

<b>Institution: University of Reading</b>
<b>Unit of Assessment: 30 History</b>
<b>Title of case study: Enhancing the understanding of the effects on Service Children of extended separation from their parents</b>
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research by the University of Reading's Martin Parsons (Research Fellow 1990-date) on the separation of children from their parents during the Second World War is being used to inform organisations on how to deal with the anxieties experienced by children separated from their parent(s) following their military deployment. The research has gained wide recognition from the media, local authorities and policy makers and has already led one school to re-develop its pastoral and academic support systems, creating a successful learning environment for Service Children and paving the way for further trials of teaching materials geared towards such children both in the UK and overseas.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Parsons' unique research into the plight of war children and evacuees arose from his original interest in the impact of war on civilian populations. He set out to dispel some of the idealistic myths surrounding the Wartime Evacuation Scheme in the UK, but soon realised not only that the topic was a truly international one, but also that separation through evacuation had long-term effects on both the children and the adults concerned.</p> <p>The initial research involved the investigation of primary source material in national and local archives pertaining to the four wartime evacuation schemes within the UK and the external evacuation of children to the USA and the former colonies. Heritage Lottery funding enabled Parsons to extend his work to encompass 'children' in other countries, including Finland and Germany, and to introduce both oral and video interviews of ex-war children who volunteered to share their experiences. As the project developed further, and as an example of growing interest in the work, Parsons was approached by the English-Speaking Union to carry out a number of interviews with SeaVacs who were privately evacuated to the USA.</p> <p>During the interviews it became apparent that there were a number of common concerns expressed in terms of the effect the experience had had on the evacuees' lives as children and as adults, regardless of nationality. While recognising that the separation of war children from their parents could have positive outcomes, Parsons came to understand that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Few children in war zones remain unscathed, either physically or mentally</li> <li>• War-related trauma can be passed from parent to child through generations</li> <li>• Some individuals who endured separation as a war child can find it very difficult to develop or maintain long-term relationships in adulthood</li> </ul> <p>These findings were highlighted through the release of Parsons' book, <i>War Child: Children Caught in Conflict</i>, in 2008, which attracted widespread interest. Lt. Col MacGregor, a serving soldier with a young family saw Parsons talking about his research on a TV documentary and subsequently read this and other work by Parsons with interest. At the time, MacGregor was in the process of writing a book entitled <i>My Daddy's going away</i> (published in February 2012, to be followed by <i>My Mummy's going away</i> in September 2013). He saw similarities between the findings in Parsons' research and his own family's experiences in the present-day, and was concerned that many of the problems linked to parent-child separation were being ignored. Contact was made with Parsons and MacGregor sought his input to provide some academic credibility and to push the book project forward, supported by the fact that Parsons was looking at the long-term effects of separation.</p> <p>Through this encounter, it became quickly evident <b>that some of the symptoms visible in children evacuated in past wars are now apparent in children separated from their Armed Forces parents following their deployment to conflict areas.</b> Based on this understanding, Parsons' research is now being used to inform and support the work being done with children who have been separated from their parents serving in the Armed Forces.</p>

### 3. References to the research

M.Parsons. *I'll Take that One: Dispelling the Myths of Civilian Evacuation*. Published by Becket-Karlson, 1998 ISBN: 1901292037. Fully endorsed by the Evacuees Reunion Association. Times Educational Supplement "Book of the Week"

M.Parsons. *The Manchester Evacuation: The Exception to the Rule*. Published by DSM, 2004

M. Parsons, ed. *Children the Invisible Victims of War*. Published by DSM, 2008 ISBN-10: 0954722949

M. Parsons. *War Child. Children Caught in Conflict*. Published by History Press, 2008. ISBN-10: 0752442937

M. Parsons. *I'll Take That One Too. Evacuees, the Invisible Generation*. Published by DSM, 2013. ISBN: 9780954722951

*Children and War: International Journal*. Published by DSM (online and hard copy), 2005-ongoing <http://www.dsmgroup.co.uk/ciw.html>

Internal peer review has ranked the published material as of at least 2\* quality.

The underpinning research was part funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (£100,000 with the Evacuees Reunion Association, 1999); the Big Lottery Fund (£100,000 to establish the War Child Archive at the University of Reading, 2004); and the Englefield Charitable Trust (£4,000 personal award, 2011).

### 4. Details of the impact

History has shown time and again that problems occur with families during war-induced separation. While there is little that can be done to reverse the trauma suffered by individuals in the past, Parsons' research is supporting the great achievements being made in the 'here and now' in helping the thousands of Service Children currently in school education.

#### **Student tracking scheme**

Pippa Bleach, a former PhD student of Parsons, is driving the Service Child project forward at The Connaught School in Aldershot, in her current role as Head of Humanities. Based uniquely on the understanding of child separation in war developed by Parsons, the school, which has a high percentage of Service Children (97 pupils, some 8 per cent of the total student population), has introduced a tracking scheme which monitors all students and gathers important academic and pastoral information about children with parents in the Armed Forces.

The academic aspect of the scheme tracks a child's performance in various subjects/areas, and cross-references it to when their parents are on active service. The pastoral element of the scheme looks at the behavioural traits of Service Children, and the length, regularity and location of their parent's deployment. With Parsons' understanding that war separation can affect relationships both in the short- and long-term, the school can take appropriate measures to ensure that Service Children feel integrated in the school community, such as not forcing individuals to 'make friends' and letting them forge their own relationships. As Service Children frequently move schools, the tracking scheme has particular relevance when an individual leaves The Connaught School, as these focused and enhanced academic and pastoral notes can then be transferred to their next school. The aim here is to provide continuity and stability for Service Children in a transient and often daunting environment. Although this scheme is still in its infancy, The Connaught School and its staff have embraced it as a highly important and valuable to Service Children. As a result, a 'Service Child handbook' – a comprehensive resource for the care and support of such children at The Connaught – is set to be published within the next 18 months.

#### **Tailored teaching materials**

Parsons has recently established a link with Blankenhagen School in Gutersloh, Germany, which caters solely for Service Children. On the basis of the work done at The Connaught School and the findings to date, Blankenhagen School has agreed to trial a curriculum and teaching materials developed by the staff, based on Parson's work, aimed at dealing with aspects of separation and

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the provision of quiet rooms and counselling services to support their pupils. Once the materials have been evaluated and amended, it is hoped that the 'Service Child Supplement' (small sums of money ring-fenced by the Government for each Service Child in the UK), now available to all schools with Service Children, however largely un/mis-spent, will be used for the initial purchase and copying of teaching materials and handbooks at The Connaught and elsewhere. This will result in a better awareness of the needs of individual children and greater continuity in school administration.

**Service Child Library**

Under the guidance of Parsons and Bleach, The Connaught School recently created a Service Child Library, with books chosen by Service Children. It has also partnered with 'Reading Force', a mutual reading and scrapbook scheme where children read the same book as their parents serving overseas. Devised by Alison Baverstock at Kingston University, this initiative helps to minimise the trauma of separation by giving child and parent a shared experience to discuss.

**Policy making**

Parsons' research has caught the attention of policy makers. In December 2012, the Defence Committee announced a major new enquiry into the provision of education to the children of Service personnel. As part of the enquiry, Parsons and Bleach were asked to attend a meeting with the Administrative Chair of the Ministry of Defence Select Committee at the House of Commons. This meeting took place in January 2013, with Parsons and Bleach explaining in detail the key elements of the research findings and how they have trialled learning materials and transfer documents in schools. Following this conversation, and based on their success to date, the team was asked to submit a report to the Select Committee and ultimately the Defence Minister, which has since been accepted as written evidence.

In addition, Buckinghamshire County Council recently invited Parsons to present his findings at their Armed Forces Community Covenant working group, with the aim of creating and implementing an action plan for supporting Service Children in the county. In February 2013, Parsons accepted an invitation to address an audience of NATO and SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe) representatives in Belgium in September 2013 about his research, its impact to date and how it can benefit children both in the UK and worldwide.

**Media and other interest**

Parsons discussed his research on the BBC 4 programme *The Evacuees* (Sept 2009). Producers of the BBC's *The One Show* heard about Parsons' research and subsequently asked him to film a segment about war child evacuation (filmed 23 May 2013). ITV has since displayed interest in the work and Parsons and his team are now in negotiation with the channel about a future TV series.

Moreover, following a conversation between Parsons and the Dean of Westminster Abbey, the 'Children in War Memorial Project' took place in November 2012, where 12 children laid wreaths at the Abbey in memory of those affected by war as a child. This successful event will be repeated in 2013 and has led to further interest from Gloucester and Truro Cathedrals, who are keen on using Parsons' research-based insight for similar services.

**In summary, Parsons' work has been hugely important in generating new ways of thinking about Service Child separation and in changing organisational approaches towards the issue. When asked about the impacts arising from the research, Dr Peter Heini, the leading authority on psychological war trauma in children, described it as "truly ground breaking".**

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

- BBC 4. *The Evacuees*. Sept 2009
- Senior Committee Assistant, Defence Committee, House of Commons\*. Access to 'Service Children in Education', Government Select Committee written report, February 2013.

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- Battalion Commander, Blandford Camp\*
- Director of Reading Force\*, Kingston University
- Head of History, The Connaught School\* (Impact on curriculum change)
- Founder of Help the Heroes\* (able to corroborate the invitation to address representatives of NATO and SHAPE)

\*Contact details provided