

Explain the differing reactions of the British public to the policy of evacuating children during the Second World War.

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Evacuation was a voluntary scheme formed during the Second World War. The British public responded to this scheme in many different ways which varied from positive reactions to negative reactions. Throughout my essay I will cover the differing reactions of the British public when evacuation was formed. This will consist of parents/family responses (including parents of evacuees and reception families) and children's reactions (including children that were either hosts or evacuees). Finally, I will also consider the importance of the social structure in Britain during the Second World War as this often influenced the differing reactions of the British public towards the policy of evacuation.

Initially, when evacuation was first introduced, many young people responded to the scheme in many different ways. On the one hand, some evacuees and hosts were very excited and eager for the scheme to take place and when it did had a very fun and adventurous time. For instance, a young girl that was evacuated recalls becoming 'best friends' with her host. Hence, this shows that some hosts were very welcoming towards the children that were evacuated and that some evacuees had a very enjoyable experience and that on the whole some evacuees and hosts bonded together and both had very positive life changing experiences. However, on the other hand some evacuees and hosts had very distraught and painful experiences. Some hosts were not as welcoming as others and went to the extent of bullying evacuees for many reasons such as not wanting evacuees coming to their schools and on their territory. For example, a woman remembers that in her past 'evacuees coming...horrible to them...most shameful memories...glaring at them'. Therefore this goes to show that some hosts were very rude and uncaring towards the evacuees causing evacuees who may have been looking forward to their stay to have a very sad, emotional experience leading them to becoming homesick. As a result, some evacuees and hosts had very enjoyable experiences whereas some evacuees and hosts had difficulty getting on or difficulty adjusting to new environments.

To continue with, most of the different experiences that many children had as an evacuee or a host was strongly related to the social structure at the time in Britain. During the Second World War there was a major gap between the upper class citizens and the working class (lower class citizens). Thus knowing this prior knowledge, I know that with the different lifestyles children were brought up in would affect how they may have treated children in a different class to them. Some evacuees from lower class families were sent to upper class homes with first class children that were hosts and similarly some children that were from upper class families were sent to lower class homes. When children from different classes mixed together for the first time there were different types of reactions towards the policy for evacuation. Some children mixed in well and had a great learning experience whereas some children had difficulty adjusting to a new place with different lifestyles and even worse when those children they were mixing in with were being disrespectful towards them due to the different social class beliefs. For example an ex evacuee recalls his memory as a young boy that 'they were violent...were abusive...because we were 'different'...we were told we were as bad as the Germans'. Hence, this goes to show that the social structure had a major influence on the young peoples minds and that many children were disrespectful to each other because of the different social backgrounds they were from.

Next, parents reactions towards the policy of evacuation changed over time because different events occurred having different effects on parents. When the evacuation scheme was first introduced many parents were in fear of the war as this was a different war which could have the possibility of bombings going on in the major cities. So therefore when the policy of evacuation first started many

parent of evacuees supported the scheme for their children's safety and best interests, I know this because at the beginning of the war a mass number of children were evacuated which shows that parents reactions towards the scheme were that they supported the scheme. However, when the war started and the Phoney war took place later on, many parent started to undermine the policy of evacuation for no bombings were taking place back at home so many parents decided to bring their children back home for main reasons that they were missing them and that no major bombings were going on in the major cities so thought that nothing harmful would happen to their children. However, as the war continued and the blitz started to take place many parents once again had a change of mind because the bombing went from bad to worse and many young and old British citizens were killed. Thus, due to the Blitz a mass number of children once again were evacuated abroad to the countryside until the war was over. An example would be of a young girl who was 'evacuated twice during the war' which could possibly be due to her parents change of mind over the different periods of the war which was similarly to what most parents of evacuees on the whole felt towards the policy of evacuation during the war.

Secondly, some adults that had different reactions towards the policy of evacuation were adult's part of reception families that were mainly hosts to evacuees who could have possibly had children of their own. On the one hand, some reception families with adults that were hosts were very welcoming towards their evacuees and treat the visiting evacuees with love, care and attention and even as if they were their own for instance a sister and bother recall when their host even 'travelled all the way to London to ask if he could adopt us' because he'd grown to love them as if they were his own children. However, on the other hand some adults that were hosts did not take on the loving parent role but took advantage of the situation of evacuation and used evacuees for labour purposes such as a young girl recalls being 'a maid' and worked as a maid in her reception families home. Consequently, this shows that some hosts treat evacuees as their own loving children so had a very respectful and supportive reactions towards the policy of evacuation whereas others only were supportive and glad of the scheme because it meant more people to help with their work and to show off to their neighbours that they were participating in the war effort and secretly inside may have been against the scheme for it meant they had to look after evacuees they didn't want to look after.

Also, a major factor that affected the differing views of hosts towards their visiting evacuees was due to the social structure that was present in Britain. When children were being allocated to their designations, the government could not keep the social structure in mind because homes were limited so if any family was willing to take on an evacuee to look after then the scheme put random children in their homes. Therefore some hosts were in shock such as upper class families in shock to find evacuees from lower class families to be so unhygienic and filthy. For instance an old host remembers that 'they were so dirty...unhygienic...' Therefore, this shows that the reaction towards the policy of evacuation scheme differed throughout families due to the effect of the social structure

In conclusion, I have found that there were many differing reactions towards the policy of evacuation. All those who experienced the scheme had different responses such as children that were either hosts or evacuees had positive fun times whereas other children had negative miserable times. Also many reactions were affected by the social structure such as the mixing of upper and lower class families and finally many reactions towards the policy of evacuating children changed over time for instance parents of evacuees that undermined the scheme during the Phoney war but realised how serious the scheme was when the Blitz took place. I personally think that evacuee's reactions were the most important responses as it was the evacuees who had to move away from home and especially them being children made it more difficult for them trying to live a different lifestyle, meeting new people and visiting new settings without their parents.