

ADMISSIONS TO BORSTAL INSTITUTIONS.

During the year 3 boys and 1 girl were transferred to Borstal institutions. This action was taken only after all other means at our disposal had been availed of, and I was convinced that such action was necessary in their interests as well as in the interests of our institutions of which they were inmates.

In this connection, however, I wish to say that, on the other hand, we have been enabled to save many young people from being admitted to Borstal or other institutions. I am satisfied that with intensive methods of preventive work, including the proper placement of difficult children, we could do still more in the way of saving children from being sent to institutions. As an instance of this it may be mentioned that when the old Training-farm at Weraroa was handed over to the military authorities and provision had to be made hurriedly for a number of the boys in residence, we arranged for twenty-six of those whose training had only been partially completed to be placed in a district under the control of an officer fully qualified to deal with such cases. He visited the boys at frequent intervals during the first few months, and it is gratifying to be able to state that every one of them made good in the community. It was not found necessary to return any of these to institutions.

One boy who was regarded as a menace in his district and considered a suitable case for Borstal, but was ineligible on account of his age, was, by arrangement with the Court, taken charge of by this Branch and is progressing very satisfactorily under firm but sympathetic guidance.

INFANT-LIFE PROTECTION.

Children under the age of six years maintained in foster-homes apart from their parents are supervised by Child Welfare Officers. The homes are required to be registered, and are inspected regularly in the interests of the infants concerned. The total number of registered homes at the 31st March was 534, and the number of infants maintained therein was 581.

Payment for these children is made by the relatives concerned, but the agreement for payment must have the approval of the Superintendent or other authorized officer.

During the year Child Welfare Officers in certain districts were requested by the Courts under the Domestic Proceedings Act, 1939, to act as conciliators in 37 cases. In addition, Magistrates or Judges asked for reports in 10 cases of matrimonial disputes in which the custody of children was concerned.

District Child Welfare Officers also supplied to the Social Security Department reports on 186 families where the welfare of the children concerned required this action.

ILLEGITIMATE CHILDREN.

During the year the Department made the usual confidential inquiries with respect to all illegitimate births, which are notified to the duly-appointed Child Welfare Officer in each district. In the majority of cases it was found that suitable provision had been made for the child by the mother or other relatives, so that no further action was necessary on our part. In other cases the field officers assisted the mother in ensuring that suitable provision was made for the infant and for the mother herself. In certain cases the mothers were assisted to initiate affiliation proceedings.

ADOPTIONS.

A pleasing feature of the work in connection with children was the increase in the number of applications under the Infants Act for the adoption of children. The total number of adoption orders made by Magistrates for the year ended 31st December, 1940, was 604—the number for the previous year was 518.

The majority of the children adopted were infants up to the age of five years—408 out of the 604.

In 29 cases advantage was taken of the extended provisions of the Act of 1939 making eligible the adoption of children up to the age of twenty-one years.

CHILDREN'S HOMES REGISTERED UNDER THE CHILD WELFARE ACT, 1925.

There are 84 of these Homes, and the total number of children in residence at the 31st December, 1940, was 2,854, as against 2,973 the previous year. It is reported by the authorities that in the case of 158 of these children both parents were deceased, in the case of 592 the mother was deceased, and in the case of 254 the father was deceased. The information regarding the rest is indefinite, but it is known that in a number of cases the parents were separated or deserters, while in others nothing was known of their whereabouts.

DISCHARGE OF INMATES.

During the year 548 children were discharged, the average age of discharge being sixteen years three months. The policy is to discharge children as soon as they are suitably provided for by friends or relatives, or are able to fend for themselves.

SPECIAL RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS.

School for the Deaf, Sumner.—The number of pupils at the School for the Deaf at Sumner at the 31st March was 56 boys and 46 girls. In addition, 15 day pupils were attending the school—11 boys and 4 girls.

During the year Mr. T. Chambers, the Principal, retired on superannuation, and Mr. H. Pickering was appointed in his place.

Otekaike and Richmond.—The number of pupils at these special residential schools for backward children was: Otekaike (boys), 171; and Richmond (girls), 65.

Blind Children.—Blind children are provided for at the New Zealand Institute for the Blind at Auckland, a private institution with Government representation on the Board of Trustees. Parents may arrange admission privately and the Government may also arrange admissions. There were 24 Government pupils in residence at the 31st March.