

During the year the Department lost the services of a number of the staff, male and female, through resignations and on account of military duties. Unfortunately, many of our officers were already carrying an overload of case work, but an endeavour is being made, by the appointment of temporary officers, to keep the work up to an efficient standard. Proposals in hand for the improved reorganization of the district child-welfare offices provide for additional staff training and fuller co-operation with other agencies interested in the welfare of children.

PLACEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS.

There was a considerable falling off during the year in the number of applications from foster-parents willing to take State wards into their homes, and this entailed more intensive work on the part of the field staff in the placement of the younger children in our care. It may be mentioned in this connection that only a very small percentage of children are placed in institutions even for brief periods. For the normal child, placement in a good foster-home is regarded as the next best thing to having a home and parents of its own.

For those requiring institutional care the Department has its own institutions in the main centres, and advantage is also taken in certain cases of placing children in the children's homes controlled by private organizations. There were 105 children in residence at these latter homes at the 31st March last and 77 in the four Roman Catholic institutions specifically mentioned in the Child Welfare Act, 1925.

A feature in the placement of younger children was the increase in the boarding of difficult children in specially-selected foster-homes rather than in institutions. Some foster-parents are specially adapted to train this type of child, and the good results attained warrant the continuance of this practice. It means more trained staff, of course, as considerable time must be spent in the study of the individual child in order to ensure placement in the home atmosphere conducive to the fullest adjustment.

EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES.

State wards are in the same position as other children so far as facilities for education are concerned, and deserving cases are given considerable assistance throughout their post-primary course. At the 31st March, 1941, 223 of the 2,046 children in foster-homes were receiving post-primary education, of these, 53 were taking professional courses, 100 technical, 36 commercial, and 23 home science, while 11 Maori children were attending Maori colleges.

EDWARD COSTLEY TRUST.

In connection with the above I wish to make grateful acknowledgment of the assistance given in Auckland to deserving children who desire to proceed with post-primary and higher education, and to apprentices and others requiring help. In each case a recommendation by our local Senior Boys' Welfare Officer is required by the trustees. An average of 50 cases are so assisted every year.

YOUNG PERSONS IN EMPLOYMENT.

When children are ready to be placed in employment, care is taken to consider their desires and special aptitudes. If in the initial stage of their employment they are not receiving sufficient wages to maintain themselves, the Department helps them financially—271 cases were being so assisted at the 31st March.

A Post Office Savings-bank account is opened in his own name for every child and a certain portion of his earnings is banked for his use later on. Generally speaking, the children receive the standard rate of wages.

At the 31st March 775 boys and 430 girls were in employment, and in addition 586 boys and 356 girls, not committed to the Department's care, were supervised in their situations by Child Welfare Officers.

CHILDREN'S COURTS.

The number of children appearing before the Children's Courts showed a slight decrease from last year—2,934, as against 2,953 the previous year.

The offences against rights of property show an increase, but this is offset by the decrease in the number of children charged simply as being "delinquent."

Of the children appearing before the Courts, 548 were committed to my care, this being an increase of 39 over last year; 862 were placed under the legal supervision of Child Welfare Officers, an increase of 64 over last year. The number committed to Borstal institutions was 40, as against 24 last year.

At the 31st March last the total number of children being supervised by orders of the Courts was 1,109. Of the 862 children placed under supervision this year, 72 had previously been dealt with by the Courts and placed under supervision, while the Courts ordered 9 to spend a period in an institution—usually three months, but sometimes longer. The majority of the children under supervision responded very well, but the deciding factor is the co-operation of the parents.

Honorary Child Welfare Officers numbering some 200 men and women throughout the Dominion assisted materially in the Court and inquiry work and in helping to supervise cases. Their services are highly appreciated. I also desire to acknowledge gratefully the services rendered by "Big Brothers" under the Y.M.C.A. and the Catholic Church authorities in helping to supervise boys.

As was the case last year, the majority of the 2,934 children appearing before the Courts were between the ages of ten and seventeen years, and 358 of the 641 taken charge of by the Superintendent during the year came within this age-group, as against 322 of the 596 committed to his care in 1940.

The district Child Welfare Officers submit to the presiding Magistrates concerned a special report each year covering the work of the Children's Courts for the year.