

'The devoted, the dull, the desperate and the deviant'

The Staff Problem in Traditional Residential Care

Barry M Coldrey

'The devoted, the dull, the desperate and the deviant',
The staff problem in traditional residential care

* Editor: Barry M Coldrey, 1939 –

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‘The Devoted, the Dull, the Desperate and the Deviant’ - The Staff Problem in Traditional Residential Care

Over some years during the 1990s, the writer was an investigator for a section of the Catholic Church concerning allegations of widespread abuse at the four traditional orphanages in Western Australia managed by the Christian Brothers.¹ This was in the context of the child migration and the sexual abuse controversies whirling through the Australian community.² It became clear at an early stage that a general staff inadequacy — in spite of the dedication of many people — and the realities of widespread abuse were inextricably linked. A former inspector of Victorian residential care, Dr Donna Jaggs, brought this to my attention many years ago when she remarked: ‘The staff I observed

¹ The title — in accord with current conventions — tries to suggest the staff problem in four key words: ‘devoted’, recalling the idealism of many care staff who gave dedicated service over long periods in difficult, sparse conditions; ‘dull’, referring to the lack of appropriate professional training for virtually all traditional care staff; ‘desperate’, refers to the fact that many staff took carer positions in lieu of something better and moved as soon as possible; and ‘deviant’, referring to the fairly widespread physical and sexual abuse which occurred in some of the residential care institutions.

² *The Scheme: the Christian Brothers and Child Care in Western Australia*, Argyle-Pacific, Perth, Western Australia, 1993; *Child Migration to Catholic Institutions in Australia: Objectives, Policies, Realities: 1926–1966*, Tamararaik Press, Melbourne, 1995; ‘A most unenviable reputation’: the Christian Brothers and school discipline over two centuries’ in O’Sullivan, P. (ed.) *The Irish World Wide: Vol. 3 Religion and Identity*, Leicester University Press, 1996; ‘The sexual abuse of children – as a public issue’, *Studies* (Dublin), Vol. 58. N° 3 Autumn 1996; ‘Good British Stock’: *Child and Youth Migration to Australia, 1901–1983*, Guide N° 11, National Archives of Australia, 2000; ‘A mixture of caring and corruption’: Traditional residential care in orphanages and industrial schools, *Studies, An Irish Quarterly Review*, Dublin, Vol 78 No 3, Autumn 2000, pp 7–18 ‘A strange mixture of caring and corruption’: residential care in traditional church institutions, 1940s to 1960s’, in Moyal, A, and Weigold, A, (eds) ‘A Passion for Scholarship’, *Papers delivered at the 1999 Conference of the Independent Scholars Association of Australia*, ISAA, Canberra, 2000; ‘A strange mixture of caring and corruption’: residential care in Christian Brothers orphanages and industrial schools during their last phase, 1940s to 1960s, *History of Education*, (England), Vol 29 No 4, Summer 2000, pp 343–355 The Queensland Inquiry into Institutional Abuse - a Good Model for Ireland?, *Studies, an Irish Quarterly Review*, Winter 2000–01; ‘The child migration controversy, a survey and analysis of the debate over child migration and residential care in Australia, 1987–2000’, *The Australasian Catholic Record*, Vol 78, No 1, January 2001. ‘The extreme end of a spectrum of violence: physical abuse, hegemony and resistance in British residential care’, *Children & Society*, Vol 15 No 2, April 2001.

were often almost as deprived as the children for whom they were trying to care.³

The issues have been dormant more recently. However, on 4 March 2003, the Australian Senate accepted a motion by Senator Andrew Murray, – Australian Democrats, Western Australia – allowing the Community Affairs References Committee to hold a public inquiry on the issue of the quality of care available in traditional residential institutions last century. Senator Murray said:⁴

Many institutionalised children suffered casual neglect and some experienced chilling physical and sexual abuse. The Committee report will provide useful insights into the causes and results of this treatment and give former institutionalised children a chance to tell their stories, and heal some of the hurt they have experienced. The Australian Democrats hope that this inquiry will serve to influence and encourage federal and state governments to fund research for programmes to minimise harm to individuals and in society and to evaluate the long term social and economic effects on individuals and society as a whole ... It will be a good start in redressing an unjust state of affairs for Australian children.

³ Jaggs, D, *Neglected and Criminal*, Melbourne, 1986 and Jaggs, D. and Jaggs, C. *Advancing this good work*, Geelong, 1988. Jaggs, D. *Asylum to Action: Family Action, 1851 - 1991*, Melbourne, 1991.

⁴ Senator A Murray is associated with two other inquiries, especially that into British and Maltese child migration to Australia after World War II. See: *Lost Innocents: Righting the Record, Report on child Migration*, Senate Community Affairs References Committee, Government Printer, Canberra, 2001. There is a vast literature on child migration and much of this material is relevant to this exploration of the staff problem in traditional care. Some of the major references are: There is an array of relevant primary sources in the National Archives of Australia, Canberra and in the Public Record Office, Kew, Surrey. One key source would be the seven substantial files: Child Migration, General Policy, Parts 1-7, 1943 - 1974, A446/182, 1960-66716-22, National Archives of Australia, Canberra. Secondary sources include: Bean, P and Melville, J. *Lost Children of the Empire*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1989; Coldrey, B.M. *'The Scheme': The Christian Brothers and Child Care in Western Australia*, Argyle-Pacific, Perth, 1993; Wagner, G. *Barnardo*, Routledge, 1979; Wagner, G. *Children of the Empire*, London, 1982; Parr, J. *Labouring Children, British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869 - 1924*, Croom Helm, London, 1980; Moore, A. *Growing up with Barnardo's*, Sydney, 1980; Welsh, L.P. *Geordie, Orphan of the Empire*, P. & B Press, Perth, 1990; Welsh, L.P. *The Bindoon File*, P & B Press, Perth, 1991; Sherington, G and Jeffrey, C. *Fairbridge: Empire and Child Migration*, Woburn, London, 1998; Creelman, M. 'A surrogate parent approach to child migration: the first Kingsley Fairbridge Farm School, 1912 - 1924 in Hetherington, P. (ed) *Childhood and Society in Western Australia*, University of W.A. Press, Nedlands, 1988; Coldrey, B.M. *'Good British Stock': Child and Youth Migration to Australia, 1901-83*, Research Guide N° 11, National Archives of Australia, Canberra, 1999; *The Welfare of former British Child Migrants, Vols 1 & 2*, Health Committee, House of Commons, HC 755-1, Session 1997-98, HMSO, 1998; *Select Committee into Child Migration, Interim Report*, Western Australian Legislative Assembly, Government Printer, Perth November 1996; *Interim Report of the Independent Advisory Panel to assist Former Residents of Christian Brothers child Care Institutions*, 17 March 1994, Perth, Western Australia; *Final Report of the Independent Advisory Panel to assist Former Residents of Christian Brothers child Care Institutions*, 21 October 1994, Perth, Western Australia.

Many writers — including most whose works are mentioned in the bibliography — have mentioned the perennial problems encountered by the traditional orphanages and industrial schools in getting and holding adequate staff. It was a consistent theme in Reports of Committees of Inquiry — the following comment being from the *British Reformatory and Industrial Schools Commission*, 1883, one hundred and twenty years ago:⁵

The teachers employed are frequently insufficient in number, and of inferior quality, although a strong and highly qualified teaching staff is required in consequence of the inferiority of the material ... In addition, the methods and appliances of the school are often antiquated and second rate and do not come up to the requirements of the Department of Education in public elementary schools.

However, the staff scene can be discussed only in terms of what the establishments were aiming, and the constraints under which they worked. The objectives in traditional care — and the systemic limitations under which management worked — dictated the numbers, qualifications and 'quality' of the staff they could employ.⁶

The purpose of traditional residential care

When the orphanages, industrial schools and reformatories were established, their first priority was not the welfare of children, though this was important to some, but the protection of respectable society from the depredations of certain classes of children. These children were perceived to require special structures and systematic training because otherwise their chaotic lives were dangerous to society as a whole. The idle, abandoned, illegitimate, poverty-stricken child was viewed as a natural recruit to the 'seething mass of human misery', the 'perishing' or 'dangerous' classes who threatened the stability of the state. This attitude remained dominant — though sometimes contested —

⁵ Hyland, J, *Yesterday's Answers: Development and decline of schools for young offenders*, Whiting and Birch, London, 1993, p. 12

⁶ The word 'quality' is placed in inverted commas because such a term begs all sorts of questions. Ideas of qualifications, personal disposition and competence are involved, and on these matters sincere people can differ.

throughout residential care until the reordering of priorities which emerged in the report of the Curtis Committee (1944) whose recommendations were largely legislated as the *Children Act* (1948). This change from viewing the deprived child as a threat to the notion of 'the welfare of the child' as paramount took place at different rates in different places. Old attitudes died hard over the next generation.

Traditionally, urban, marginalised, lower class children — 'street Arabs', 'roughs', 'ruffians', 'corner boys' — posed the threat; the institution was viewed as the appropriate response. The institution, be it an industrial school, reformatory, training ship, farm school or orphanage became the 'field of dreams' on which to plan for the 'saving' of these children; to draw them from the anarchic freedom of the streets and the influence of feckless parents and mould them into responsible members of the respectable working class. **A real transformation of human behaviour was the objective.**⁷

Behind the concern was colossal economic change and a population boom. Throughout the British isles there were many more children around and they were poor children. The nineteenth century saw enormous and unparalleled social changes. Population was growing at a previously unprecedented rate, doubling in the first half of the century, and nearly doubling again during the second half. The result was a predominantly youthful society and a sense that these were young people everywhere. Children under the age of fourteen constituted at least one-third of the total population and for most of the period nearly forty per cent.⁸

⁷ These are some major, recent, relevant texts: Bailey, V, *Delinquency and citizenship: reclaiming the young offender, 1914–1948*, Clarendon, Oxford, 1987; Cale, M, *Law and Society: an introduction to sources for criminal and legal history from 1800*, PRO Publications, Surrey, 1996; Hood, R G, *Borstal re-assessed*, Heinemann, London, 1965; Humphries, S, *Hooligans or rebels? An oral history of working-class childhood and youth, 1889–1939*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1981; Mahood, L, *Policing gender, class and family: Britain, 1858–1948*, UCL Press, 1995; Middleton, N, *When the family failed: the treatment of children in the care of the community during the first half of the twentieth century*, Gollancz, London, 1971; Platt, A M, *The Child Savers: the invention of delinquency*, University of Chicago Press, 1977; Pearson, G, *Hooligan: a history of respectable fears*, Schocken Books, New York, 1984.

⁸ Hopkins, E., *Childhood Transformed: Working Class Children in Nineteenth Century England*, Manchester University Press, 1994

The same transformation was occurring throughout Western Europe and the United States and spawning similar social problems. In response, a widespread reform school movement emerged. In Western Europe, these institutions were managed and funded privately. The pioneers were Johann Wichern and his **Rauhe Haus** in Germany and Frederic Demetz and the **Colonie Agricole** in France. Both developed in the 1840s.

There were many imitators in their respective countries as well as in other European states. Mary Carpenter's renowned work with juvenile delinquents at the **Kingswood** and **Red Lodge** reformatories in the 1850s not only helped popularise the ideas of Demetz and Wichern in Britain, but also facilitated the passage of England's first comprehensive juvenile justice legislation, the **Youthful Offenders Act** in 1854 and the **Industrial Schools Act** of 1866.

The new asylums were 'total institutions', that is, their managements sought a complete regulation of the daily life of each inmate and the creation of a new personalities. The prisons, reformatories, workhouses and orphanages had analogous populations: the poor, the marginalised, the dispossessed, the unprotected and the stigmatised. Their functions are associated with the words 'control', 'incarceration', 'deterrence' and 'rehabilitation'.⁹

Within the world of 'total institutions' there were some differences. Prisons, workhouses, industrial schools, orphanages and reformatories did not have identical regimes. However, the daily round in these asylums possessed striking similarities. In residential care for children, the industrial school, borstal, orphanage and reformatory shared much in common, though the common features could be moderated by the age of the inmates, the style of the leadership, and the quality of staffing. **However, in the author's view it is the similarities which are striking, between different institutions and across the English speaking world.** The prisons, asylums, workhouses, orphanages, industrial schools and

⁹ Ignatieff, M., 'Total Institutions and the Working Classes: a Review Essay', *History Workshop*, 15, 1983

reformatories looked alike and the inmates marched to a similar disciplinary cadence.¹⁰

In view of its ethos and objectives, the pre-1950s orphanage or industrial school was not usually 'a cosy home for children'. It was not meant to be. The modern emphasis on the welfare of the deprived child (and his/her family) was not the primary focus. The homes were 'spartan', 'regimented', 'sparse' and 'punitive'. Their objective was to control, to change, to reform, to remould the children. The means to achieve the goals of re-educating the inmates were a combination of moral, educational and industrial training but in a milieu controlled by strict codes of military style order reinforced by severe punishments.¹¹

The regime in traditional residential care

Within the institutions the children were highly regimented. There are dozens of memoirs and autobiographies of former inmates which make this plain. The boys and girls were expected to be quiet, compliant, respectful and well behaved; these were the middle-class management expectations. However, there was resistance; many of the inmates did not internalise the values of the institution and there were good reasons why they did not. The residential care system did not develop widespread consensual support from the working class since the schools were engaged in a cultural assault on cherished lower class values. Control was paramount; care was not and the welfare of the child as an individual was a secondary consideration.

In an aid to understanding the above, we may say that there were two models at work in traditional residential care:¹²

¹⁰ Ignatieff, M, *A Just Measure of Pain: The Penitentiary in the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850*, Peregrine, London, 1978, pp. 214–215

¹¹ Norman, F, *Banana Boy*, W H Allen, London, 1969, p. 29; Arnold, M, and Laskey, H, *Children of the Poor Clares*, Appletree Press, Belfast, 1985, p. 145; Ferm, R, *Ice Cold Charity*, Book guild, Sussex, 1990, p. 9; Memorandum submitted by Mr Dallas Paterson relating to personal experience as Principal of Fairbridge farm school, Pinjarra, Western Australia, 7 January 1949, MH 102/2251.

¹² Gilligan, R. *Irish Child Care Services: Policy, Practice and Provisions*, Institute of Public Administration, Dublin, 1991, p. 194

- ❖ The traditional missionary/rescue model where the dedicated workers removed the wretched children from the care of feckless, incompetent or absent parents and remoulded them for a useful life in respectable society.

The supporting rhetoric resonated with mouth-filling images of high-minded intervention. There was the metaphor of the jungle: marginalised youth were 'home heathens' or 'street Arabs' — akin to the savages which Western explorers were encountering in remote parts of the globe. There was the animal taming metaphor: the children of the poorest were 'the wild, the dirty, the tattered, untamed'. They obviously required to be taken in hand, to be civilised.

- ❖ The medical treatment/sterile protection model

The former model is more commonly recognised; the medical treatment model less so, and this will be explained more closely. Child care was influenced by the traditional medical treatment model, associated with which were concepts of disease, pollution and moral contagion — an innate pathology. The child needed to recover through a course of treatment, i.e. care, in a sterile environment which was the children's home, placed often in a rural context. These were well insulated from the malign influences of parents and environment. The idea was that with a course of the correct treatment, the child could be strengthened to achieve a level of resistance to the pathogenic forces in his environment.

Both models presumed that the children needed to be taken in hand; their behaviour and standards were not good enough and had to change. The early child care system — including the Christian Brothers industrial schools and orphanages — was to rescue children from unsavoury, unsafe or unsanitary social conditions and to change them for the better.

There were high expectations of the care system. The children's values, attitudes and behaviour left much to be desired; the staff carried a heavy burden, and — as we will see — the burden was too heavy for many of

them. It is appropriate here to recall Jaggs' comment: 'The staff I observed were often almost as deprived as the children for whom they were trying to care.'¹³

An approved school in a time warp

In the United Kingdom by the 1970s, residential care had begun to change dramatically: 'Curtis Committee' emphases on the 'welfare of the deprived child', 'the emotional development of the child' and the importance of retaining family ties were widely accepted standards. After all, the *Children Act* (1948) had been passed a generation previously.

In the midst of change one Approved School had been forgotten, St Ninian's at Falkland in rural Scotland, staffed by the Christian Brothers. The relevant files for the 1960s show few inspections and from 1969-72, no inspectors called. Then someone in the Scottish Office remembered St Ninian's and a flurry of inspections followed. Within a year or two, St Ninian's was closed.¹⁴

What the final wave of inspections show is a traditional residential care institution with most of the failings, and one or two of the positive sides to traditional Christian care. **The inspectors found no evidence of criminal behaviour, no sign of physical or sexual abuse.** However, in terms of 'modern' child care, St Ninian's was 'an anomaly and a mistake'. Why?

In 1972, it had the flavour of a 1930s establishment. With a few brief quotations from the reports we will try to capture the scene. St Ninian's was a junior approved school with around forty boys — all educationally retarded and most intellectually challenged — hailing

¹³ Jaggs, D, *Neglected and Criminal*, Melbourne, 1986 and Jaggs, D. and Jaggs, C. *Advancing this good work*, Geelong, 1988. Jaggs, D. *Asylum to Action: Family Action, 1851 - 1991*, Melbourne, 1991.

¹⁴ The relevant file is ED 28/360, State Archives of Scotland, Edinburgh, Scotland. The various contributors to the inspections were Messrs Petrie, Ward, Vallence and Forrest. Ward was the medical officer

from Glasgow or other urban communities on the west coast. The school was 'isolated ... isolated in every possible way', a hardship post for the staff, of whom there were ten.

One was called 'Care Staff', four were 'Domestic Staff' and there were five teaching Christian Brothers, none with qualifications in child care. The 'Care Staff' was the matron – 'elderly, arthritic and autocratic' – unable to give any but the most basic attention to the boys. 'By any reckoning, the child care component is minimal', D.S. Petrie declared in his first report, dated 26 September 1972. There was no psychological or psychiatric coverage. Dr J A Ward, the Medical Officer, summarised his concerns in this way:¹⁵

The most disturbing feature of St Ninian's is the way in which child care depends entirely on a small group of humane and dedicated Christians whose training is as teachers and who do not even possess the special Teacher Training to help them meet the needs of maladjusted, dull boys ... The Brothers have plenty of insight into the emotional and social plight of the boys but quite inadequate experience or training to give more than amateur and superficial assistance. I would regard the contribution of the matron – the only female figure in regular contact with the boys – as basic nursing care only. She has neither the physical health nor the personal qualities for real mothering.

Meanwhile, were there specific physical, sexual or emotional abuses occurring at St Ninian's? Her Majesty's Inspector from the School's Office in Dunfermline thought not. He wrote: 'I did not see anything which gave obvious cause for alarm ...' Few complaints have surfaced since. St Ninian's was a small establishment and was closed in 1974. In the controversy over traditional Catholic care in the British Isles over recent years the place was never mentioned.

However, last year a gentleman, Mr B.C. emailed the author from Phnom Peng in Cambodia where B.C. manages a bar and owns a number of other small businesses. He revealed that he had attended St

¹⁵ Ward, J A, Medical Officer, Inspection Report, 31 October 1972, ED 28/360, State Archives of Scotland.

Ninian's, 1965–67 and 'the most hellish years' of his care experience — physical and emotional abuse — were there. He added:¹⁶

I am a product of children's homes in Scotland. Born in 1952 to an unmarried mother, I was placed in care from day one and spent the next fifteen years of my life there. I spent 10 years in Smyllum Park School, Lanark (Sisters of Charity), two more years with the same nuns at Lasswade, near Edinburgh and the last three and most hellish years at St Ninian's in Falkland.

Perhaps with more exposure, more details will emerge regarding what happened at this institution. However, the focus here is the staff reality in general in traditional residential care. On one side we have high ideals, mouth-filling rhetoric, intervention strategies and the staff positioned as vital and caring. On the other side, the children were positioned as desperately needy, grateful and co-operative and the result, over time, a relentless exposure of widespread inadequacies and abuses in traditional care.

Given that the international evidence in the English speaking world about the value of care is at best ambivalent and at worst unfavourable, how can this be explained, the perverse gap between good intentions and unhappy outcomes? In essence, the system demanded a quality of staff which rarely, if ever, existed and a level of resources which none was willing, or able to supply. The tension between theory and reality was glaring; the children — and many staff — suffered. Shirley Swain has defined the scene in neat way:¹⁷

At its best, large group care provided the equivalent of a boarding school experience for an otherwise destitute child. At its worst, it was a mismatch of disturbed and disturbing children and staff that created hell on earth ... staff were, by definition, benevolent; ... the child was positioned to be grateful.

¹⁶ B.C. to the author, 21 September 2002

¹⁷ Swain, S, 'Breaking the hearts of our children', Age, 13 May 1997, p. 11

The Staff Problem: Summary

In part, this staffing problem in Christian Brothers institutions, like St Ninian's, represented a specific case of a general problem in traditional child care. In 1946, the seminal report of the *Care of Children* (Curtis) Committee, deplored 'a widespread shortage of the right kind of staff, personally qualified and professionally trained to provide the child with a substitute for a home background.' The report found that the understaffing and unattractiveness of residential care was due to poor salaries, poor accommodation and unsocial hours. Staff turnover was rapid, preventing children from establishing solid, permanent relationships. It was near impossible to provide satisfactory care.

The recruitment problems and at times, management's desperate reliance on available help, led to a mind set which encouraged abuse and provided a cover for abusive carers. These attitudes included a quasi martyr mood among staff who persevered, who were available - 'in the front line' - day after day. This mood said, in essence, that carers deserved every consideration and the little privileges they enjoyed - such as separate dining facilities and better food - because they were sacrificing so much for the deprived children. At one level, this was no more than harmless indulgence, but it had a negative side.

This darker side covered inappropriate behaviour by staff members which could be rationalised and excused by the fact that 'their work was no hard, their hours so long and their contribution to the cause so great' that unsatisfactory behaviour was trivial by comparison. With this martyr self perception it was not far to more sinister attitudes of excusing destructive behaviour and illegality. In the minds of those staff members who saw themselves as giving so much, there was a tendency to forgive their own negative conduct and that of their colleagues.

In what follows, these are some of the core questions which are being addressed:

- Why did so many of those carers who commenced their work with benevolent intentions end by abusing some of those for whom they were caring?
- While many commenced their work with marginalised youth in the homes with benevolent intentions, the system was wide open to penetration by committed paedophiles. How often did this occur?

There is a Christian variation of the above: there appears to have been a tendency to place chaplains in the homes who were known to be abusers or already suspect before they were appointed. Were these appointments isolated, or almost part of a policy?

In all this it is worth making a distinction not always attempted: There is a world of difference between describing — and perhaps deploring — the hard life of the poor in earlier, less affluent times. This is quite different from exposing — and perhaps excoriating — specific abuses which occurred in traditional residential care.

The world of traditional care was a world of poor people. Carers and children were working class people, in a society where there were fewer safety nets than there are now. Some people in the supporting committees managing the homes were comfortable, even affluent, but they had little to do with the actual day-to-day life of the children.

On the other hand, normal poor people — thirty to seventy years ago — did not chastise their children with the extravagant, even bizarre, severity which many claim was normal in care. They did not molest their children sexually. They showed more support, patience and concern for their children.

The Low Status of Residential Care

In fact, the low status of residential care — and the inability of care to recruit and hold quality staff — has been bemoaned by concerned commentators for generations. In 1946, the *Report of the Care of Children Committee* (Curtis), bemoaned 'a widespread and deplorable shortage of

the right kind of staff, personally qualified and professionally trained to provide the child with a substitute for a home background'. The reasons for this unfortunate state of affairs were obvious: poor salaries, poor accommodation; unsocial hours and isolated institutions.¹⁸

Those comments referred to 1946, as the United Kingdom emerged from six years of war. However, while there were many changes in residential care over the next half century, serious researchers over the last ten years have identified similar problems all over the system. The residential homes carried negative overtones; and their lowly status made it difficult to recruit quality staff, Low pay was critical; residential work was more poorly rewarded than fieldwork for qualified social workers. Actual care workers often lacked professional training.¹⁹ Two writers summarised the obvious in this way,

The most damaged and problematic young people have traditionally been dealt with by those social work staff who are among the most poorly trained, least well educated and worst paid.' This state-of-affairs was still occurring twenty years after the eclipse of traditional Christian or philanthropic child care.²⁰

After the so-called 'Kincora scandal', involving widespread abuse of residents in Homes in Protestant East Belfast, the Report of the Committee of Inquiry found the same problems of gaining staff to manage the children's homes:²¹

Evidence was received from all parties ... that considerable difficulties had been experienced in the recruitment of staff to work in children's homes and hostels. Unsocial working hours, the requirement to live-in, the stress of caring for disturbed children, low professional status and low pay were all factors which contributed to the difficulty.

¹⁸ Youngusband, E, *Social Work in Britain: 1950-1975*, Vol. 1, George Allen & Unwin, London, 1978, p. 52

¹⁹ Kahan, B, *Growing up in groups*, Institute for Social Work Research Unit, HMSO, London, 1994, p. 44

²⁰ Berridge, D, and Brodie, J, 'Residential child care in England and Wales: The Inquiries and after' in Hill, M, and Aldgate, J, *Child Welfare Services: Developments in Law, Policy and Research*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London and Bristol, Pennsylvania, 1996

²¹ *Report of the Committee of Inquiry into Children's Homes and Hostels*, HMSO, Belfast, 1986, p. 21

The point is comprehensively made. There were obvious results which followed from this state of affairs: managements were often forced to accept available staff without asking too many questions, and staff-on-duty — aware of the difficulties — could easily develop a quasi martyr mentality which could come to excuse inappropriate conduct. Moreover, if work in residential care had low status, the residents themselves were low on society's priorities — across the English speaking world and not merely in traditional philanthropic Homes.

Many of the children in traditional care were the offspring of young, unmarried mothers. The unmarried working-class mother and her child had a bleak and difficult time wherever they lived. Homes for unmarried mothers were spartan and had punitive regimes.²² The following comment is from the nineteenth century, but similar attitudes — if expressed in less florid and pungent language — lasted until well after World War II in some places:²³

In 1854, the Rev W Harrison, summed up the object of the Foundling Hospital in these words: 'To give a woman, who has fallen into sin, and is desirous of escaping from its practice and degradation, an opportunity of hiding her shame, by receiving her infant and thus removing the evidence of her disgrace.

This attitude carried over on to the children, as Joanna Penglase has said, they faced 'the disapproving glance' — on a regular basis. In Mount Cashel (Newfoundland), Greg Connors recalled that when the boys from the home went to other schools in the city, 'we were treated a lot different from other students.'²⁴

Young people in care — and in their first years of employment — were exposed to exploitation and abuse. Their isolation and low status made

²² Humphries, S, *A Secret world of Sex*, Sidgwick and Jackson, London, 1988, p. 87

²³ Ramsland, J, 'Cultivating a Respectful and Modest Demeanour: children of the Foundling, 1800–1926', *The London Journal*, Vol 18, No 2, 1993, p. 95; Ferguson, H, 'Exposing the institutional abuser', *Irish Independent*, 25 March 1996, p. 8

²⁴ Harris, M, *Unholy Orders, Tragedy at Mount Cashel*, Viking, Penguin, 1990, p. 310

them vulnerable. One rare document which exposed exploitation at Fairbridge, Pinjarra, Western Australia makes these points with some precision. The document is dated, 7 January 1949; its author, Dallas Paterson, was principal at Fairbridge, 1936–37.²⁵

Paterson described the nine state school staff and their Principal as unqualified by training, temperament or willingness to embrace the idea of a farm school experiment ... and the head Cottage Mother (and Matron) as completely unsympathetic towards the girls in her charge.

However, Paterson reserved most of his criticism for some of the Perth Committee and their relatives – ‘cynical scoundrels’ who looked on ‘institution children as fair game.’ He gave examples:

- a member of the Perth Committee was notorious for his philandering conduct towards the girls in his wife’s charge. Cottage mothers disliked their girls being sent to his station. Aftercare disapproved of the reports given by the girls of his conduct, but girls continued to be sent to his place;
- a Western Australian Minister (of the Crown) telephoned to order me to give a son a boy at the lowest wage for that son’s farm. The farm was on our Black List;
- the wife of the Chairman of the Perth Committee arrived one day unheralded at the Farm School and ordered my predecessor to move a young Fairbridge girl from her son-in-law’s house. Her son-in-law was a man with no conscience and had behaved in a most seriously immoral way, repeatedly and over a long period whenever his wife left the farm to stay in Perth or to go to the nearest Township.

This behaviour was possible because of the high status of the Committee and their families and the low status of the Fairbridge children.

²⁵ Memorandum submitted by Mr Dallas Paterson relating to personal experience as Principal at the Fairbridge Farm School, Pinjarra, Western Australia, MH 102/2251, Public Record Office, Kew, Surrey.; Robson, F, ‘A Christian Brothers legacy’, *Age (Good Weekend)*, 26 November 1994, p. 74–78

The penetration of the staffs of the homes by committed paedophiles

The scene was ripe for the penetration of residential care by paedophiles or homosexuals seeking partners among the older teenagers (and this at a time when in most Western jurisdictions, consenting sex between same sex partners was still illegal).

The possibility was rarely recognised under traditional care. However, in 1955, the Director of the Child Welfare Department, Western Australia wrote to the Commissioner of Police in the following terms. After institution managements advertise staff vacancies 'experience has shown that persons of undesirable character sometimes apply for such vacancies and it is often difficult — in the absence of information to the contrary — to make a suitable selection.'²⁶

The Commissioner advised the department to discuss the matter with a senior (named) Police Officer and agree to a common procedure. This was done and the care institutions were circularised along these lines. Fairbridge, Pinjarra, replied on 9 November 1955:

In so many instances "Time is of the essence" and where it is necessary to carry on essential services it is not possible to delay appointment to a position pending character check. However, I shall be glad to take advantage of Departmental screening of applicants for positions here where time permits.

In fact, most of the institutions did not reply, and in the end, nothing appears to have been done.

²⁶ Barnett, M, 'Motion, Select Committee into Former Child Migrants, Appointment', 4th Session, 34th Parliament, Western Australian Legislative Assembly, Hansard, 12 June 1996, p. 2542.