

## 5.4 Women's Group on Public Welfare Report (1951)

5.4.1 The Women's Group on Public Welfare (which incidentally Margaret Bondfield had founded in 1938) had already published in 1948 a report on *The Neglected Child and its Family*, based on research carried out in 1946-7. Soon afterwards, in 1948, just a year after child migration to Australia had been resumed, the Group set up the Child Emigration Committee. Its members represented the National Association for Mental Health, the Church of England Moral Welfare Council, the Women's Liberal Federation, the Family Welfare Association, the YWCA and the British Federation of Social Workers, plus one co-opted member. It was not an official inquiry, but the report it produced, published by the National Council of Social Service, is important because the group had clearly been affected by wartime and post-war changes in welfare services, new thinking on the needs of children, and a perceived need to review the practice of child migration as 'a matter of social conscience' (p.6).<sup>75</sup>

5.4.2 The report did not argue for the prohibition of child migration, but it did strongly recommend changes if it were to continue (p.17). It urged that professionally qualified social workers with an understanding of the emotional needs of children should be involved in selecting children for emigration, along with a committee made up of people with a knowledge of children's needs and with first-hand knowledge of conditions in the receiving countries. Most importantly, the principal criterion should *not* be 'whether the child is suited for emigration, but whether emigration is best suited to his particular needs' (p.59).<sup>76</sup> If emigration were to be approved, several other matters needed to be considered.

5.4.3 These included the advisability of not separating brothers and sisters and older and younger children but of keeping siblings together (p.42), the pre-emigration training of children (pp.33-4, 59), the training and the number of escorts caring for children on voyages and after arrival (pp.34-5, 41, 60), the accommodation of children in small cottage homes only (pp.41, 60), the education of British child migrants alongside local children to prevent their institutionalisation (pp.43-4, 60), the careful selection and training of resident staff and of aftercare officers (p.61), and the maintenance and availability to all parties of detailed records for each child before *and* after migration (pp.31-2, 61) – for the sending agencies 'cannot divest themselves of responsibility for that child's subsequent welfare' (p.20).

5.4.4 Moreover, the committee was concerned that voluntary organisations sending child migrants overseas were subject to far less scrutiny than cases in which special licenses were being applied for in the UK for a child to be adopted overseas (pp.64-5). The committee also worried about the legality and practice of fostering and about the legal guardianship of children sent overseas (p.62). In sum, while the report did not explicitly criticise the concept of child migration (and the report contains no overt references to child abuse of any kind), its recommendations were in conformity with the insistent recommendations of the Curtis Committee.

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<sup>75</sup> *Child Migration, a Study made in 1948-50 by a Committee of the Women's Group on Public Welfare*, National Council of Social Service, London, 1951.

<sup>76</sup> A very similar phrase is contained in British Federation of Social Workers, 'Child Emigration: Importance of Careful Selection', June 1948, one of three papers submitted to the Home Office by organisations represented on the Women's Group during debates on the Children Bill: TNA, MH102/1562.