

No. 2.—STATEMENT OF THE SUPERINTENDENT OF THE CHILD WELFARE BRANCH—MR. J. R. McCLUNE.

YEAR ENDED 31ST MARCH, 1940.

The functions of the Child Welfare Branch and statements regarding its various activities have appeared in a more extended form in previous reports; this year, unfortunately, on account of a paper shortage the report on the Branch has had to be curtailed.

The permanent field officers of the Branch stationed in the main centres of population have in the performance of their multifarious duties again received great assistance from the Honorary Child Welfare Officers—approximately 200 public-spirited men and women whose services the Department gratefully acknowledges.

The system of appointing housemasters for duty in boys' homes, mentioned in last year's report, has been extended and has proved very successful, especially in enlarging the scope of the boys' activities and recreation and in supervising them in the evenings and at week-ends.

A larger number of children than usual passed through the receiving-homes last year. The matter of reopening the receiving-home at Napier to relieve conditions in the Wellington, Hawke's Bay, and Gisborne districts is at present under consideration.

The Girls' Home at Burwood for older girls requiring institutional care for a period has been kept full during the year, and the question of providing additional accommodation to enable better classification of the girls to be made is at present under review.

A new building for older boys requiring a period of training in an institution is in course of erection at Levin to replace the old out-of-date buildings. The training of the lads, though under rather difficult conditions, is proceeding satisfactorily meantime.

The numbers in residence have been fully maintained at both schools for backward children at Richmond and Otekaike. Considerable improvements to the buildings and grounds were carried out at each institution during the year.

The Girls' Hostel in Wellington continues to function very successfully. This institution provides for girls in employment in the city.

In Auckland a hostel has recently been opened for older boys at apprenticeship or other work in the city.

The latter hostel was previously occupied by boys receiving post-primary education (provision for whom is now made elsewhere) under an arrangement with the Costley Trustees and the Y.M.C.A. authorities. These two bodies had for some seventeen years assisted very materially in the maintenance and successful management of the hostel. While it would be difficult to name all those who assisted in this work, the Department feels it could not let this occasion pass without making special mention of the services rendered over a long period of years by Mr. C. J. Tunks, of Auckland, who was a member of both bodies.

Preventive work, an important feature of the constructive work of the Child Welfare Branch, is being extended as circumstances permit. An adequate staff of trained persons is essential to its development, and this is being augmented as quickly as circumstances permit. It was a matter for regret that during the year we lost the services, owing to retirement for various reasons, of six of our experienced women field officers. With losses also on the male side it has not been possible to extend the preventive work as fully or as expeditiously as is considered desirable.

During the past year 286 families, representing 625 children, were taken under preventive supervision, and at the 31st March the number of children under the oversight of Child Welfare Officers was 1,906. Contact with the child and the family is maintained until the Child Welfare Officer is satisfied that assistance is no longer needed. While the saving of money to the community in this way is very considerable as compared with the cost of maintaining inmates in institutions, the saving of the child to the community is a matter of infinitely greater importance.

CASES APPEARING BEFORE THE CHILDREN'S COURTS.

Table 1 below shows that a total of 2,953 children appeared before the Courts during the year, as against 2,801 for the previous year. This increase is almost wholly due to the increase in charges of theft (829) as against the previous year's total (650).

Of the total number appearing this year, 812 were placed under the supervision of Child Welfare Officers, while 21 had their supervision period extended within the same period. Of the children placed under supervision, 28 were subsequently committed to the care of the Superintendent.

The numbers committed to the care of the Superintendent and admitted to institutions such as receiving-homes, special schools, training-farms, &c., was 509, but all these, with the exception of 181 (104 boys and 77 girls) who required further training, were suitably placed out in the community before the close of the year. The remainder (1,611) appearing before the Courts were dealt with in a manner not calling for supervision by a Child Welfare Officer (see details below).

At the 31st March, 1940, there was a total number of 1,041 children under supervision of Child Welfare Officers by order of the Courts. Of the numbers (812) placed under supervision this year, 43 had previously been dealt with by the Courts and placed under supervision. The Courts ordered 10 children to spend a period in an institution.