

LAMBETH SOCIAL SERVICES

QUALITY AND EQUALITY
THE REPORT OF THE ENQUIRY
INTO THE SOUTH VALE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

JANUARY, 1990

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Q U A L I T Y A N D E Q U A L I T Y

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- CHAPTER ONE -

THE ENQUIRY PANEL

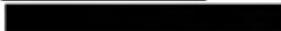
CHAIR:

Edgar Zephyrine - Principal Manager,
Community and Voluntary Services

MEMBERS:

Hugh Alexander - Principal Manager, Special Services
An Haynes - Area Social Services Manager
Geraldine McGuinness - Senior Personnel Officer
Albert Rose - Assistant Race Relations Adviser

OBSERVERS:

 - N.A.L.G.O. Representative
 - N.U.P.E. Representative

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT TO THE PANEL:

 - Personnel Officer
- Admin. Officer, Children's Homes
- Personnel Support

THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. To investigate fully the management and running of South Vale Assessment Centre, with particular regard to the allegations of racism, sexism, and bad child care and management practices, that have been made by some staff members.
2. To have the power to call to give evidence all existing and relevant employees of the Council, both staff and Management.

To have the power to call to give evidence all relevant children in care and/or, with advice, to determine the best and most sensitive means of eliciting such evidence.

To have the scope and resources to request and determine evidence from previous relevant employees, children in care, and present and past students on placement at South Vale Assessment Centre.

To be able to request and negotiate all relevant union and other institutional documents, e.g. College Student Reports.

3. To take cognizance of and be familiar with all relevant Council and Social Services Directorate Policies, and associated Procedures and Practices, paying particular regard to those of Equalities, Management, and Child Care.

To be able to seek expert advice, both from within and without the Council.

4. To consider, analyse and structure the evidence in order to -
 - i) draw conclusions and make recommendations with regard to
 - the equality practices;
 - the management practices;
 - ii) draw conclusions and make recommendations with regard to
 - disciplinary action, if necessary;
 - individual maltreatment (both employees and children in care) and appropriate compensation, if necessary;
 - iii) - draw conclusions and make recommendations, if necessary, with regard to improving and enhancing the Council's and Social Services Directorate's Equality, Management and Child Care Policies, Procedures and Practices.

5. With approval, to alter the terms of reference during the course of the investigation, as events and/or evidence so dictate.

INTRODUCTION

"Residential care staff and foster parents need to be sensitive to the special and distinctive needs of black children and to understand their family and community situation in Lambeth - this requires clear policy guidance, management commitment and training support."

The above, taken from the Council's "Good Practice Guide for Working with Black Children in Care", perhaps encapsulates in a cohesive form the overall objective of the Enquiry. The Panel was resolutely clear that its purpose must include looking in depth at the issues which bear upon the quality of service provided by South Vale. The task, therefore, was to ensure that all those who gave evidence to the Panel, whilst being advised of the seriousness of the Enquiry, were also mindful of the emphasis on what service was being delivered and how that service was offered.

To achieve the above, it was essential to engage in detailed questioning of the staff. The initial instructions given to the Panel indicated that it was only necessary to spend an average of half an hour with each witness. It was assumed that the Panel could complete the interviews with over forty staff, and a number of others, in a two to three week period. Those assessments were wildly optimistic. Indeed, the Panel was having to spend an average of one and a half hours with care staff and an hour with other support staff. This reality conflicted with the expectations of staff, who claimed to have been told that the matter would be fully concluded within four weeks. Bearing in mind that a number of the South Vale staff was suspended from duty and the consequent rumours which followed the decision to set up an Enquiry, the Panel was aware of the disturbing anxieties which staff were experiencing. As it transpired, the Enquiry lasted for much longer than was anticipated. The Panel had to be careful not to sacrifice its aim of undertaking a full and beneficial Enquiry to the interest of succumbing to a time-frame that was presumptuous.

The Enquiry was also constrained by the resources at its disposal. These included accommodation and administrative arrangements, which were to further hinder the functioning of the Panel. The limitations on space at Mary Seacole House meant that sessions were sometimes cancelled or held elsewhere, with consequences which did not assist the work of the Panel. Further to this, the accommodation available often failed to meet the basic requirements of access for disabled people within our Equal Opportunity Practices.

With regard to administrative support, the Panel again suffered a number of difficulties. The arrangements were inconsistent and did not take the real needs of the Panel into consideration. There were times when sessions were cancelled because of the lack of a minute taker. A number of problems have been encountered in ensuring typing back-up to the Panel. We have

consistently promised each witness that a copy of the transcript of their statement will be available to them at the end of the hearing - although we are certain that this promised provision will be kept, we regret that transcripts will not be available as early as we had hoped.

In general, therefore, the Panel was less than happy with the support and guidance provided to it, including from the Personnel Section. The importance and urgency attributed to the Enquiry when it was initially established were certainly not reflected by the organisational support offered to the Panel thereafter. Worse, this lack of commitment support and regard was inevitably communicated to those who came before the Panel, and to their representatives. Nevertheless, the limited support that was available was admirable and was genuinely appreciated by Panel members.

Before the setting up of the Enquiry, however, a number of staff had been suspended from duty, including several key members of the Management Team in the Centre. This preliminary decision clearly affected the attitude of both the suspended staff and their colleagues, and must have had an impact on the manner and the context of what was said to the Panel. There were indications throughout the Enquiry that Head Office Managers were giving careful consideration to the implications of staff suspensions in such circumstances, and were learning lessons for the future. The Panel has no observations to make on this. It may, nevertheless, be helpful to state the Panel's view that the suspension of staff was not a necessary, or even a helpful, preliminary to the successful running of the Enquiry.

Readers of the Report should be aware, however, that, in spite of the above, the Panel took a serious view of the allegations. The Council's Child Care Policy, Good Practice Guide and its Equal Opportunity Policy were paramount in the Panel's considerations during the conduct of the Enquiry.

HISTORICAL FACTORS

The Panel recognised that a number of unfortunate historical factors have adversely affected South Vale and impeded its functioning. It should be clearly stated at the outset that the existing staff group should not be held accountable for these, or any other, external constraints. On the other hand, the fact that the wider organisation has often acted in ways which are inimical to the maintenance of good practice at South Vale, should not be a "catch-all" excuse for each and every failure.

Among the externally determined constraints which have been reported to the Panel are the following:

1. The building, by virtue of its size and design, does not lend itself to the creation of an intimate and homely atmosphere, to effective non-intrusive observation of children, or to easy communications.
2. Similarly, the large staff group required to operate such a building militates against consistency in child care practice, and has led to complicated and unwieldy accountability structures.
3. South Vale has had to cope with severe staffing shortages over a very considerable period. Understandably, this creates difficulties in maintaining systems for staff training, supervision and development, as well as lowering morale and motivation and reducing the individual contact between staff and children.
4. The lack of available "follow-on" accommodation for children assessed at South Vale, has been pointed out by many witnesses. This clearly has a depressing effect on staff and children, and diverts the establishment from its primary focus.
5. For a series of reasons, there has been a lack of support for and supervision of the Officer-in-Charge, over a number of years. In particular, Senior Management has been unclear about what constitutes "good enough" child care for Lambeth's purposes, and there have been no adequate systems for inspection and monitoring.
6. The Panel feels strongly that, whatever the exigencies of the situation, the decanting of staff and children from St. Saviour's Children's Home into an Observation and Assessment Centre, was ill-advised and likely to be detrimental to the incoming children, in particular.

THE APPROACH

The Enquiry was asked to look specifically at the following areas.

1. CHILD CARE PRACTICE: a) The use of physical violence/abuse.
 b) Failure to meet the needs of individual children.
 c) Inappropriate methods of control and reward.

2. RACISM TOWARDS STAFF a) Individual incidents.
 AND CHILDREN: b) Institutional racism.

3. SEXISM TOWARDS STAFF: a) Individual incidents.
 b) Institutional sexism.

4. MANAGEMENT PRACTICE : a) Use of threats towards some staff and children.
 b) The use of favouritism.
 c) The removal of records from the Unit.

The above matters were dealt with at length, with a Lead Member taking major responsibility for fully exploring each area. Other members of the Panel added further questions.

The Panel began its hearings on Monday, 29th. July, 1989 and concluded 18th. December, 1989. There were a number of problems in arranging appointments convenient to both the Panel and the witnesses. However, fifty members of staff employed at South Vale were seen. Twelve other people, associated with South Vale, were also seen. Twelve members of staff were not seen by the Panel. With the exception of one case (where the member of staff concerned was ill), the Panel considered that those not seen would be unlikely to make new contributions to the evidence.

All witnesses were allowed to have a friend or Union representative with them during the interviews. Dialogue was not encouraged between witnesses and friends or representatives, and the Panel witnesses were also informed that should they not want to give evidence in the presence of Union Observers on the Panel, a request to that effect would be considered.

The Panel agreed that at the end of the Enquiry, each witness would receive a copy of the transcript of their statement.

Assurances on confidentiality were given to all those participating.

OPERATIONAL AND PRACTICE ISSUES

The Panel questioned every member of staff who was available to appear and a number of other people, including the Visiting Medical Officer, the Consultant Psychiatrist and the Educational Psychologist. In addition, key officers who were based at Social Service Headquarters with either advisory, functional, support or managerial relationships to the Centre, were interviewed. One Senior Officer, whom the Panel felt could have contributed significantly to the Enquiry, was not able to attend through illness.

It was imperative in an Enquiry of this nature, and fundamental to the brief, that the Panel looked in detail at Practices and Procedures. In this restraint, the Use of Physical, the Needs of Individual Children and the Methods of Control and Reward were examined and explored for their relevance, competence and effectiveness. In the main, the evidence given revealed that practices were variably interpreted by staff and their validity in the context of Council Policies and Procedures was thereby undermined. Current views on the role of a modern Assessment Centre was difficult to establish.

1. THE POINTS SYSTEM

The points system at South Vale was discussed at great length during Panel sittings. It appeared to be a major bone of contention with many staff disliking the system, both in principle and practice, but feeling powerless to change or abandon it despite discussion at staff meetings.

Many staff reported abuse of the system, in particular the deduction of points from children as an "on-the-spot" sanction. All staff were agreed that this was improper, but some were honest enough to admit to having used the system in this way from time to time. In any case, it was difficult to see how confusion could have been avoided given that other systems of sanction were in operation concurrently, for example, with regard to absconding and smoking. These systems, which are documented, seemed to the Panel over-elaborate, and to militate against the use of initiative by staff and against an individualised, non-institutional response.

There was massive confusion about the nature and scope of the points system. Many staff asserted that all children were included (except short-term emergency admissions); others thought that young/older children or children who had resided in South Vale for many months could be exempted. Different staff had different views about their capacity to intervene to modify the system on behalf of children.

Of more concern was the way in which the points system was seen by some staff as a "behaviour modification" approach, and by others as a quasi-psychotherapeutic method designed to encourage children to come to terms with their behaviour in a supportive setting. It seemed to the Panel that the points system fell between both stools, lacking the consistency and theoretical underpinning necessary for the former, but operated too inflexibly and intrusively for the latter. In either case, it was unlikely that the perceptions of the children themselves were properly assessed or taken into account.

Many staff clearly valued their regular opportunity to sit down with their group of children and review their behaviour and the interaction of the group in a structured way. The Panel accepted this, but could not see what the points system added to this process.

2. FAVOURITISM AND SPECIAL TREATMENT

Allegations of favouritism were refuted by over 50% of interviewees. Perhaps not surprisingly, some staff felt themselves to be "not part of the inner group", but nevertheless did not feel that there was favouritism. In contrast to that, a very substantial number of interviewees considered the OIC had favourites amongst staff and children. There appeared to be a strong view, amongst black and white staff, that one member of black staff who had been redeployed to South Vale was treated more favourably, and received special privileges. The view was also expressed that the OIC listened more readily to black staff than to white. It is possible to surmise that he may have been over-cautious in his handling of black staff or, on the other hand, over-dependent upon the views of black staff in respect of black children.

Certain children appear to have been selected as favourites by the OIC but one explanation offered to the Panel was that the OIC was the only person at South Vale competent to deal with very disturbed children. He often gave "special care" but never favouritism. If that situation prevailed, it would seem desirable for the OIC to convey to his staff his special interest in a child and engage their co-operation in establishing an appropriate care plan utilizing his special skills towards that aim. There was insufficient evidence to support the allegation that the OIC took certain children to his flat. One interviewee told the Panel: "Staff and children talked about the OIC's favouritism but it is felt there is no point in challenging it." The Panel considered that it would be functional for staff to re-examine their performance in this area and to consider the implications for staff and children if practice is not communicated to the wider group. It is not felt to be a constructive element in good child care practice, while acknowledging that there will always be children with special needs who will need special skills.

3. THE CHILD CARE POLICY AND THE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Since 1975, Lambeth has made significant progress in its attempts to achieve objectives that incorporate the virtues of an Equal Opportunity Policy. The Social Services Directorate, after considerable consultation, established a number of policy approaches for achieving their objectives. The "Child Care Policy" and the "Good Practice Guide for Working with Black Families and Black Children in Care" emerged as important statements in the articulation of the organisation's commitment to the care of children. Implementation demanded familiarity with both content and process of these policies by all those involved at South Vale. No participant in the South Vale initiative could be exempt from the expectations of a service which guarantees quality and equality were to be provided.

We began by looking at the Child Care Policy, the main elements of which are as follows:-

1. A local authority cannot perform all of the functions of a parent.
2. A child has the right to expect permanence. This can only be provided within the child's own home, or in a substitute home that is intended to last and is protected legally.
3. Where, in law, a local authority has to take over parental responsibilities with, or without parental agreement, planning must be the keyword.
4. The presence of carers fulfilling the tasks of parenthood within a relationship that is expected to last, is what promotes the personal growth and development of a child.
5. The changing role of residential staff, with particular emphasis on training which should be oriented towards that of foster carers or intensive direct work with the whole family. Partnership is an important element in that goal.

The Panel had the following observations to make about the way Lambeth's Child Care Policy was implemented at South Vale.

1. The difficulties of dealing with children who know they are not permanent was acknowledged by the Panel to be a major constraint. The concern was that in a "short-term" establishment, the constraints could lead to excessive control.
2. The Panel studied the rules surrounding visiting children at South Vale and found them rigid. Facilities afforded to parents lacked comfort and did little to promote the concept of relaxed, shared care.

3. The lack of adequate staff training was a major concern for the Panel. Against the background of the changing role of residential social work, it was felt that:-

- a) Training was inadequate to undertake work involving families.
- b) There was little evidence to indicate a welcoming partnership role and, generally speaking, there was not a skilled response.

4. One feature noted was that South Vale kept children whom no other Lambeth homes were willing to take and who were difficult to place anywhere else.

4. THE GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR WORKING WITH BLACK FAMILIES AND BLACK CHILDREN IN CARE

The Good Practice Guide, although available since 1982, was insufficiently read or understood.

" Many of the issues raised in the Good Practice Guide constitute good social work practice for all children in care. However, it is essential that work with black families and black children in care fully takes into account the dynamics and cultural milieu of black families, as well as recognising the impact of racism and disadvantage of the black community. The Guide is intended to highlight these issues within the context of Social Work Practice. "

The Panel found that:-

1. Most staff at South Vale (even if they had not read the Good Practice Guide) had some idea about the need for black children to be provided with special skin and hair care. However, there was little idea of the importance of individualised provisions, and a lack of awareness that all black children's skin and hair did not respond to similar treatment.
2. Similarly, the concept of ethnic meals was unsatisfactory. The provision of meals was irregular and not geared to special needs. There was insufficient thought and guidance given to the provision and preparation of food, for example, for African children vis a vis Afro Caribbean children or Black Asian children.
3. The advice offered in the Good Practice Guide regarding "co-workers" was not sufficiently understood by most staff. Black workers were heavily leaned upon to do the work with black children and it did not appear that white staff had learned from them. Enhancement of a child's positive identity and provision of "survival skills" necessary for living in a racist society might be noted as two examples of that. Indeed, in many cases there was a denial of racism.

4. Visiting rules did not recognise the value of the extended family and kinship ties and there was no evidence that black parents were encouraged to share the parenting role.
5. There was no evidence that staff acted as good parents to children who attended schools in the community and the Panel felt some concern that many staff would be unaware of their responsibilities in having discussions with the schools regarding, for example, the school's level of commitment to black pupils or examining the curriculum content.
6. Staff at South Vale tried to meet individual children's leisure time needs and there was evidence that efforts were made to provide appropriate clubs. However, it was less clear whether children who might have had more intellectual hobbies would have been so assisted. The Panel would have wished to see some evidence of the community being welcomed into South Vale.
7. Provision of relevant literature e.g. glossy black magazines, West Indian/Asian newspapers, were not apparent. Some staff stressed that there were books for black children but when questioned, could not name the titles or explain the content. It was felt that some of the readily available glossy black magazines might have contributed to the child's positive self image.
8. Assessments appeared to be based more on judgements than on observations. It was felt that the system lent itself to the possibility of racism.
9. Feelings of isolation were prevalent amongst a substantial percentage of black staff and there was no evidence that white staff were aware of those feelings.

5. MEETING THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN

A substantial proportion of interviewees felt that individual children's needs were well met at South Vale while agreeing that needs might be better met if staffing resources were improved.

There was evidence that everyone wished to provide the best service for the children in their care and the Panel frequently found committed, dedicated workers who wished only to do their best for all children.

Most white staff felt that they were sensitive to the needs of black children and would consult with their black colleagues if in doubt. Many black staff felt that the overall ethos of "control" at South Vale made it difficult to meet the individual needs of children. Some staff made attempts to meet those needs but were hampered by institutionalised racism. This will be dealt with separately in this Report.

The grave concern of the Panel was that, however well-meaning staff were regarding the welfare of the children, there was too much trust placed in intuitive working. Insufficient consideration was given to the importance of constructive training, or to sensitivity to special needs. Supervision and training on the understanding of the Good Practice Guide for Working with Black Families and Black Children in Care was also neglected.

In August, 1982, all Senior Managers within the Directorate involved in service provision for black children in care, made a commitment to encourage implementation of the working practice outlined in the Guide by giving staff the opportunity to discuss the papers in various ways, and through training opportunities. In spite of systematic exposure to the Guide in 1982/1983, it was apparent to the Panel that the momentum had not been maintained over the years. It was acknowledged that the increased numbers of black staff had helped enormously in the care of children but that there was a danger of white staff taking for granted the content of the Guide and relying too heavily on black colleagues at the expense of their own development. In general terms, white staff when questioned were able to reiterate a section of the Guide relating to skin and hair care and some were able to discuss the importance of ethnic meals. However, few had sufficient insight into the psychological needs of black children, the importance of positive identity for black children and the fundamental necessity for black children and their families to be respected for who they are.

One interviewee (not a member of the care staff at South Vale) felt that the "general atmosphere was not conducive to good child care" and felt "appalled at what went on at times."

Another interviewee, while claiming that the positive identity of black children was not sufficiently considered, felt that the situation had improved since the appointment of additional staff. The same interviewee asked, "why headquarters Senior Managers allowed the ethos at South Vale to continue?" Undoubtedly, the redeployment of staff from other Lambeth Children's Homes to South Vale brought many advantages but also some period of disquiet. It is never comfortable for existing staff, who feel they are working well, to be challenged by 'newcomers' and it is never easy for 'newcomers' to adjust from a Children's Home atmosphere to the more structured regime of an Assessment Centre. Good supervision and induction would have gone some way towards easing the inevitable tensions which existed.

6. PHYSICAL HANDLING

There was no evidence of systematic or frequent physical abuse of children at South Vale. No child appeared to have made any complaint to any outside person.

However, the rough handling of children during the process of restraint was a source of concern to two members of staff, who had not been accustomed to the systems in operation at South Vale. It was not

possible for the Panel to make a judgement about these matters after so much time had elapsed. Nevertheless, such anxieties highlight the need for all establishments to have inspection and monitoring mechanisms in place which ensure that:

- a) staff responses to uncontrolled outbursts ("blow outs") by children do not become routinised or institutionalised;
- b) staff and children are able to learn from such incidents, and to learn more than simply to perfect the processes of restraint;
- c) children have access to proper channels of complaint, when necessary, and staff are properly protected against unjustified complaints;
- d) all accidents which may occur are properly recorded and referred for medical attention, where necessary;
- e) adequate attention is paid to the emotional, as well as the physical aspects of confronting challenging behaviour.

It should be reiterated that there is no evidence of children having been harmed as a result of the process of restraint. The Panel's concerns related to a readiness to assume that practice was of a satisfactory standard, without adequate monitoring systems. In particular, it seemed that restraint was never raised as a formal topic in South Vale, or formal instruction been given to new staff. It seems of crucial importance to the Panel that pivotal and influential establishments, like South Vale, do not come to rely too heavily upon any unspoken, informal culture which does not link adequately to other establishments or to Lambeth policies.

7. ASSESSMENT AND CONTROL

It is obvious that any Assessment Centre will need to strike a balance between allowing unlimited "acting out", and applying constraints which will mask or distort those very behaviours which give rise to the need for assessment. It would be folly to argue for the removal of all controls. Such a regime would give rise to unacceptable risks for children and staff, would render rational assessment impossible, and would soon become unmanageable. Nevertheless, the Panel formed the judgement that the regime at South Vale had strayed too far in the direction of seeking to control children's behaviour. Indeed, some staff spoke as if it were the main function of the establishment to prepare young people for adult life, rather than to assess their future care needs on a short-term basis. (We have already noted the problems caused for staff by the non-availability of move-on accommodation.)

The view was expressed to the Panel by some of those we interviewed that South Vale valued conformity too highly, and that children were expected to fall into line with a somewhat outdated and conventional stereotype

of a well-behaved child. It is quite clear that the expectations of South Vale were out of kilter with a number of the education centres which the children attended, and with a number of the residential establishments which went on to receive them.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of these differences of view (and arguments about the merits/disadvantages of strict/lax upbringing of children are probably irresolvable), it was of concern to the Panel that there appeared to be no mechanism which allowed access to anyone outside the staff group to the day-to-day practices at South Vale, and hence no system for ensuring adherence to the expectations of the agency overall.

By and large, staff at South Vale did not see the regime there as institutional, or repressive, but there were exceptions to this view. The following practices were reported to the Panel in a negative light, by a range of people both inside and outside South Vale:

- children being shouted at harshly;
- girls not allowed to wear trousers to school, even where this was permitted by the school itself;
- children withdrawn from therapeutic group being run outside South Vale, for misbehaviour inside the home;
- undressing early in the evening and changing into night attire (- various reasons were given by staff to account for this practice, ranging from children's wishes to staff convenience);
- fines for absconding;
- children not allowed to eat dessert if main course not eaten;
- lack of private time when not under observation;
- lack of free association with other children;
- silence during meals;
- rigid routines over hair washing.

Again, many of these items are matters of opinion or interpretation. It is of concern, however, that the internal culture of South Vale seems to have been so strong that it was rarely felt necessary, or possible to question, challenge, or review these practices, and that South Vale felt able to impose such rules without reference to other agencies which might be affected by them.

In the view of the Panel, South Vale was not helped in these areas by a number of other organisational practices. The fact that South Vale became a long-term home for a number of children has been mentioned above. It also seems to have functioned as a "reformatory" for children whose challenging behaviour was beyond the capacity of other establishments.

Given these circumstances, it is not surprising that the goals of South Vale have become confused, and that it is seen as elitist and exclusive by other Children's Homes. It was often said to the Panel that South Vale is not like other Children's Homes and so cannot be judged in the same ways. Surely this is true only to the extent that South Vale has a special and different function. In all other respects, South Vale is an

integral part of Lambeth's Children's Homes service and should espouse the same values and practice base. It is not helpful to encourage staff to believe that they are undertaking work which does not share a common core with the work of other CRCOs simply because they are in a specialist setting. Moreover, the fact that South Vale is a focal specialist resource is a reason for making its internal workings more, rather than less transparent to other establishments.

8. STAFF SUPERVISION

Throughout the interviews it was repeatedly stressed that Supervision in the field of residential social work should not be compared with field social work and Panel members were mindful of the different emphasis and circumstances which surround day to day work. However, since May 1983 a "Management Development Programme" has been in existence for all Managers, from all Divisions, whereby they accepted the Directorate's Policy Statement. Implicit in that policy was the key component of formal, regular supervision as an important means of achieving results.

The Panel found only scant evidence of a commitment to supervision and there was only a very small minority of Managers at South Vale who either received or offered it. It would appear that when supervision was available, it was mostly haphazard, irregular, non-productive and without clearly defined goals for either the supervisor or the supervisee.

There was a great deal of evidence that Managers high in the structure were not committed to the principle of supervision and gave it only very low priority in their work programmes. The Panel frequently learned that Headquarters Senior Managers had told them that the 'children must always come first' and, while that is undeniable, the Panel was puzzled as to the reason Senior Managers had paid lip service to the "Management Development Programme" when they must have been well aware that, in practice, one of the key components was not adhered to. The maxim that 'children must come first' must not be allowed to negate the importance of effective staff supervision. The Panel was most concerned when told by a South Vale Manager that she did not agree with supervision. Staff members in her group were well aware of that fact and it was felt that it must have been extremely difficult for new staff members at South Vale to have confidence in their Managers when that fact was known.

One member of staff relatively new to South Vale told the Panel that she had been there three months before her supervisor made time to provide formal supervision. There was evidence also that for six years following his appointment, the Officer -in-Charge received no supervision whatsoever. He received one short period of supervision during 1987, when there was a covering Senior Manager from HQ, followed by monthly supervision from July 1988 by his present Line Manager. He advised that he welcomed the help and support the supervision sessions afforded him; he benefited from being able to share new ideas and was optimistic that with the new level of support and guidance he looked

forward to taking South Vale into the 1990's. He felt many of his staff resisted supervision and did not feel it was achievable owing to crises and emergencies. In spite of that, there appears to have been little effort made to rectify that by planning and goal-setting within South Vale.

A special mention must be made of the complete lack of supervisory facilities afforded the night staff at South Vale. The Panel was most concerned that those staff members appeared to be omitted from all constructive thought surrounding the whole concept of supervision.

Against the background of scant formal supervision, it would seem that a substantial amount of informal support, advice and consultation took place at all levels. Descriptions were given to the Panel of discussions taking place at daily, weekly and monthly meetings whereby staff were able to air their views, or become aware of issues and major topics of concern. However, the Panel felt it was a poor substitute for formal supervision and considered there was no safety net for people who were absent from the meetings, who might be too insecure to question, and who may have felt inhibited about discussing their work amongst other staff who had been at South Vale longer. Unquestionably, Managers always made themselves available to junior staff on an informal basis, but again, it was felt by the Panel that learning 'on the job' in a hit and miss fashion was highly unsatisfactory.

A further point of concern for Panel members was the question of how staff became aware of Lambeth's policies and again, the lack of formal supervision highlighted the difficulties of ensuring that staff were made aware and sufficiently understood such documents as the "Child Care Policy", the "Good Practice Guide" and the "Equal Opportunity Policy". It was felt to be unacceptable practice to advise staff that the documents existed and have them sign to say they knew of their existence. It is a well known fact that some staff are unlikely to give the appropriate level of consideration to important documents without careful discussion and tuition. Indeed, it is an indictment on Managers that they treated such important documents with such little regard and a further indictment that Head Office staff appeared to do little to ensure that staff were supervised on the policy documents.

SOUTH VALE AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

1. RACISM AT SOUTH VALE

In this section of the report, the Panel has looked at evidence suggesting either direct, or institutional racism in employment and child care practice.

Direct racism is defined here as an act which is intended to disadvantage a person (or cause injury to feelings) because of their racial origin. Institutional racism is defined as an act, or practice, which may not be intended to discriminate on racial grounds but nonetheless does so,

DIRECT RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

It must be said at the outset that most of the evidence in this area was circumstantial, and not supported by the majority of staff. However, experience has shown that direct racial discrimination is often hard to prove, especially given Lambeth's stance on race and the policies flowing from this.

The main source of concern in this area was the prevalence of "joking" and "name-calling" of a racial nature between black and white (including Irish) staff. Two female officers in particular, one white and one black, were seen as involved in such interactions, although their relationship was characterised as "good-natured." Both the Senior Assistant and Officer in Charge were aware of this situation but nothing had been done to change it. The Senior Assistant in Charge said that he had spoken to both members of staff on a "number of occasions" but confessed to being "unable to do anything about it". In an atmosphere where this type of "banter" is tolerated, it is usually black staff who end up worse off as it provides a platform where racist views can be freely aired without fear of sanctions. The fact that both the Senior Assistant in Charge (SAOIC), and Officer in Charge (OIC), were unable to stop this behaviour raises concerns over their ability to address issues of race and to create an atmosphere where black people can work without fear of ridicule.

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

EMPLOYMENT:

Although many of the employment issues relating to institutional racism at South Vale could be identified in most Lambeth residential establishments, the incidence and breadth of these discrepancies are such as to raise concerns over career development for black people at

South Vale. Many of these concerns emanate from a result of bad management practices (covered elsewhere in the document), but the effect is likely to be felt most by black staff because of an accumulation of disadvantaging factors.

RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION:

Throughout South Vale's history there has never been a black "Senior Manager". Although many black and white staff said it would be a move in the right direction, it was pointed out that a vacancy had not appeared for a long period which had militated against this happening. Even so, when "middle management" vacancies appeared, black people were not recruited. This could be for a variety of reasons, e.g. lack of experience, not applying, interview bias etc. However, Senior Management could have made use of the Race Relations Act, reviewed job descriptions and person specifications, and their recruitment procedure, in order to find out why black people were not being recruited to these posts. It was not evident that Management had taken any initiative, or asked for help in this area. It would also appear that recruitment and selection panels have never had a black member of staff on them, by virtue of the generally lower grades of black staff.

SUPERVISION AND TRAINING:

Because formal supervision of staff did not take place on a regular basis, if at all, it is difficult to see how the career development of any staff, (especially black staff), took place in a meaningful way. Managers complained that they had great difficulty in getting staff on courses at Carisbrooke Training Unit because of the limited numbers of places available, although a small number of black staff had been on secondment for CSS or CQSW courses. In general, career development and training were viewed too narrowly by Managers.

A number of black staff had been in the same post for over six years, others had hardly progressed more than a single grade in the same period. Black staff, when questioned why they had not applied for higher posts, often offered a rationale of their situation, such as "I like what I'm doing", "It suits me", or "I don't want to move on". Although these comments may be valid, it was said with such frequency as to suggest that these staff either doubted their ability, or had lost any motivation in working to develop their career.

RACISM AND CHILD CARE PRACTICE:

Throughout the Enquiry, conflicting evidence was given on the nature and frequency of "ethnic meals" provided for children at South Vale. This ranged from twice a week to once a month, or never. Although records are kept of "ethnic meals" provided, there was sufficient evidence to doubt the validity of these records. It is clear that "ethnic meals" are provided on an infrequent and ad hoc basis, and are not of a quality which black children would find acceptable. This, to quote the Good Practice Guide, is "to dismiss an important part of one's culture."

Very few staff, when asked about the contents of the Good Practice Guide, mentioned the need for black children to have a positive cultural identity and how this could be done. When asked what was being done, staff would say books and literature are provided which show black characters. In pressing staff further for the title or story line of these books, they were unable to give any further information. Before the Enquiry took place, the Panel visited South Vale and found no evidence of books or magazines containing black characters of any description.

Because staff in general lacked an awareness of the contents of the Guide, it was not surprising that a number of incidents came to light which caused the Panel some concern. For instance, a white female night duty worker was proud that both white and black children called her "nanny." The Panel also learned of a member of staff reading a bedtime story to a black child in which the central character was a "snow queen with beautiful blonde hair and blue eyes." A minority of white staff did not think there was any difference between the needs of black and white children, or could say how the needs of an Afro-Caribbean child may be different to those of an African child. In general, the needs of African children were not being addressed in any form at South Vale. Again, quoting from the Guide, it is difficult to see how staff prepared black children to "face up to possible racial issues when discharged from care." It is important to bear in mind that South Vale is a "short term" assessment centre, so only a limited amount can be realistically achieved. Even so, most staff were unaware of these basic expectations

MONITORING:

Apart from records of meal provision, no other monitoring of child care practice on the lines of race was evident during the Enquiry. The "points system" was never evaluated to see whether black children did less well than white children in its operation. There was no mechanism to ensure that staff had read and understood the Good Practice Guide for Working with Black Families and Black Children in Care, and no means of monitoring the effective implementation of the policy. In effect, no thought was given by Senior Management as to how child care practices on race were progressing at South Vale.

In conclusion, it must be stated that from the evidence given to the Panel it would seem that the approach of Management and staff to race issues is to address them as they arise, a reactive approach. This was evident from questioning on the content of staff meetings. In these meetings, race was not put as a regular item on the agenda and would only come onto the agenda when discussing a particular black child. This approach denied the opportunity of staff and Management to discuss a wide range of issues and plan ahead for the most effective ways of meeting the needs of black children. Although black staff were consulted on the care of black children in South Vale, because of the lack of any initiative elsewhere in South Vale, this may have had the effect of marginalising race issues even further.

2. SEXISM

SEXISM - can be defined as a manifestation of sexual discrimination which affects morale, sense of job security, career development prospects, and job satisfaction.

To illustrate that sexism existed at South Vale, the following examples can be cited from the information provided to the Panel and those interviewees who attended.

In order to address the issues of sexism, the following will be examined:-

- Organisational structure
- Meeting/communication structures
- Staff relationships
- Mechanism for communication
- Equal Opportunity Employment Policy
- Service delivery

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE:

This is a traditional hierarchical structure with an Officer in Charge, Senior Assistant Officer in Charge, three Assistant Officers in Charge, Group Leaders, Assistant Group Leaders, Team Leaders and Children's Residential Care Officers.

Although job descriptions did not indicate any gender bias, some women perceived themselves as having less status and decision making capacity than men in the same grade.

The above comments reflect the structure of the Care Staff. Domestic and Administrative staff structures are similarly hierarchical. Not only were there communication gaps between the staff groupings, but there was lack of communication within staff groupings. For example, one employee who had been employed for 22 years had had no contact with the Officer in Charge beyond saying 'good morning'.

This structure has militated against women expressing their views with the resulting effects on confidence and morale. These points will be expanded below.

RECRUITMENT:

It can justifiably be assumed that recruitment panels were nearly always exclusively male - women had no opportunity to participate in the recruitment procedure. This contravened the spirit of the Council's Equal Opportunity Employment Policy and discriminated against women.

MEETING/COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES:

Although staff meetings were held regularly and were very well documented, these really had a casework dimension rather than providing a forum for staff discussion or an opportunity for staff to make any input. Management used these as a mechanism for conveying instructions without any real discussion. The underlying mood of the meetings would appear to have been authoritarian.

The usual structure of the weekly staff meetings reflected the service delivery structure, i.e. along gender lines.. Staff working to the Girls Section attended one meeting and the boys another.

SOME OBSERVATIONS:

Boys and girls received different treatment -

Gender segregation reinforced that.

Segregation of staff meetings meant that the different treatment went unrecognised and unacknowledged.

Specific Examples:

Girls were required to change into their nightclothes after supper.

Girls had an imposed mode of dress and a rule existed whereby they could not wear trousers to the Old Library, even though the rules of the Old Library allowed that. (That ruling was noted in the staff minutes and was raised by a panel witness, eternal to South Vale.)

Bath routines were imposed on girls but not on boys.

These examples demonstrate that girls were subject to regimes which impinged on their personal autonomy and choices in a way that boys were not.

It has been demonstrated that staff meetings were essentially a forum for discussing the children.

There was no forum for either discussion of staffing issues or staff development. This resulted in -

An undermining of confidence of the staff, particularly female staff who were either concentrated at the bottom of the hierarchy or perceived themselves to be in a less powerful position.

Most staff were not aware of the conditions of service/entitlements, e.g. maternity leave, job share, promotion procedures etc., have tended to remain in the same post for years, and have even been excluded from Acting Up arrangements.

The fragmented structures have meant that there was no awareness on the part of South Vale staff of institutionalised sexism, both in relation to staff and children.

STAFF RELATIONSHIPS:

It has been mentioned earlier that the staff meeting structure at South Vale was such that individual staff groupings were unaware and uninformed of matters pertinent to the group as a whole. This had the effect that some members of staff were included in the decision-making process and others not, and there was a perception that some staff were treated favourably by the Officer in Charge. There is no evidence to support favouritism as such, but access to the Officer in Charge was not consistent.

South Vale had a number of staff who had been in post for many years and had not kept abreast of trends and developments, both within the Council and externally. Newly appointed staff, or those who had transferred from other Lambeth Children's Homes, experienced some difficulty about integrating into the South Vale way of working and thinking.

Staff, particularly women, were reactive in their approach and seemed unwilling or unable to demonstrate their skills and abilities in such a way that they achieved appropriate recognition.

This had particular effects for members of the night staff who were clearly disadvantaged, not only by the system of night working at South Vale but also Lambeth's policy of having waking night staff. This excluded them from developing their practitioner skills and denied them the opportunity of assessing, identifying or even demonstrating supervisory and administrative skills. Assumptions had been made about them that they were uninterested or unable to participate in the work at South Vale other than as an 'invisible' group of staff.

Staff developed their own informal networks and support groups and this militated against them as they did not highlight their feelings in a constructive way. In the absence of staff meetings as a general forum, and supervision as a particular forum, it was inevitable that there were assumptions made which created a climate detrimental to the women staff.

There appeared to be some inconsistency about relationships with Senior Staff. Whilst they were informally available when require, nothing of substance seemed to generate from the individual discussions, i.e. there was no ensuing action.

The Panel heard that some staff expected male staff to become involved whenever there was any disruption, others said that the male staff automatically intervened, and other staff said that there was no difference in expectation and males and females worked in a similar way.

The indications to the Panel were that women did not recognise their equal value to male staff and did not react against the macho and physical responses to situations at work and consequently conformed to traditional stereotyping. Both male and female staff at South Vale were not conscious that the effects of their sexist behaviour would militate against positive imagery for the female staff or the young females in their care. This form of behaviour could lead to a perceived dependency upon the male role.

The segmentation of staff groupings particularly affected opportunities for members of particular staff groups to form relationships with one another. Additionally, it appeared that there was a prevailing atmosphere at South Vale in which 'everyone knew their place'. This was particularly regrettable as individual members of staff had much to contribute to each other and thereby collectively enrich their own working lives as well as making South Vale a happier place for the children in their care.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYMENT POLICY

In Paragraph 2.1 of the Council's E.O.E.P. it states that "equality of opportunity regardless of race is vital, both to give individuals a fair and equal chance of developing their abilities and realising their expectations and also for the Council to make effective use of its wo/manpower" and Paragraph 2.1.b. ".....Social attitudes may deprive women of opportunities to realise their abilities and thereby lead many women to lower their expectations. The aim of the policy is to improve the opportunities available to women....."

The atmosphere and style of working at South Vale did not meet with the Council's expectations.

The Senior Staff Group had been in post for some time and was predominantly white male. There were two female Assistant Officers in Charge. The Senior Staff Group in no way reflected the Council's equality targeting policy and would appear negatively to influence the aspirations of black and/or female staff. As previously mentioned, the fact that women were largely excluded from participating in the recruitment and selection process deprives the Council of valuable knowledge and experience which would have been to the advantage of both staff and children in care at South Vale.

SERVICE DELIVERY:

Previous observations have identified sexism arising out of current practices. To recap, the Panel found evidence of service delivery along gender demarcation lines, different treatment of boys and girls, negative role models, and an institutional ethos which would generally militate against females.

Evidence presented to the Enquiry, and supporting documentation, could not be said to uphold allegations of direct sexism at South Vale, either in terms of employment practices or service delivery. However, there was substantial evidence of institutional sexism in both areas.

THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The details contained in this report have already indicated that the Enquiry can fairly be said to have failed to establish allegations of misconduct and maladministration about which it might be appropriate to suggest recommendations for disciplinary action. Nevertheless, the Enquiry Panel remains far from happy with certain practices and the role of the Council's policies in the operation of South Vale.

We have already commented on the appropriateness of the mechanism for looking at the allegations that were raised. The Panel needed to be convinced that the alleged misconduct had indeed occurred and could be substantiated. That is not to say that the Panel concluded that the complaints should not have been raised. Indeed, as the report has shown, there was justifiable cause in bringing to the attention of Management the concerns held by the two members of staff in question. The Panel was very disturbed on a particular charge of brutality that the conflicting evidence of staff did not assist a clarification.

The report has established that favouritism, although isolated, was, unhappily, a feature of management practice at South Vale. The Manager defending the charge was convinced that a justifiable technique was being labelled as favouritism. It must be pointed out that other staff failed to recognise that practice as a child care approach. In the main, they agreed that it was favouritism.

We were amazed that South Vale appeared to operate with what can only be described as a 'hit and miss' approach to Council Policy on Child Care. It must be considered untenable in an organisation like this, that significant numbers of key staff have not been inducted on the Child Care Policy and the Good Practice Guide, the cornerstones of our approach to working with children. One member of staff at Team Leader level, knew nothing about these policies and yet she was appointed in 1988, at a time when child care issues were very much 'under the spotlight'.

We were not impressed with the way the organisation is structured. There is an overkill of tiers within the organisation. In some instances, those tiers bear no relation to assisting the efficient functioning of the organisation. The cumbersome arrangement whereby a member of staff was not supervised by her/his Manager is confusing. Team Leaders are apparently without authority. The need for South Vale to be more closely accountable to officers based at Mary Seacole House is urgent. The Panel does not feel that South Vale was well managed. The Department must take every step to ensure that a view that South Vale is managed by a select few is dispensed with. Management meetings tended to be reactive (looking at problems) and parochial. The Panel feels that key areas of the Council policies were marginalised by the Management Group. There is a need for a massive overhaul in this area.

The area dealing with staff supervision has detailed the Panel's findings on management practices. There can be no excuse for either the lack of planned supervision or, when some supervision took place, its inappropriateness. The management practices at South Vale have not given sufficient emphasis to supervision as a tool for eventually delivering a high quality of service. There must, in future, be more supervision and continual induction to keep pace with the ever-growing need to achieve the highest standards in child care practice.

The treatment of Equal Opportunity and Race presents a further dilemma. Perhaps the best way to describe South Vale's attitude to Race is to say that a kind of inertia existed which it was easy to fault, but difficult to convict. As the preceding paragraph indicated, Race was one of the key issues of Council policy which was marginalised. Race was only discussed at staff meetings 'if a problem arose'. Further, the promotion of the Council's objectives on Race was left to black staff. One such black staff, who was not a care staff, was apparently regarded as the authority on Race matters. South Vale would do 'just enough to survive', sufficient to ensure that it was not accused. This could not be acceptable to the Panel and is not supported by Council policy. There was no training and no evidence of an attempt by Management to develop a 'race-friendly' environment. Black staff are not making meaningful progress at South Vale. The achievement of Team Leader status at South Vale is meaningless. The rank holds little responsibility and no authority. Black staff were not progressing beyond Team leader. It follows that the Senior Management Group is all white. Further, the group is comprised of a group of white men who have been in their positions for a long time.

There is without doubt an environment of passive sexism existing at South Vale. Although women hold key senior posts, the evidence has shown that the real decision makers in the organisation are men. There are certainly no black women in positions of influence. The Panel is not fully convinced that the apportionment of responsibilities is totally free of a sexist bias. There was some evidence that women were pushed aside, because men considered themselves more capable of 'dealing' with certain situations. We have already talked about the division of children on the grounds of sex. We remain unhappy about this.

There is much in our view that is wrong with South Vale. No one must assume that an absence of disciplinary measures against staff is commensurate with satisfaction with South Vale. We are not very pleased with what we have heard. The need for drastic changes in management and operation cannot be overemphasised. Our recommendations will indicate how strongly we feel.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Panel therefore recommends the following.

1. The return of South Vale to its original objectives of being an Assessment Centre.
2. A restructuring of the organisation to take account of the following:-
 - 2.1 Appropriately qualified staff commensurate to the objectives of the Centre.
 - 2.2 The integration of an Equal Opportunity personnel in the structure at Deputy Manager level with responsibility for training.
 - 2.3 The removal of unnecessary tiers within the organisational structure.
 - 2.4 The creation of a fair structure for night staff, which takes account of the need for active management and career opportunities.
3. The closure of South Vale for a period of up to three months to achieve the above objectives.
4. The need for a smaller Senior Management Group.
5. The need to give serious consideration to the advisability of spouses working together within the same Senior Management Group.

We recognise that this recommendation has implications for other areas of the Department and therefore feel that Committee approval might be needed.
6. The need for an intensive induction programme for staff appointed to the new South Vale.
7. The development of a Code of Practice for all residential staff, on dealing with Challenging Behaviour and Restraint, and on language in a multiracial environment.
8. The need for clear Management relationships between officers at Head Office and the Assessment Centre.

9. A List of Standards on Monitoring Performance, Equal Opportunity and Relationships within Residential Centres.
10. That the use of the points system at South Vale be discontinued. In general, the use of points systems or token economy systems is not appropriate in Lambeth's Children's Homes. Any other such schemes in other Homes should be identified and only continued with the consent of the Principal Manager, and if proper professional oversight can be provided.
11. That a protocol be drawn up for South Vale to clarify when and in what fashion the Visiting Medical Officer should be informed about any injury or illness affecting a child.
12. That staff at South Vale should, as part of their formal induction, be informed about prevailing policy with regard to the restraint of children.
13. That the use of interview rooms at South Vale as "time-out" rooms be discontinued.
14. That further consideration be given to alternative ways of grouping children at South Vale, e.g. in terms of age.
15. That efforts be made to establish formal and informal contacts between staff at South Vale and those in other Homes, with a view to (a) promoting a unified child care service and (b) establishing a mutual framework of expectations.
16. That the practice, common in many authorities, of using the assessment centre for the control of unruly children (other than those who have an agreed need for assessment) is undesirable, especially where it merely compensates for lack of support to or resources in other Homes.
17. That in applying its rules to children, South Vale should also take due account of the rules which apply to children in schools and other daytime settings.
18. That every effort be made to move children on from South Vale after assessment; not to do so is to doom any Assessment Centre to failure.
19. That resources be made available to develop a genuine multi-disciplinary approach within South Vale. In particular, additional Psychiatry sessions should be made available for consultation work with staff.
20. That all Job Descriptions be revised to reflect more accurately organisational expectations.
21. That the role and status of waking night staff be reviewed with a view to integrating them more effectively into the running of the Home.

22. That a time limited working group be established to look at the implications of formal regular supervision for all staff working in Children's Homes with a special emphasis on training for supervisors.
23. That a training programme be established to -
 - 23.1 Re-examine the Good Practice Guide and its implication for practice in the residential child care context.
 - 23.2 Provide information about the black community in Lambeth especially related to family life and rearing children.
 - 23.3 Address workers own attitudes which prevent them implementing in practice the race policy, confronting their own racism.
24. That particular crucial areas of child care practice be identified and monitored in line with current Child Care Policies.
25. That either through formal supervision or in-house training all new and current staff have a sufficient grasp of the Good Practice Guide for Working with Black Families and Black Children in Care.
26. That a review of ethnic meal provision at South Vale is carried out resulting in a guideline on the most effective way of meeting the dietary needs of black children.
27. That DMG considers providing Anti-Racist training for all residential care staff.
28. A review of Recruitment Procedures at South Vale.
29. A review of Job Descriptions and Person Specifications.
30. Quarterly monitoring and evaluation of the work force at South Vale.
31. More frequent use at South Vale of the 1976 Race Relations Act.
32. The common practice of recruitment by Panels comprising only white male officers is highly undesirable and steps should be taken to ensure that such situations are avoided, wherever possible.
33. That Senior Management devise an anti-racist strategy for South Vale to include employment and service delivery.
34. The findings of the Enquiry should be communicated to the Officer in Charge.

35. That a time limited working group, reporting to ADCYP, be established to look at the implications of formal, regular supervision for all staff working in Children's Homes, with a special emphasis on training for supervisors.
36. The practice of staff taking children to their own homes should take place only within the context of a case work plan and should be carefully examined by the OIC on all occasions.

- CHAPTER TEN -

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Panel wishes to record its thanks to the following people for their contribution to its work.

The South Vale Staff

Staff of the
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-  - Personnel Officer
-  - Minute Taker
-  - Educational Psychologist
-  - I. T. Project Manager
-  - General Practitioner
-  - Visiting Psychiatrist
-  - Ex South Vale Staff
-  - Family Finders (for typing the report)

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