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The PUBLIC TRUSTEE



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"LEADING THE LITTLE FEET A LITTLE WAY"

Nineteen Years' Service For Kindergartens



IN THE GARDEN at the Taranaki Street Kindergarten, Wellington. Mrs. Dowsett is in the centre; with her is Miss Jean Kemp, the newly-appointed secretary

AFTER 19 years of service as organising secretary to the Wellington Free Kindergarten Council, Mrs. Edward Dowsett is retiring. But even 19 years go quickly when they are spent in work that is congenial, and work that is growing in scope. Since the first Free Kindergartens were started in New Zealand, they have become more and more recognised as a valuable and necessary work. In an interview, Mrs. Dowsett told The Listener something of her work and the extent to which it has become an inspiration to her and to all those associated with it.

"I was lucky in beginning when I did," said Mrs. Dowsett. "All the really hard pioneering work had already been done. When I took over, the foundations had been well and truly laid, and the Wellington Association had reached the stage when it was ready to extend its activities. My work has taught me one thing very clearly—that one never really loses time by careful organisation in the initial stages of any movement. The parable of the house built on the rock applies well to any educational and social work. My first introduction was at the opening of the play house in the garden of the Taranaki Street Kindergarten. It had been given by a school-Chilton House School-and it was a. good omen of the sort of unstinted support and generosity that I was to learn is so much part of our organisation. The motto which was chosen for the play house door has always been to my mind one that has caught the spirit of our work-'Love, laughing, lead the little feet a little way.'

Public Support

"Have you found increased interest and support for kindergarten work over the last 20 years?" we asked.

"Yes, certainly. Partly, I suppose, people are more aware of what leading

educationists are saying, and they all stress the importance of the pre-school period. And then the public can see results for themselves if they bother to do so. Parents with children at kindergarten talk to parents whose children don't go. We certainly are finding more and more parents who want to send their children. Not only are our kindergartens as full as they can be, but there are long waiting lists, and we are constantly having letters beseeching us to open free kindergartens in new centres. We can't attempt to meet all the needs that are there, but the work is growing all the time. It's not only a matter of raising money for new centres, it is also training enough kindergarten teachers to carry on and to take over these centres. Our policy has always been in the past to serve the most congested areas first and to take the most needy children first, the children who would have nowhere to play but the streets, or whose parents have to be away during the day, or who, we feel, for various reasons, need the quiet, happy and creative life at one of our centres. Probably a good deal of interest also was roused at the Centennial Exhibition by our model kindergarten, and now we are getting greater Government recognition."

Raising the Money

We asked Mrs. Dowsett if her duties included organising the raising of money and how far the kindergartens depended on public support for their existence,

"Yes, one of my chief concerns has been to see that the finances of the association are adequately safeguarded. The Government capitation grant meets approximately one-third of our running costs, so we have had to depend on the public for a very substantial sum. Yet no matter how great were our needs, the public has never failed us. At first, the salaries of the teachers were very low—little more than pocket money.

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