

Care of Children Committee, United Kingdom

1946 – 1946

Other Names: • Curtis Committee

Details

The Care of Children Committee, chaired by Dame Myra Curtis, reported to the British House of Commons in 1946. The Committee had investigated Children's Homes in the United Kingdom and its landmark Report (commonly known as the Curtis Report), focused on the 'remote and impersonal' way of 'caring' for children. It recommended significant changes to the out-of-home care system so that children received more care and attention to their individual needs. The Report also recommended improved training and development for staff working in the Homes. The Curtis Report later influenced child welfare policy in Australia.

The Curtis Report, as it is commonly known, led to the passing of the Children's Act 1948 in the United Kingdom. The Report of the Committee expresses members' shock and dismay at what they describe as 'the remote and impersonal relations' existing within children's homes. The predominant concerns of the Committee were not with physical and material conditions in the homes, but with the care and attention children needed to receive.

In the mid twentieth century, there was a growing awareness of the needs, and indeed the rights, of every child to stability, affection and emotional security. The United Nations' Department of Social Affairs published the report, *Children deprived of a normal life* in 1951. An important figure in this shift in understanding is Dr Edward John Mostyn Bowlby, the founder of attachment theory. Bowlby published the landmark book, *Children and the growth of love* in 1953.

Key recommendations of the Curtis report were:

- to encourage the development of the family group home system (family groups were not to exceed 12 children, and a mix of ages and sexes was preferable in each home)
- to keep siblings together in placements wherever possible
- to educate children in care in local schools

The report also contained specific instructions for the good management of institutions. The Committee stated that the main requirements for a child's substitute home were:

- Affection and personal interest; understanding of his defects; care for his future; respect for his personality and regard for his self esteem
- Stability
- Opportunity of making the best of his ability and aptitudes
- A share in the common life of a small group of people in a homely environment

The Committee reported that, however well children's material needs were met in Homes,

on the human and emotional side, they continually feel the lack of affection and personal interest. The longing for caresses from strangers, so common among little children in Homes, is in striking and painful contrast to the behaviour of the normal child of the same age in his parents' home. The lack of the mother's fondling cannot of course be entirely made good, but something must be provided which gives the child the feeling that there is a secure and affectionate personal relation in his life.

On the topic of child migration from Britain to Australia, the Curtis Report was 'unenthusiastic about child migration' generally, but saw a role for migrating children from 'deprived' and 'unfortunate' backgrounds. These children, it was believed, could gain 'the foundation of a happy life' in a new country.

More info

Related Entries

Related Events

- [Visit of John Moss \(1951\)](#)

John Moss, who visited Australia and reported on child migration to Australia was a former member of the Care of Children Committee.

Related Concepts

- [Child Migration \(1800s - 1970s\)](#)

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