

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

YEAR ENDED 31st MARCH, 1939.

FUNCTIONS OF THE CHILD WELFARE BRANCH.

The main functions of the Branch may be briefly stated as follows :—

- (1) Preventive work—that is, the inquiry in the early stages into cases of difficulty with children or bad adjustment in the home.
- (2) Supervision and general placement and care of all children committed to the care of the Department through the Children's Courts.
- (3) Administration of State institutions for children and young people who cannot be placed in the community, including institutions for afflicted children.
- (4) Visiting and oversight of all children placed by the Courts under the legal supervision of Child Welfare Officers.
- (5) Inquiry and investigation of all cases coming before Children's Courts.
- (6) Inquiries into cases of illegitimate births, to ensure that proper provision is being made for each child, and for the mother where she is a young single woman.
- (7) Administration of the Infants Act, licensing of foster-homes, and supervision of infants placed therein.
- (8) Inquiry into all applications for adoption of children.
- (9) Inspection and registration of private institutions and children's homes.

The early history of the Branch may be found in an article published in " Fifty Years of National Education in New Zealand " (Whitcombe and Tombs, Ltd.). This sketches the growth of the work from the earliest recorded times up to the passing of the Child Welfare Amendment Act, 1927.

STAFF.

During the year there were several important staff changes. Owing to ill health the late Superintendent, Mr. John Beck, retired in the early part of the year, after a little over thirty-eight years' service in the Branch. He assumed control of the Branch upon the retirement of Mr. R. H. Pope in 1917, and gave very fine service indeed to the Department. Mr. Beck early recognized the short-comings of the old system of segregating large numbers of children of varying ages and mentality in residential institutions. The larger industrial schools were closed, the system modified, and a better method of supervising children in the community adopted during his regime. Just prior to the enactment of the Child Welfare Act, 1925, the then Minister of Education, Sir James Parr, arranged for Mr. Beck to visit the United States of America and the Dominion of Canada to inquire especially into the working of the Children's Courts there. A pamphlet containing a record of Mr. Beck's visit and his recommendations has been published (Special Reports on Educational Subjects, No. 15).

Mrs. C. K. Masters, Senior Child Welfare Woman Officer at Wellington, retired after twenty-eight years of faithful service. She was one of the first women Visiting Officers appointed to travel the whole Dominion inspecting foster-homes.

During the year Mrs. M. Hamilton was appointed to the Head Office of the Branch as Woman Inspector. Her duties include, besides assisting with the female staffs, the inspection of institutions, both departmental and private, and a survey of the methods of placement of children in private homes throughout New Zealand.

Mention has been made in previous reports of proposals for the training of officers and for making better provision for preliminary study and practical experience so as to provide an avenue for those interested in this class of work. From trainees could be selected officers for particular positions either in the field or in institutions.

Some time ago the Department, in calling for applications for officers, made it a condition that they must be prepared to study the legislation and literature connected with the work. Training on the job for the particular duties required is arranged by attaching new appointees to one of the larger centres, but there should, however, be some prior process of elimination so far as applicants for appointments to the child-welfare service are concerned. It is hoped to evolve some practical scheme in the near future for both efficient training and reliable tests of the results of such training as well as of general capacity.

Present officers have, I am pleased to say, made a practice of studying the literature connected with child-welfare and allied problems.

I wish to take this opportunity of paying a tribute to those officers who are still with us and who were members of the service during the years of the depression. We were understaffed and services had to be curtailed, but, as was to be expected, our work increased, although actual delinquency decreased. It was almost a daily occurrence for these officers to listen to stories of hardship and pleas for help, to assist older children into employment, and to advise and assist with maladjusted children in the home. Knowing all these officers and the work they were called upon to perform, I cannot speak too highly of the services they have rendered to the community during those years in particular.

Private organizations did wonderful work during this period and co-operated with our officers in endeavouring, wherever possible, to keep families intact.