

HONORARY CHILD WELFARE OFFICERS.

There are nearly 200 Honorary Child Welfare Officers, male and female, acting at the present time. These officers, who give their services gratuitously, have proved of considerable value to the Department in carrying out its work, and especially so in the smaller centres of population. This is in accordance with the Department's general policy of decentralization and the belief that it should be left as far as possible to the local people to deal with their own cases—the Department merely to guide or assist. In cases coming before the Children's Courts these officers as a rule make all the inquiry and report to and attend the Court themselves, unless there are special circumstances which might require the attention of the permanent official for the district. The Department takes this opportunity of again expressing to all these officers its deep appreciation of the services they perform to the Department in particular and to the youth of the community in general.

INSTITUTIONS.

It is the policy of the Department (section 19 of the Act) not to place any child in an institution unless this should become absolutely necessary. It is recognized, however, that there will always be a relatively small proportion of children dealt with who require institutional treatment before they can be returned to the community. For children requiring a more or less lengthy period of detention, the Department has two institutions—one for boys at Weraroa, near Levin, and one for girls at Burwood, near Christchurch. The ages of the young people admitted or in residence thereat vary from about fourteen to nineteen years. Boys remain in residence usually from six months to eighteen months, while girls remain sometimes up to two and three years before again being tried in the community. Each case is dealt with on its merits. The Department has in hand at present the matter of making better provision for boys requiring reformatory treatment, the existing institution at Weraroa being quite out of date for this purpose.

In addition to these two institutions there are smaller institutions—namely, a boys' home and a receiving-home in each of the four main centres, and one additional receiving-home at Hamilton. The former homes take in boys from nine years onwards who require temporary housing; such boys attend the nearest public school. Boys of school age are sometimes ordered by the Court to spend a period of one to three months in an institution, and these are usually provided for at such homes. They also provide for older boys requiring temporary accommodation while changing board or service situations, &c.

The receiving-homes are clearing-houses for young children of both sexes, and all girls. Older girls are admitted pending placement in a foster-home or a situation, also, when necessary, young girls just leaving school who require a short period of training in domestic work before being placed out. In this connection it may be stated, however, that a number of mistresses prefer to take these young girls and train them themselves.

At both classes of homes children may be admitted on remand or on warrant (section 13 (2) of the Act) pending the hearing in the Court.

Besides these the Department has also a girls' hostel in Wellington which accommodates about 16 girls. These girls are usually apprenticed to trades or employed in shops or offices. This institution provides for those who are not fitted for domestic work but who are likely to do well in other employment, but would be better for a period of friendly supervision which is exercised by the staff in the hostel.

Backward children under the care of the Branch who cannot be educated at the special classes in the public schools, or, being over school age, require special training, are admitted to the two institutions established for such cases (see further reference later on in this report).

In dealing with its problem cases the Department wishes to express its appreciation of the services rendered by Dr. J. Russell, Deputy Director-General of Mental Hospitals, an experienced psychiatrist, who has not only examined and reported upon a large number of individual cases taken to him, but also has kept in close touch with the Department's residential institutions.

BOARDING-OUT OR PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN IN PRIVATE HOMES.

Section 20 of the Act of 1925 makes special mention of the fact that it shall be the duty of the Superintendent to place children in foster-homes whenever practicable in lieu of detaining them in institutions.

With over half a century of experience behind it, and having in mind also the experience of other countries, the Department can say unhesitatingly that this system of placement is the best for those normal children who for one reason or another have no homes of their own. There is abundant evidence to prove the beneficent results which as a general rule attend such placement. There are just over 2,000 children constantly at board, older ones dropping out and new ones coming on to take their places. Despite the care taken in selection and subsequent supervision, it is perhaps only to be expected that now and again a home will be found to have deteriorated or become unsuitable. As soon as any such come under the notice of the Department, action is taken to remedy matters or remove the child, as the case may be. All applicants for children are required to give full particulars of their home and circumstances. The home is then inspected by a Child Welfare Officer, who inquires fully into the suitability of the applicants. A list is kept of all such cases in the District Office, and when a child is ready for placement the field officers consider carefully which of the applicants might be best able to guide and train this child. After placement, the home is visited by Child Welfare Officers at least once every three months, and oftener should circumstances warrant. Independent confidential reports are also obtained regularly from the teachers of the schools the children attend. In addition, the Honorary Child Welfare Officers and local persons interested in children frequently assist—especially in ensuring that our children take part in the ordinary social life of the community.