

Explain the differing reactions of people in Britain to the policy of evacuating children during the Second World War

People involved with the policy of evacuation, the hosts, children, parents and government, all had diverse views about the whole idea of evacuation. Some agreed with it, others did not. The purpose of this essay is to illustrate some opinions that people felt about evacuation, starting with those affected the most, the children.

The children were by far the most influenced by the evacuation. They were taken on little notice, put on trains to unknown places and lined up in a village hall and chose to be taken in. This was traumatic for the evacuees, as few understood what was going on and why. Also, some of the evacuees were not chosen, so were unceremoniously dumped on a random family, whether they were wished or not. They were also bullied in the villages and got in trouble as they're outsiders from the village. As a result of the stress that these children had, they would wet the bed and were even more stressed after being punished. The children felt strange as they were in a clean, warm house and had clean warm beds. Also, they had a lot more food than they would usually have. This was far different to their normal lives in the slums, where they were used to a cold, squalid corner of the room to sleep in. Some evacuees however enjoyed the fresh air, beautiful scenery and treated the evacuation as a holiday or day trip. They found the idea educational as they found out what farms look like and how life is like in the countryside. Some children were unfortunate to have a bad host, were treated badly and were often beaten, starved or locked in the coal cellar. They would try to complain to their parents, but were ignored, as the host would act nice for the parents when they visited.

Next I will move on to the host family's views on the evacuation policy. They had to take in a strange child or children to their houses, often the child being from a city miles away. The child was in their opinion, lower class and poor, and therefore needed special attention. If the host family had children already, they may be unsupportive towards the newcomer, or may make a long friendship with them. Some hosts only took in children on account of the financial grant given to them by the government, mistreating the children or just plain ignoring them. Many found the evacuees repulsive, as they had little concept of hygiene and were used to relieving themselves in the nearest corner. Some, though were genuinely supportive of the evacuees' problems, and gave them help, teaching them manners and cleanliness. In actual fact, this was a rare occurrence and many hosts were unkind, whether due to prejudice, greed or even fact.

Thirdly, the parents had their own views about evacuation. They were expected to hand over their children, their pride and joy to a person who they don't know, as well as not knowing where their children went. Now most parents would feel a little apprehensive about this and quite a few were prepared to defy the wishes of the government and keep their children at home, or remove them from the houses they were assigned to in the countryside. However many parents welcomed this as they could concentrate on fighting the war without stress from their children. Many parents were worrying even more about the children than if the children were left at home, and may even concentrate less on their work. This would be the inverse effect of what the government expected, which was that the people would work harder without the distraction of the children. Many trusted the government would not let them down, but were confronted with tales from the children that they were having a terrible time and would prefer to take their chances with the bombs than remain evacuated. Some however, may have been glad that the children were gone and felt

relieved that they had more rations to supplement any food they may or may not buy on the black market, without the children, they can concentrate on looking after themselves.

My final point is regarding the government's views of its evacuation plan. Obviously, the government believed that they were doing the right thing, that the evacuation of children to the country was justified, as Germany was a clear threat. However the mass movement of over 2,000,000 children was a harsh undertaking, which was a blow to the rail lines that could have transported raw materials or manufactured goods to help in the war effort more directly instead. The government also boasted that it could provide support for children whose parents were killed in wartime work, and help to reunite the families after the war. This was not particularly true, as out of the original amount of evacuees, only 50% would have been reunited with their families. The reasons for this would be that the parents might have been killed in war work, the children may have lost contact due to lack of communication, the children may have ran away or even that the children may voluntarily wish to stay in the country. As well as this, the government thought that the efficiency of the country's war effort would improve, as people with children could take possible working hours off by being with their children. Either way, the government's views were too optimistic as casualties in Britain would affect families, and most families would lose a member during the war.

In conclusion, the people of Britain had a variety of views about the evacuation of British children. The children were mostly stressed by the change, the hosts were not pleased with the children's manners, the parents were worried about the children and the government tried to stand by the idea but failed.

Word count

With title: 994

Without title: 975