

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

- Apart from the obvious, fundamental principles of not sending young children thousands of miles away from their families, and giving them honest accounts of their identity and family background, there are many lessons to be learnt from child migration policy and its consequences.
- These relate not only to the way that child migrants and their families were treated at the time, but also to the subsequent actions - and inaction - of government and other agencies involved.
- All of these lessons are relevant to current and future policies and practices relating to child welfare both nationally and internationally.
- We have listed the key lessons under the four themes identified last October by the IICSA Chair for the Inquiry's recommendations, though some could be included in more than one category:

1. CULTURAL

- **Never be dazzled or intimidated by big names, whether individuals or organisations:** the institutions involved in child migration were household names, often with royal patronage and high-level political connections. In addition to the considerable power and influence these institutions wielded behind the scenes, it is clear that the decisions of Ministers and senior officials in government were skewed by their perceived ability to drive public opinion.
- **Mistreatment and physical abuse are on the same continuum as sexual abuse:** It is true that not all the critical reports submitted to the government referred specifically to sexual abuse. However, the signs were there if anyone had been willing to investigate further. Malnourishment, poor health, lack of cleanliness, intolerable living conditions, urine-soaked bedding, etc were all clear signals of abuse and mistreatment that observed few boundaries.

2. STRUCTURAL

- **Maintain consistently a good minimum standard of care for *each and every* child:** significantly different standards were applied between children in care in the UK and those sent overseas. Moreover, the Home Secretary had to approve the migration of each child from Local Authority care but no such scrutiny was applied to children in the care of voluntary agencies. There are no second class children so second rate standards should not be tolerated for particular groups of children. Minimum standards were never applied in the worst institutions in respect of key issues including education, working hours, corporal punishment, health care and personal identity.
- **Set clear standards and monitor rigorously:** in other words, never trust without verifying. There were no common standards enforced on the Homes receiving child migrants and no standard inspection mechanisms. And many of the arrangements that did exist fell into disuse. The responsibility for monitoring the welfare of the children was fragmented and inspections were neither frequent nor robust. These were critical failures for children who lacked strong advocates.
- **Avoid group-think:** it is clear that politicians and other key figures of the day were largely blinded by the promise of an idyllic, new world overseas with its potential for a fresh start. As a result, it seems that insufficient effort was made to seek evidence to evaluate consistently whether the policy was achieving its objectives or was just wishful thinking.