this volume. The key drivers of the growth of nineteenth-century child welfare institutions perhaps include the following:

- Developing urbanization, which highlighted the needs of children and disrupted traditional family and rural communities.
- The growth of an urban middle class who witnessed child poverty and neglect – and were often the pioneers of the emerging child welfare organizations.
- The impact of religion, which often formed the ethical base of the emergent organizations.
- The national need for a skilled, nourished and educated workforce that required a protected period of childhood.

These and other social and economic forces coalesced to lead to a rapidly developing and emergent philanthropic sector. Each organization has its own specific and unique history (see Gordon, 1988, on the United States and Ferguson, 2004, on the English Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, for example), but common strands are certainly present. The situation in the United States of America is summarized as follows, reflecting many of themes identified above:

Charitable organisations on the nineteenth century were, for the most part, responding to the social effects of economic change. The panic of 1837, which lasted until the mid-1840s for example profoundly influenced New York City charities. With unemployment estimated at 33%, cynicism and suspicion replaced the optimism and pious fervor of the previous decade’s evangelical missions to the poor. Losing faith in the power of religion to reform, charity workers began to think of the poor and unemployed in terms previously associated only with the so called ‘vicious poor’ – criminals and alcoholics.

Nelson, 1996, p. 46

While each of them had a specific history, the emerging philanthropic institutions also had many shared features. First, they were often led by pioneering and charismatic males – Dr Thomas Barnardo, being perhaps the most famous British example. The caring role, however, often belonged to women:

From the onset of the orphanage system and continuing into the 1920s and 1930s, board members and ‘lady manager’ volunteers assumed many task currently assigned to professionals. Middle class and upper class women, with servants at home, assumed supervisory tasks as an extension into the community of normal tasks with their own families. Volunteer boards not only oversaw budget and made policy, but also made decisions regarding admissions and discharges and approval or disappointment of families to whom the children were to return or be placed out or adopted, and governed many other phases of the children’s lives, deciding what they would eat, wear, and how much and how they would work and play. Board members and ‘lady managers’ were regularly present at the institutions and oversaw their functioning.

Smith, 1996, p. 124

Second, the charitable organizations became very influential in campaigning for legal reform and government intervention – on issues such as child labour, education, incest and child abuse. In Great Britain this led eventually to the first comprehensive legislative framework provided
by the Children Act and the Prevention of Incest Act, 1908. The organizations outlined Table 2.1 campaigned successfully on a whole range of child welfare concerns, a role they still play today – often very effectively.

Third, they pioneered a range of child welfare interventions: the orphanage, the home visit, foster care (‘boarding out’), case records and child migration to name just a few. The tension between institutional care and family-based care provides a golden thread through the history of child welfare (an issue addressed in Chapter 20 of this volume by Mollidor and Berridge).

. . . between 1830 and 1860 orphan asylums became the nation’s predominant method of caring for dependent children. By the 1880s, however, orphan asylums were facing heavy criticism, usually accompanied by arguments favouring placing children with families. It was no coincidence that Charles Loring Brace, the most famous critic of asylums, was also the nation’s most influential advocate of placing-out. Under Brace’s guidance, the old concept of indenture took on a new form that shared as much with modern day family foster care as with indenture.

Hasci, 1996, p. 159

The debate between institutional and family-based care was a long one:

The decline in the use of institutions was preceded by at least 60 years of debate, and the conclusion, after the first 40, that family care was preferable to institutionalization.

Smith, 1996, p. 124

Fourth, the child welfare institutions prepared children for the transition to adulthood – often through gender-based training such as entering the service sector for young women and skilled trades or the armed forces for young men (Frost, Mills and Stein, 1999).

Fifth, as we have seen, they mobilized the middle class as both volunteers and fundraisers as a central element of their strategy.

The nineteenth century then was a period of transition – from child welfare institutions and legislation being sparse at the start of the century – to a strong and powerful philanthropic sector and an emerging state sector, based in an emerging legal framework, by the close of the twentieth century.

We move on now to explore one example of child welfare practice that emerged in the early days of child welfare organizations. This example is that of child migration – a practice which has global implications and resonates with many themes explored throughout this volume.

Child migration from Great Britain – the displaced children of Empire

In the twenty-first century we have witnessed that one of the major child welfare challenges is the mass displacement of children from war and conflict zones. Hundreds of thousands of children have been displaced from Iraq, Syria, Somalia and Sudan, for example, since the dawn of the present century. However, from 1619 until the early 1960s the flow of children was in the other direction – the world’s leading industrial and colonial power, Great Britain, was transporting its own children overseas: they were unaccompanied and separated from their birth families. The story of this practice is highly relevant to our exploration of the origins of child welfare:
Although well-rooted in living memory, child migration schemes had existed in various guises since the 17th century. In 1619, the Virginia Company took 100 street children from the City of London to Virginia in order to supply labour to the plantation owners. Some were as young as 10, deemed, like their 19th century counterparts, a nuisance to the authorities and a burden to the taxpayers; moreover, they were suspected of spreading the plague! This set a precedent, and in 1622 the Council for New England also asked for poor children to be sent to them, and so the emigration of children to the colonies began.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 13

These transporting schemes were in the most part organized by the emerging philanthropic organizations, supported by organized religion and the state: the children were largely the poor and the orphaned. They were sent to all corners of the British Empire – mainly to Australia, but also to the early American colonies, the West Indies, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. The patterns of migration changed over the decades:

Thousands of children were transported to the American and West Indian colonies between 1615 and 1776 (before the American Revolution), and to Australia between 1787 and 1868. When the first fleet sailed to Australia in 1787 it carried children such as 13 year old Elizabeth Hayward – a clog maker tried at the Old Bailey for stealing a linen dress and silk bonnet – among the 717 convicts on board.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 13

We can discern a number of motivations in terms of the philanthropic organizations backed and supported by the state. First, it was felt that the children required ‘rescue’. They were to be rescued from the dirt, squalor and immorality of their birth families and, once industrialization emerged, from the negative influences of the urban environment: overcrowding, incest and alcohol. The evangelical need to ‘rescue’ children was primary amongst these:

Into the chaos stepped several philanthropists, most of them imbued with an evangelical mission to spread the word of God and rescue the poor from sin. They set to work with energy and dedication, setting up shelters for the destitute and schools and homes for their young. But the stream of those in need was never-ending and, as unemployment rose in the late 1860s, charities and Poor Law Unions began to send people to Canada, releasing space in the workhouse to accommodate others.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 7

This emphasis on rescue can again be seen in the American context, where Charles Brace founded the Children’s Aid Society in 1853:

The children, Brace felt, were ‘much superior to the parents’. If caught in time, they could be saved from vice, beggary and filth. Brace believed that many poor children, even if they were not orphans, had no semblance of the family life he advocated for all Americans, ‘their memory if home is a damp cellar, where they were kicked and cuffed. The gentle influences moulding childhood were curses and foul words, and bitter hunger and poverty’. He emphasized their innocence, asserting that their foresight could not be connected directly to laziness, want if foresight, or vice but seemed to stem from distant social evils.

Nelson, 1996, p. 50
One leading and high-profile British pioneer was Thomas Barnardo, who provides a prime example of a champion of emigration as a solution to the problems outlined by Brace:

Barnardo began his reforming work on city streets, as did fellow evangelicals Annie Macpherson, William Quarrier and James Fegan, and like them he was horrified by the scale of deprivation that he saw. The hopeless situation of children surrounded by poverty and vice particularly appalled him, and he was brought close to despair in seeing ‘Young men and women crowded together in pestilential rookeries without the least provision for decency’. Barnardo came to dominate the child migration field, not least through his talents for fund raising and promotion, and his relentless determination was to arouse both admiration and controversy in those who witnessed his dramatic rise.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 90

The destination for the children and young people had to be clean, spacious and thus encouraging of a new morality. The open spaces of the colonies offered these qualities – fresh air, space and the opportunity to be an active, productive and moral citizen:

From the point of view of workhouse authorities and child-rescuers, emigrating children had practical advantages. It gave children from the city slums a new chance, rescuing them from moral as well as physical decay. Life in Canada was healthier, and in general the Canadians were regarded as more pious. It was also very much cheaper to send the children to work in Canada than to bring them up at the British rate payer’s expense, followed by a possible future of destitution or crime.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 8

Barnardo himself stated that:

If the children of the slums can be removed from their surroundings early enough, and can be kept sufficiently long under training, heredity counts for little, environment for everything.

Barnardo quoted in Heywood, 1978, p. 53

Of course, whilst the fresh air and open space was welcome it could not offer a magical solution, as Milly Sanderson, a teacher employed by Barnardo observed:

Canadian sunshine is bright and Canadian air is pure, but I never yet have heard that they have the power to renovate corrupt hearts or reform evil lives.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 99

Second, a motivation existed for the philanthropists planning the migration of children around the idea of Empire. The children were ‘children of the Empire’ and could carry the British values of hard work, Christianity and loyalty to the ‘far-flung’ corners of the Empire. The countries that made up the British Empire required labour, leadership and people to carry British values – qualities potentially represented by the children of poverty and disadvantage, from British backgrounds. Thus two challenges – child rescue and imperialism – were addressed by one solution:
In the early 20th century, a new force reared its head – one that the British government could support wholeheartedly: imperialism. The child-rescuers began to change their tune, with Barnardo describing his children sent overseas as ‘Bricks for empire-Building’. An imperial vision of Dominions prospering under young settlers of good British stock complemented the moral benefits of child migration. . . . The philanthropists sought to remove them from inauspicious conditions to new environments in which they had the chance to make different lives for themselves. In Canada, they were placed in the open spaces and clean air of the countryside, away from the city and its temptations – certain to strengthen them and make them healthy in body and spirit.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 9

Poverty and single parenthood were primary amongst the root causes of the perceived need to migration:

Half of the children emigrated by Barnardo were from one parent families, usually widows unable to support their children. Once her husband had died, a widow found herself in difficult circumstances. If she received any help at all from friends or relatives, or if she moved from her husband’s parish, she was likely to lose poor relief. And the kind of work available to her as a woman would not provide the income needed to support herself and her children.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 111

Here is a fundamental tension in child welfare: when should children by supported within the birth family and when should they be ‘rescued’ or ‘separated’? In order to support children we need both universal services for all families (see the discussion in Chapter 6 of this volume) and also more targeted support where there are specific problems – such as domestic violence (see Chapters 15 and 16 in this volume).

What were the experiences of these children and young people? Clearly given the hundreds of years that the process went on for and the thousands of children involved, experiences varied greatly. There can be little doubt, however, that this was an adult-led and adult-focused system:

The system, if it can be called such was weighted entirely in favour of the adults; the children were never asked their opinion and their feelings were ignored. Many felt the process of selection to be humiliating, almost as if they were animals being purchased, and a demoralizing end to a long trip over sea and another journey on land. Other adjustments were demanded too. They had been part of a noisy group of children, sharing new experiences, and the people in charge of them were at least familiar. Suddenly they were parted from friends and, very often, siblings, and taken to a remote farm to live with strangers. Sometimes these strangers turned out to be kind, sometimes not. Whatever the circumstances, and much of this depended on luck, the anticipation of the journey was over – the new life was about to begin.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 89

Some went on to become powerful and rich landowners or industrialists, but most seem to have experienced some emotional trauma and often physical and sexual abuse. The children’s voices, remarkably, remained silent until the 1970s when some brave individuals heard the voices of the then adults who had experienced migration (see Humphreys, 1996, for case studies of this).
Many young people spoke of the experience of physical and/or sexual abuse, sometimes at the hands of farmers they had been placed with and, as has since been extensively documented, in church-based institutions, such as the Christian Brothers in Australia:

Whether in Australia or Canada, life as a child migrant was often hard. Institutions could be bleak, strict and lacking in affection, so much depended on the character of those looking after the children, and this was largely a matter of luck. Children left the orphanages and farm schools around the age of 15 or 16 – many were younger and were sent out into the world with very little support. Boys worked long hours as farm hands in unfamiliar terrain, grappling with searing heat or bitter cold: Girls’ options were even more limited, as they were sent into domestic service and only the exceptional ones could develop and form of career. Systems of aftercare were often very limited or ineffective, and the children’s loneliness and isolation also kept them vulnerable to abuse.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 10

Eventually the Christian Brothers apologized for the sexual and physical abuse of children:

We, the Christian Brothers of today, unreservedly apologize to those individuals who were the victims of abuse in these institutions.

Humphreys, 1996, p. 34

The theme of stigma – again a recurrent one in the history of child welfare – emerges from this account by a young person sent to Canada by Barnardo:

One Barnardo boy arrived in Canada in 1915 describes his time there in bleak terms. . . . I realised we were just chattels for Canadian farmers. We were never allowed to forget that we were lucky to be alive; you really were a nobody. . . . Their attitude was I was there to work, not sit around in school, so I was doomed to be just a labourer.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 115

Of course experiences varied and some of the young migrants experienced satisfaction about their new lives, expressed as follows:

I am very satisfied with the employment. Meals and accommodation are very good.

It is a very interesting job, and I am not overworked. We are getting on well together. They are a very nice family and are treating me as one of the family.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 224

Many young people experienced emotional, mental health and relationship issues. Children sent abroad by Barnardo and others were often misled about their family. There are tragic examples of young people being split from their siblings, and many examples of children being told that they had been abandoned by parents or had been orphaned when, in fact, parents were writing letters and desperately trying to get in touch with them. Margaret Humphreys, who played a major part in speaking out for the migrant children in the late twentieth century, writes movingly about this issue as follows:

The philanthropists and the child ‘care’ agencies appear to have wanted to sever any links the children might otherwise have had with their families or country. They were so successful
that many migrants are still totally convinced that their mother and father were dead. Yet after researching 1000s of cases in the past seven years, I can safely say that I have found only one child who could properly be called an orphan.

Humphreys, 1994, p. 363

This has a profound impact on people’s sense of identity and belonging: another historic theme which people in the care system still experience today.

It is also clear that our values and perspectives change over time: attitudes to child maltreatment, child labour and large-scale institutionalization, for example, are very different today to those held in the nineteenth century. Attitudes to child migration changed too, a shift we probably began around the start of the Second World War:

The need for change in child migration has been signalled in a series of reports on farm schools undertaken during the Second World War. They prompted the British Government to commission W. Garnett, Official Secretary to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom in Australia, to prepare a report in response. Garnett was to explore conditions not only at Fairbridge Farm Schools, but also at the Barnardo Farm School at Picton and in schools run by the Christian Brothers.

Kershaw and Sacks, 2008, p. 215

Towards the end of the twentieth century, child migration was regarded as a ‘scandal’ – a recurrent word in the history of child welfare.

Again in the context of this volume we are interested in the key themes emerging from our historical study. These themes include:

• The removal of children from poor families, particular those perceived to have moral shortfalls.
• The contrast made between the immoral, overcrowded spaces of urbanization and the fresh air and space of the colonies.
• The religious motivation of the philanthropists who pioneered new ‘solutions’ to the challenges of child welfare.
• The key role of high-profile philanthropists in mobilizing resources as well as political and public support for their initiatives.
• The search for international solutions to child welfare problems – see Chapter 19 on international adoption, for an example.

The twentieth century

The twentieth century saw the modernization of the child welfare world. The following features can be identified:

• The continuing growth, wider reach and embedding of the nineteenth-century philanthropic sector
• The growth of state-based child welfare
• The development of national and international legal frameworks
• The emergence of a wide range of child welfare professionals
• Education and training for child welfare professionals
• A strengthening focus on the ‘best interests of the child’.

Each of these will be explored briefly below.
The continuing growth, wider reach and embedding of the nineteenth-century philanthropic sector

The philanthropic child welfare bodies we have explored that tended to emerge in the nineteenth century changed and evolved during the twentieth century. Most of the larger ones thrived and shifted focus – often from the provision of direct services, often large orphanages – to have an increasing focus on prevention and campaigning; this is the case with both Barnardo’s and National Children’s Homes (Action for Children), for example, in the United Kingdom.

The growth of state-based child welfare

The most notable change in modern Western societies was the growth of child welfare provision (see Chapter 6 in this volume) – models varied across the world, from universalist to more selective service provision. The state faced many challenges in the field of child welfare. The state often faces political pressure to provide for vulnerable children – orphans, children with disabilities and abused children being amongst these categories. Effective child welfare services require investment and therefore the state needs to make decisions about taxation and expenditure patterns. High levels of investment are required as poor-quality child welfare services can be politically contentious – the Romanian orphanages being just one high-profile example. State intervention also faces value challenges around respecting and maintaining the privacy of the family and assessing when intervention is appropriate. Different states have reached differing approaches: authoritarian states, including fascist and communist societies, have been heavily interventionist in relation to childhood, neoliberal and free market societies less so.

The development of national international legal frameworks

Our historical discussion has shed light on the uneven development of child welfare – we have witnessed how policy and practice has shifted historically and geographically. Since 1989 the international reference point has been the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Convention has 54 articles that cover all aspects of the lives of children and young people, that is all those under the age of 18. This was a shift towards seeing children as the carriers of rights – rather than the passive recipients of care and charity. We have seen the consequences of this in our previous discussion. The UNCRC has been ratified by all member states of the United Nations, with the exception of the United States of America.

A strengthening focus on the ‘best interests of the child’

If one phrase dominates the rhetoric of modern child welfare practice it is ‘the best interests of the child’ – one of the four principles of the UNCRC. This phrase appears in legislation internationally and is often provided as a direction for policy and practice development. Whilst the phrase is no doubt helpful it does pose many dilemmas, including: who decides what the best interest are? What if the child wishes do not appear to be in the best interests of the child?

An emerging emphasis on children’s rights and participation

Alongside the focus on the ‘best interests of the child’ and again largely stimulated by the UNHRC has been an increasing focus on children’s rights and participation. It would now be unusual to find a child welfare project that does not aspire to the participation of children and young
people. All over the world we witness the growth of children’s councils, children’s parliaments and active methods for involving children and young people in child welfare developments. Indeed it could be argued that child welfare as a field has made greater steps forward in this area than say education or health as a field.

The emergence of the child welfare professions

One of the most significant changes of the twentieth century was the growth of the child welfare professions – child social work, child psychology, paediatrics, child nursing, youth workers, play workers and so on are now discrete professions. This is underpinned by professional training that emerged in the late nineteenth century and was consolidated throughout the twentieth century. Whilst there is still a role for the volunteer, the field has now shifted so that it is now dominated by the professional and the professions. Whilst all professions have discrete features, the existence of professional training, accreditation, registration and continuing professional development will be found in most of the child welfare professions.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide a summary of some key historical themes in child welfare. Of course, the chapter has been focused and partial and each nation state will have their own specific and unique history of child welfare. However, by exploring an early child welfare institution (Coram) and an early child welfare practice (child migration) with global resonance we hope that the chapter has generated some themes with wider global implications.

In the introduction to this chapter we suggested three key questions on which the chapter is designed to shed light:

• What is the relationship between the ‘private’ nature of the setting in which the child is raised – the nuclear family, the extended family or the community – and how and when should the State intervene?
• When intervention takes place should this come from the state, the private sector or non-governmental (philanthropic/charitable) agencies?
• What principles should the intervention draw on – should the intervention be child-centred, protective or family service-based? (See Parton, Chapter 12, in this volume.)

How has the chapter shed light on these three questions? Let us explore each in turn.

• What is the relationship between the ‘private’ nature of the setting in which the child is raised – the nuclear family, the extended family or the community – and how and when should the State intervene?

In this chapter we have seen that prior to the emergence of the early child welfare organizations, families and communities were left alone to raise the child, or sometimes, decided to abandon the child. The early child welfare organizations intervened and either supported the family in raising the child or ‘rescued’ the child from what were perceived as failing families. These interventions were always and remain to this day controversial. When a child dies at the hands of their parents this issue is often addressed: should the child protective services have intervened earlier and more authoritatively? The interventions we have outlined earlier were controversial in this way: Barnardo was criticised for his role on child migration, for example.
• When intervention takes place should this come from the state, the private sector or non-governmental (philanthropic/charitable) agencies?

We have seen in this chapter that the early child welfare institutions were charitable or philanthropic in nature. State structures, say at the start of the nineteenth century, were too underdeveloped to offer a comprehensive child welfare services. As child welfare issues became more visible during the nineteenth century – partly as a result of increasing urbanization – it fell to the Church and charities, supported by wealthy individuals, to address the challenges of child welfare. The charities often have a close relationship with the state, requiring legal support or campaigning for change being part of their role.

• What principles should the intervention draw on – should the intervention be child-centred, protective or family service-based?

The principles in which child welfare interventions are embedded emerged during the period explored in this chapter. Some early philanthropic organizations were based on ‘rescuing’ children from what were perceived as situations neglectful of immoral family conditions: child migration in a sense is the extreme example of this. The child is rescued and then transported many thousands of miles as part of this process – so that the rescue includes a totally new environment. As the twentieth century progressed, the emphasis on ‘rescue’ arguably declined and family support and prevention were strengthened (see Frost, Abbott and Race, 2015).

References