

The 'four-fold nature' of the Wellington Boys' Institute in 1910: physical (a gymnasium, football, cricket and athletics), social ('occasionally ladies of the city give a *spread* to the boys'), religious ('not conducted, perhaps, on very orthodox lines') and training (two Boy Scout troops and a rifle cadet volunteer corps) attracted some 230 working class boys. The backers were, however, at great pains to stress 'the quite *unsectarian* . . . character and purely altruistic' nature of their work: 'any boy be he Jew or Gentile, Roman Catholic or Protestant, or of any denomination or no denomination may become a member without taking part in any of its religious services'.²¹ By 1910 it was also filling 'to some extent . . . the place of [a] boy labour bureau' in Wellington, directing youngsters towards rural employment possibilities. In the Edwardian era the Institute saw its role quite clearly:

'Prevention is better than cure.' It must be evident to all that it is cheaper and wiser to build a simple fence at the top of the precipice than an elaborate hospital at the bottom. So it is better to catch the young early, than merely provide for an asylum for the infirm before they go astray, and to save lives before they are lost than to provide, as Lowell puts it, 'an ambulance to fetch life's wounded and malingers in'.

'A rescued lad' was better than 'a rescued man': his cure might be permanent and he had before him 'a life of usefulness and great possibilities'. The 'rescued man' could only offer the 'dregs of a wasted life for the Public Service'. 'The lack of discipline amongst New Zealand boys', noted the same organisers of 1910, 'is very marked, and it is just here that a work such as is carried out at the Institute is most valuable'.²² Since example and public testimony were important openers of purses, the promoters also proudly displayed photos of former Institute members who had become achievers: young men such as Farrier-Major W. J. Hardham, VC—decorated for gallantry at Naawport, South Africa on 10 January 1901—and one G. Hill, another Institute graduate, who had saved the life of another boy in a boating mishap off the Te Aro reclamation. History, too, was appealed to from Sir Richard Arkwright to President Grant. All manner of boys of lowly parentage who had attained prominence were paraded before the hopefully generous benefactors of Wellington and the Dominion. Indeed, it was claimed,

Our own country certainly has a most honourable record of those who have graduated from the toilers' tasks and risen to the highest and most honoured positions in the Dominion. . . . Poverty is no crime, frequently it is a blessing; for many a poor lad has been strengthened by the buffetings received in the rough sea of adversity during his life time. The fighting made him strong.²³

Rarely could the working class boys of Te Aro, Mount Cook and Newtown have ever had such a persuasive extolling of their many