

A very brief history of family support before Sure Start

Social Work History Network

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Building the welfare state

- Full employment
- Social Security
- NHS
- Optimism and confidence in public service professions

Changing attitudes to poverty

“Their lives are characterised by dirt, disintegration and disorder. They are often shiftless, apathetic, irresponsible to an almost incredible degree”.

Jones, D. (1950) ‘Family Service Units for problem families’, *Eugenics Review*, 41(4): 171.

“About the only common characteristics of these families, it seems, are the financial ones”.

Wootton, B. (1959) *Social Science and Social Pathology*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Towards family support: key legislation (1)

Children Act 1948

- Creation of local authority Children's Departments
- Support for 'boarding-out' as an alternative to residential care
- Registration and inspection of voluntary agencies
- Restoration of children with families

Children and Young Person's Act 1963

- Response to the problem of 'juvenile delinquency'
- "Gives the go-ahead for LA children's departments to actively 'promote the welfare' of children through practical assistance – families become the client group (Hendrick, 2003)

Towards family support: key legislation (2)

“We recommend a new local authority department, providing a community based and family oriented service, which will be available to all. This new department will, we believe, reach far beyond the discovery and rescue of social casualties; it will enable the greatest possible number of individuals to act reciprocally, giving and receiving service for the well-being of the whole community.”

(Seebohm Committee 1968: paragraph 2).

Local Authority Social Services Act 1970

- Creates new unified Social Services departments (incorporating Children’s Departments)
- Conservative minister Keith Joseph tells the new departments plan for annual budget increases of 10 per cent (Jones, 2020: 125)

The development of 'child protection'

Failing to intervene to protect children from parents

- The discovery of 'battered babies' in the United States
- The Maria Colwell Inquiry (1974)
- More inquiries through the 1980s – e.g. Beckford, Carlile, Henry

Social workers with too much power?

- Cleveland Inquiry

Children Act 1989

- Section 47: legal framework for child protection
- Section 17: family support for 'children in need' – has it ever been implemented?

Fiscal crisis, the New Right and Conservative Governments (1979-1997)

- Unemployment
- Means testing – e.g. school meals
- Regressive taxation
- New Public Management
- Child poverty rises from 1 in 10 to about a third - strong link to health inequalities

Further reading

Hendrick, H (2003) *Child welfare: Historical dimensions, contemporary debate*, Bristol: Policy Press

Jones, R (2020) *A history of the personal social services in England: Feast, famine and the future*, Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan

Parton, N (1985) *The politics of child abuse*, Basingstoke: Macmillan

Purcell, C (2020) *The politics of children's services reform: Re-examining tow decades of policy change*, Bristol: Policy Press