

**CHILD WELFARE IN  
NEW ZEALAND**

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In the following lines Mr. Anderson, who visited India three years ago, eulogises the work that is going on in India for the welfare of the masses and shows how a small country like New Zealand with an area of about 100,000 square miles provides for children a multipurpose social service which is based on practical considerations rather than on academic research.

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Although New Zealand is a small country, both in size and in population, yet I believe that what it is attempting in Child Welfare will be of interest to social workers in India, a country which is bigger in every way. New Zealand covers an area of about 100,000 square miles, exclusive of the island and antarctic dependencies. It is 1,000 miles long and about 280 miles across at its widest part. There is a population of two and a half million people. Of that total, 176,500 are classified as of Maori descent, the Maori people being the indigenous citizens of New Zealand. The overwhelming majority of the people are descendants from ancestors of United Kingdom origin. So far there are only small numbers of residents who came (or whose parents came) from Asian, Eastern, European, Scandinavian or Mediterranean countries or from the American or African continents.

The country is a fertile one, with a pleasant, temperate climate, with a fair measure of prosperity, with no extremes of wealth or poverty, with full employment offering for everyone, with an average expectation of life of about 70 years, and with nearly all the other conditions that should produce happy, healthy, industrious and well-adjusted citizens, but despite this it has its fair share of social problems. It certainly has its fair shares of Child Welfare problems. It is surprising (super-

ficially at any rate) that this should be so. We in New Zealand have excellent and free education services catering for every child in the country who is in the slightest degree educable. We have free health services, and our Plunket Society, an organisation devoted to the care of babies and young mothers, has been regarded as a model for the rest of the world. In comparison with the position in other countries the recreational facilities available to all are superlative. Our Social Security system is unsurpassed anywhere. Yet complementing these and other services designed to ensure the full development of all our children, we have to have a Government Child Welfare service employing 800 people to deal with the social problems of those children who need special care and attention or treatment. The total of 800 includes 200 field officers, (officially known as Child Welfare Officers) 330 institution officers and 60 teachers. The rest are administrative and clerical officers.

Three years ago I was privileged to spend three weeks in India while I was attending a United Nations conference. I saw something of the vigour and imagination that is going in to the planning of social services for that resourceful sub-continent, During my short stay I also

came to realise what a big job lay ahead in conquering the major problems of poverty and disease and illiteracy. I imagine, however, that no Indian social worker would deceive himself or herself into believing that, once these major problems have been conquered, the social problems that remain will be insignificant. Our experience, in what could well be called a Welfare State, and, I suggest, the United States experience, in what I certainly would not classify as a Welfare State, show that prosperity brings its own major social problems.

Our Child Welfare problems in New Zealand rarely arise from want or from lack of opportunity. Most frequently they arise from incompetence and from failure to take advantage of opportunities. In theory, there is little excuse to be offered for the fact that, in a favoured land with a small population of two and a half million people of all ages, 800 of those people should be engaged in remedial and rehabilitative social work with children; in practice, we could profitably employ several times that number in order to cope with all the work needing to be done.

*Child Welfare a Government service:*— Child Welfare work in New Zealand is undertaken in the main by the Government and not by voluntary agencies. Voluntary social agencies are few in number and none of them is well-endowed financially as is the case, say, in the United States. My impression (and it is only one person's impression) of the attitude of the average New Zealand citizen is that in general he prefers social work to be undertaken by Government departments because it absolves him from any suggestion that he is accepting charity. He pays his taxes and he receives the service he has paid for and

is entitled to. He can criticise it freely and can openly demand disciplinary measures if the service is inefficient. At the same time the average citizen recognises that some (a minority) of the social services can best be run by voluntary agencies and that one of their virtues is their lack of authority, which precludes them from using the "big stick" in the course of their work.

*Child Welfare an educational service:*— The Child Welfare Division is part of the Department of Education. This seems to be a more appropriate link than an association with Health or Justice or Social Security would be. Child Welfare is a social rather than a medical service; its work is educational and in no sense penal; it mainly carries out case work in a field setting rather than disburses money, which is one of the main functions of the Social Security Department. The alternative to a link with another department is for a separate Department of Social Welfare to be established. This is the pattern in those developing countries where Government social services are being established or increased. Conceivably it could be the pattern which will evolve here.

*General function of service:*— The all embracing function of the Child Welfare Division constitutes an aim which can never completely be achieved. It is to ensure, as far as humanly possible, that all children have the chance to become happy members of society, congenially and usefully employed, and enjoying the satisfactions which full use of their talents can bring. In our adult society there are, of course, offenders against the law who as criminals and prisoners are obviously failures and are obviously a drag on the community. Those who are misfits, who are "square pegs in round holes", who are

so poorly adjusted to life that they gravitate towards mental ill-health or just "get by" without in any way living full and abundant lives, who are resentful because of the handicaps they suffered or who demonstrate the absence of proper guidance as well as the inability to receive or give true affection. For most of these people, delinquent or otherwise, it is possible to say in retrospect that, if only someone had recognised what was wrong at an early enough stage for remedial work to be effective, they would have been happier and better people today. Our job in Child Welfare is to try to anticipate these needs rather than to wait for them to become obvious in retrospect.

My impression, based on limited overseas and on wide reading, is that our Child Welfare service in New Zealand is more comprehensive than most, in its endeavour to carry out the job I have outlined. In some countries, work with delinquents, work with children in need of care and protection, work with adoptions, financial assistance to families in need, and possibly other related work, are carried out by separate agencies. In some cases there is good co-ordination between the different agencies; in other cases, there isn't. I am not familiar with any other national service which combines all this work in the one department as we do in New Zealand. We believe (as I don't doubt experienced social workers everywhere believe) that the child who becomes a delinquent can in many cases be little different from the child who manifests his disturbance, not in offences against the law but in some other form of mal-adjustment, not quite so conspicuous but nevertheless just as damaging in its effect on the individual person and on society.

The child may become an inadequate adult because he has suffered initially from

the absence of available or responsible parents because he has some mental or physical defect which has not been identified and given special treatment, because he is neglected or is subjected to detrimental influences, because he has committed offences from an early age for a variety of reasons or because he is otherwise emotionally disturbed.

Anyone can pay lip service, glibly or sincerely, to the humanitarian value of social work with these children. Not enough people, however, recognise the economic value of the work. A country cannot afford to have large number of its adult population locked up in public institutions or, in other ways, a drag on the taxpayers. Comprehensive and efficient social services for children pay financial dividends to society. Although the staffing of our New Zealand Child Welfare service and related social services may seem excessive and even luxurious to a citizen of India, yet believe, rightly or wrongly, on the basis of my own observations, that it must cost less in New Zealand to produce economic adults (or near adults—young people of working age) than it does in India, when one considers the proportion of children in India who fail to reach the age of, say, sixteen years or who reach that age incapable of playing their full part in the building of society. My belief, I should add, is not based on factual or statistical data; it is just one man's general impression.

*Child Welfare's function as a classifying agency:*—New Zealand Child Welfare Officers are expected to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of all the services, Government and voluntary, catering for children. This means that anyone can approach them with a problem relating to a child and is entitled to get an answer,

even if it amounts only to classifying the problem and referring the enquirer to some other authority. For instance, a Child Welfare Officer may reply to an enquirer, "this is a health problem and you should see a general medical practitioner or a public health nurse or a school medical officer or a Plunket Society nurse" or "this is a matter about which you should consult one of the psychologists attached to the Department of Education or one of the psychiatrists attached to the Department of Health", or "because you want help in securing maintenance orders against your deserting husband for yourself and your children, you should go to the N. Z. Society for the Protection of Home and Family." Whether or not it is a problem outside the domestic province of the Child Welfare Division, a Child Welfare Officer should be able to give some helpful advice. In other words, the Child Welfare Division acts as a clearing house for children's problems of all kinds.

*The kinds of children dealt with directly by Child Welfare.*—The problems that are not referred to some other agency but remain with Child Welfare for action can be divided roughly into four main categories. They concern.—

I. Children with no parents or no available parents. This category can be subdivided into:

- (a) Orphans. There are not many true orphans in the country. For the few who have no relatives and friends willing to look after them, the State through the Child Welfare Division acts *in loco parentis* and ensures that they have as near as possible a normal upbringing, almost invariably in a foster-home.
- (b) Illegitimate babies. Usually an illegitimate baby has no father available

to care for him or her. The mother, perhaps because she has left home to have her baby somewhere where she is not known, is not in a fit condition, physically and emotionally, to make wise decisions about her baby's future and has no relatives or friends on the spot to advise her. There is a statutory provision that every illegitimate birth must be notified in confidence by a Registrar of Births to a Child Welfare Officer who then visits the mother, preferably while she is still in a hospital or nursing home (where practically all New Zealand mothers have their babies) and offers help. The mother may want her baby adopted, she may want it boarded in a suitable private home, she may want it to become a ward of the State, she may want financial help to enable her to keep the baby with her or she may want help in having the putative father adjudged and ordered to pay maintenance. On the other hand, if the unmarried mother is a *de facto* wife, she may not want help and, in that case, if the officer is satisfied that the mother is capable of caring adequately for the child, the officer will tactfully and speedily withdraw. It is not the function of the officer to interfere where she is not wanted. The work with unmarried mothers and their babies is undertaken by women officers.

- (c) Small children living apart from parents. For over 70 years it has been the law in New Zealand that no child under the age of six years can be maintained apart from its parents for more than seven days unless it is with a licensed foster-parent. This was originally legislated for in the

Infant Life Protection Act and, although that Act has long ago been embodied in another, the term Infant Life Protection (or I.L.P. for short) still persists in colloquial use. The purpose of the provision is to prevent, as far as possible, child exploitation or baby farming. The provision applies whether or not the natural parents are paying the foster-parents for the child's upkeep by the latter. A Child Welfare Officer, in effect, acts as an intermediary to protect the interests of the child. She helps the natural parents to find a suitable home, she licenses the foster-parents and she then visits the home frequently to supervise the care of the child.

(d) Migrant and refugee children. If a migrant or refugee child arrives in New Zealand while still under the age of eighteen years, unaccompanied by his or her parents, the Superintendent (i.e. the controlling officer) of the Child Welfare Division becomes by law the child's legal guardian. The officers of the Division provide guidance and assistance for the child until he or she is capable of being self-supporting.

(e) Children in private institutions. There are some 69 registered Children's Homes in the country providing accommodation for about 1500 children. These Homes are maintained by voluntary agencies, usually the churches. Many of them are erroneously called "orphanages" even though the statistics for some years now have shown that only about (and often less than) three per cent of the children in the Homes have been

orphans. The children in the Homes are mostly products of broken or breaking homes. The Child Welfare Division is required to make recommendations to the Minister about the registration, continued operation, and if necessary, cancelling of the registration of these Homes. In brief their job is to see that proper standards are maintained in the interests of the children. The Division disburses capitation grants and capital subsidies to the controlling authorities of the Homes. (It could also be mentioned that the Division since 1961 has been required by statute to undertake the licensing and oversight of child care centres i.e., day nurseries, shoppers' creches and similar centres. The children in these centres have parents available to care for them and I am referring here to this particular Child Welfare function for want of a more appropriate category.)

(f) Adopted children. A child, whether legitimate or illegitimate, released for adoption by its natural parents and not yet formally adopted by others can be said to have no available parents. Placements for adoption must be approved in advance by Child Welfare Officers, although applicants have the right to go direct to the Court in the first instance. This right is rarely availed of. The making of adoption orders, following a trial period, is the sole prerogative of the Courts. The Courts are bound to call for reports from Child Welfare Officers before hearing applications for orders. Of all the statutes under which we work, the Adoption Act

1955 is the most advanced. It incorporates the best features of adoption practices in other countries and is operating successfully to avoid the pitfalls which existed in earlier legislation covering his vitally important work. Incidentally New Zealand was the first country in the British Commonwealth, and one of the first in the world, to have statutory provision for the legal adoption of children.

- (g) Children of divorced parents. Officers report to the Court in cases where there is a dispute about the custody of children of divorced or separated parents.

II. Children with mental and physical defects. The Child Welfare Division has administrative responsibility for the State residential special schools for deaf children and for backward children. Child Welfare Officers have a limited responsibility in urban areas but a wider responsibility in rural areas for ensuring that crippled and blind children receive specialised treatment and an education commensurate with their ability. Child Welfare shares responsibility with its parent Department (Education) for running a special school for disturbed and emotionally maladjusted children. This school is so far the only one of its kind established in New Zealand.

III. Children who suffer because of the defects of their environment. Not many children in this country are deliberately ill-treated but many are neglected by their parents, are subjected to detrimental influences such as gross immorality or drunkenness, are unduly indulged by stupid parents or are allowed to become out of control. The children in this category provide Child Welfare with the bulk of its work.

IV. Delinquent children. The delinquent children with whom we work are those who have committed offences against the law and are detected. These are, of course, many delinquent children who are not detected in their wrongdoing. The cases of those children detected in wrongdoing are considered by joint committees comprising Child Welfare Officers and specially appointed members of the Juvenile Crime Prevention Section (J.C.P.S. for short) of the Police. These committees make recommendations whether a child will be prosecuted or whether the case will be dealt by preventive measures. In the last statistical year 4300 children appeared before the Children's Courts charged with offences. This was at the rate of 84 per 10,000 of the child population (aged 10 to 17 years). In the same year 3900 children were dealt with preventively following consideration by the J.C.P.S. committees. These figures will give a rough idea of the current incidence of juvenile delinquency in New Zealand.

*The age range of children dealt with:—*  
The Children's Courts handle two main types of cases. They hear charges for offences prosecuted by the police and they also hear complaints under the Child Welfare Act, usually prosecuted by Child Welfare Officers but also occasionally prosecuted by the Police. Complaints are directed against the parents and they cover the kinds of cases briefly outlined in Category III above. The Courts can hear complaints relating to children aged from babyhood up to the 17th birthday. The minimum age of criminal responsibility is ten years. When a young person over 17 years of age but not yet 18, is charged in the Magistrate's Court, with the commission of an offence, the Court may choose to refer him or her to the Children's Court. If the Children's Court decides, on

a charge or complaint, to place a child in the care of the State, i.e. to deprive the parents of their rights of guardianship, it orders that the child be in the care and guardianship of the Superintendent of Child Welfare. The child can so remain until he or she is 21 years of age. The effect of all these provisions about ages is that the Child Welfare Division works with children from babyhood up to mainly 17 to 18 years, but in some cases (a small minority up to 21 years).

*Children's Courts:*—The Children's Court is presided over by a Stipendiary Magistrate or a specially appointed Justice of the Peace. It sits in private. Admission to the Court is restricted. Publication of reports of proceedings is restricted also, in the interests of the children. Nothing can be published which could lead to the identification of a child appearing in the Court. The Court invariably is furnished with comprehensive reports prepared by Child Welfare Officers. There are rights of appeal against decisions of the Children's Court.

The Superintendent of Child Welfare, as the legal guardian of all State wards, has a discretion to decide whether or not one of his wards shall be admitted to an institution or boarded out in a foster-home. The effect of this is that the Courts do not have the power to send children straight from the Courts to Child Welfare institutions. They can, however, send older children and young persons direct to penal institutions such as detention centres, Borstal institutions or prisons, all of which are the responsibility, not of Child Welfare, but of the Department of Justice. The Superintendent of Child Welfare is not subject to direction from the Minister in matters concerning individual State wards. The Minister, of course exercises responsi-

bility for general policy and oversight of administration.

*Institutions:*—The Child Welfare institutions consist mainly of (a) Training Centres of an open-house type, with a minimum of secure provisions, providing long-term social training for seriously delinquent or disturbed children who must be removed temporarily from circulation in society (b) Boys' Homes and Receiving Homes which provide short-term shelter and training for Children admitted either in emergencies or pending classification for placement elsewhere and (c) the special schools mentioned earlier.

*Foster-Homes:*—Only about ten per cent of State wards are maintained in institutions. The Superintendent is enjoined by a statutory provision to admit children to institutions only in exceptional cases. The great majority of State wards live in foster-homes and attend the ordinary schools or, if their talents justify it, the Universities, or are engaged in normal congenial employment chosen for them with the aid of specialist Vocational Guidance Officers. Foster-parents are paid at rates, fixed by Cabinet from time to time, which are designed to strike a balance between ensuring that, on the one hand, the foster-parents are not out of pocket and, on the other hand, that foster-parents are not encouraged to take children into their homes in order to make a profit out of them. My colleagues in social work in India are no doubt aware of the trend in some countries deliberately to arrange that there shall be a margin of profit for foster-parents. The supply of foster-parents is always (perhaps inevitably) below the demand and I do not know whether the more selective use of them which a profit would allow would operate to increase the supply. A development of recent years, designed to meet the

shortage of private foster-homes, has been the building by the Government of "family homes." These are large houses owned and furnished by the Government and occupied rent-free by specially selected foster-parents who receive board payments for looking after a number of State wards. The foster-father engages in his normal employment during working hours and then helps the foster-mother with the oversight of the children in the evenings and at the week-ends.

Increasing public recognition of the fact that the majority of State wards have acquired that status through no fault of their own has served to diminish the stigma that used to be attached to them. There are former State wards in all walks of life, including Members of Parliament.

*Maintenance Payments:*—Parents of State wards are under an obligation to contribute to the maintenance of their children to the best of their ability. It would not be fair to expect the general body of taxpayers to shoulder the burden which is properly the responsibility of the parents. The circumstance that the parents may have been inadequate or neglectful makes it even more just that they should pay if they can. Many parents of State wards pay nothing. Social workers accustomed to the living conditions of the poorer people in India would be amazed to hear the arguments put forward in New Zealand in favour of being excused from payment of maintenance by some parents who have steady well-paid employment, own their own homes and cars and have all the latest labour-saving devices such as refrigerators and washing machines as well as luxuries like radiograms and television sets.

*Legal Supervision:*—There are some 3400 State wards at present. There are

greater number (over 8000) of children who are on supervision or with whom we are doing preventive work. Supervision is similar to adult probation. The term is fixed by the Court. The child remains in his own home and his parents' rights of guardianship are not disturbed. Child Welfare Officers attempt by frequent visits to influence the child into better standards of conduct. They make available specialist medical, psychiatric and other services if necessary.

*Preventive Supervision:*—The greatest volume of Child Welfare work is done on a preventive basis and this is as it should be. Removal of a child from home should be undertaken only as a last resort and I believe it should be difficult to achieve. The Court requires to be satisfied by admissible evidence that drastic action is warranted and I would not favour making it easier for Child Welfare Officers to secure committal orders. I personally would support the continued preservation of the judicial factor, if parents are to be deprived of their rights of guardianship. A social worker could easily earn a reputation as a bureaucrat or a dictator if he had the right to decide on the suitability of parents to retain control of their own children. Such a matter should be decided judicially by an independent disinterested and impartial body. But rather than initiate drastic action, it is better to persist with preventive work and so avoid burdening a child with a life-long sense of grievance because he has been separated from parents who may be considered inadequate but who nevertheless are his parents.

Although I do not propose to detail the various ways in which preventive work is carried out, I would mention one particular aspect of it and that is Needy Family assistance. The Social Security Department



disburses cash benefits to those persons automatically entitled to them and it also exercises a discretion to give special assistance where need is established on the merits of an individual case. However, should the case concern a family (i.e. where there is at least one child) and should a measure of social work oversight be called for, the expenditure is disbursed by Child Welfare. This is a useful adjunct to our work. An improvement in the material circumstances of a home and family can often lead to the diversion of anti-social trends into something more constructive. Furthermore, the fact that a Child Welfare Officer is disbursing a rental subsidy or is arranging grants for furniture, for clothing or for settlement of debts can make the officer more acceptable to his clients who are readier to act upon the officer's advice. I should repeat here, though, what I have already said about maintenance. A needy family in India would be a family which had nothing, literally nothing, in the way of material possessions. Some of our needy families in New Zealand own their house and have a car and a television set, and yet can establish special need. I realise that this would hardly make sense to an Indian social worker.

*Officers:*—There are more women Child Welfare Officers than men. The division of functions is based on the belief that women are more suitable for dealing with young children of both sexes and older girls whereas men are more capable of handling cases concerning older boys. This belief is debatable but it explains why there are more women in the service. Until recent years there was no specialised training for recruits to the service. Officers were chosen on the grounds of academic attainment, experience in social work and personal suitability. In-service training

courses and training on the job followed. For just over ten years now we have had a School of Social Science attached to one of our Universities and the graduates from that school are percolating through the service in increasing numbers. The School is a small one and has limited facilities. In fact I am sure the staff would envy the facilities available particularly at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences and even at the more humble premises of the Delhi School of Social Work, both of which institutions I was privileged to visit when I was in India. Salaries for Child Welfare Officers are good by comparison with other comparable groups of public servants. The payment of near-professional rates of salary has been a comparatively recent development however, and has not for long operated to attract top-level recruits.

*Conclusion:*—The service provided so far has been essentially a practical one and the tendency has been to recruit officers whose strength lies in versatility and cordiality rather than in an intellectual approach to problems. Because of that, because we can insist on a uniform policy being followed (with some latitude for individual initiative) and because our service provides a coverage for the whole country so that the resident in the most isolated rural area is entitled to the same standard of service as the citizen in the capital city. I believe we have as good a national service as any. I am fully aware that some of the local agencies in the United States produce far superior work to any of ours but on the other hand there are extremes of quality of service in that country. Our service is geared to deal with what are coming to be regarded as the ordinary casualties of a relatively prosperous community. What we lack is enough of the specialised services for dealing with the exceptional problem children. No doubt in time we shall have highly trained officers

specialising in narrow fields and we shall have a greater range of institutions enabling us to engage in better classification of problem children and more skilled treatment of unusually difficult children. At present, though, as I hope I have shown throughout this article, we provide for children a multi-purpose social service which is based more on practical considera-

tions than on modern academic research. With those limitations accepted, I believe in all humility that we do a job which is well worth study on the spot by social workers from countries which, like ours, are still in the developing stage, as distinct from what are known as the highly developed countries.