

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT
59th ANNUAL MEETING
THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY OF BRANT
.....

If I may be permitted a personal note in this report, I have this to say: I believe in child welfare, but I believe in good child welfare and I believe that not all that is done in the name of child welfare, is good child welfare. I cannot promise that good child welfare is cheap measured in direct dollar costs but I can assure you that bad child welfare is expensive measured in heartache, distress, and damaged lives. I intend to indicate in brief some of the things that we did last year that were good child welfare and, maybe in honesty, I must point to some of the things that were bad child welfare.

Last year I took the occasion of the Superintendent's report to stress one aspect of our work. I think that I should again call attention to that aspect for it is so important. To-day, we feel that the primary job of the Children's Aid Society is to preserve the home for the child. This is usually interpreted to mean that we must prevent, virtually at all costs, the coming of the child into care, sometimes, I suspect, even at the cost of good child welfare. Last year I included in this preventive program the constructive use of temporary separation of parent and child on a carefully planned basis so that the child did not linger in care but returned home before long. We continued to work on this plan last year with heart-warming success. The numbers of children that came into care remained approximately as great as hitherto but the time they remained was reduced so that actually fewer days care were given last year than in the previous year. We believe that careful planning in each case is good child welfare. I have been asked during the year the question, "what do all those social workers on your staff do?" Well, this is one thing they do and it is a job worth while.

This year I would like to say a little more about our foster home program. It is commonplace to say that the success of this program rests upon

the devoted shoulders of our foster parents. The community owes to the foster parents a deeper debt of gratitude than is realized. The monetary compensation is not great and it is too easy to dismiss the debt by some such statement that these people get their satisfaction out of the job. Perhaps this is true but then it is surprising that the very people who insist upon this do not always themselves invite these satisfactions by offering their own homes for children. It is not fully realized that the temporary nature of the period of most children in care to-day results in new problems for the foster parent. Each foster parent must give to the child something more than a bed to sleep in and food to eat; the child must have acceptance, understanding and a feeling of belonging. It is one thing to offer these to a child that is going to remain indefinitely in one's home. The foster home faces something quite different when it means that all these must be given to a child for perhaps a few months only and then a stranger may take his place and new adjustments must be made to a new personality. Our foster homes have become something quite different than they used to be, no longer are they places where it is anticipated that the child will stay and grow up over long years but rather way-stations in the child's journey to adulthood.

Largely because of the temporary nature of child care to-day we are recognizing that a dependence upon one form only of child care, the foster home, is not adequate. We need to supplement this program with opportunities for the provision of group living for children which does not set up an emotional rivalry to the child's own parents, which can accept the child for what he is, provide an enriching experience while giving him the necessities of life in an adequate setting and finally return him to his parents without tearing him in two directions. This would necessitate an extension of our resources that we cannot undertake alone as a single agency. We must work with other Societies in establishing such facilities as this. There is a growing recognition of this and, if I should venture to predict,

I would say that before many years there will be a growth in this direction.

We have increasingly recognized that the truism, "it is more blessed to give than to receive," applies equally to our children. We have cast about for ways to help them to give and not be merely passive recipients of the beneficence and charity of others. Perhaps I can illustrate this best by referring to what we did at Christmas time. We all know that Christmas is a time of not only receiving but also of giving, of little secrets, of whisperings and plannings and of the delight of seeing others open the gifts that we have given. It is just as important that our children should give too. This year, we made it possible and emphasized this aspect of Christmas. We concerned ourselves less with what each would receive and more with what each child would give, so we made it possible for the child to think and plan little gifts to his foster parents, to his brothers and his sisters and even to his own parents. The experiment, we felt, was an unqualified success and I believe that we must find more ways throughout the year to help our children participate in their own future. Their personal growth will lie in this direction and not by being merely passive receivers of other people's generosity, precious as this may be.

Our work with unmarried parents and their children remains one of the most demanding and most important aspects of our job. Here too, our concept is not one of merely giving but rather one of helping, i.e., helping a mother bring to her problems her own strengths and capacities. The problem that is faced by the unmarried mother is a serious and difficult one. She is best able to build upon the experience and to grow in her own character if we help her find resources within herself to meet and face her problems. I do not mean by that, that she must look after her own child necessarily but possibly that she may find the strength within herself to relinquish her child rather than emotionally cling to the child when it is in her and her child's best interests to give it up. In all her problem

solving she must participate if the experience is to be constructive.

Growing out of this work with the unmarried mother is the bulk of our adoption work. This is a very popular aspect of our work and a very gratifying one to all engaged in it. It, in a very happy way, meets two social problems; the child in need of a home and the home in need of a child, for along with the growth in illegitimacy, paradoxically enough, has occurred the growth in childless marriages. While this work is gratifying, it is also fraught with a number of complex problems simply because human emotions are deeply involved and it is easy to let our hearts run away with our heads. We must have some policies and regulations to protect the interests of all concerned. For instance, it is not fair to a child to place him in a home with people whose ages approximate that of his natural grandparents rather than that of his parents. It may be hard, however, for a vigorous couple of fifty and fifty-five to realize that we must think ahead to the teenager in another 13 or 14 years. Prospective adoptive couples must be helped to understand what adoption will really mean, what it offers and what its limitations are for themselves. Without this help, disappointments may arise and what is more important adoptive parents will not handle certain situations that are bound to arise in adoption with as much understanding and skill as the situation calls for.

From the statistics you will see that quite a few people, children and adults, are involved in the work of our Society in any one year. A lot of human lives could be damaged if care and time were not taken and skilfully used. This requires staff, and trained staff. It is not enough that we go through certain motions. It is not enough that we have certain slogans and good intentions. There must be fulfillment of these slogans and intentions. The success of the daily operations of the Society rests on the staff, their skill, their devotion, ultimately determines whether the work of the agency is good child welfare or bad child welfare.

At the outset I said that I cannot promise that good child welfare is cheap child welfare. Recently the Honourable Minister of Public Welfare pointed out that the expenditures of the Children's Aid Societies in Ontario amounted to just slightly over seven million dollars last year. It is true that this was given to show them their enormity. Let us break this down and see that the cost to each man, woman, and child, in the Province is all of \$1.50. This means that each of us must forego three or four packages of cigarettes or two or three shows or a few chocolate bars each year. In Brant, our own per capita costs were a little over \$1.00. I do not know whether our consumption of chocolate bars was up correspondingly but in any event the question in my mind is not so much one of congratulations upon our economy of operations but rather whether we have deprived Brant children of something. I see no reason why Brant children are less deserving of good welfare than other children and I do not believe that the people of Brant would insist upon bad child welfare for the sake of an extra movie a piece. Nevertheless, if upon examination, we are satisfied that our program is adequate and of high standard then we may be thankful that our costs are evidently lower than the provincial average.

There are those men and women who stand as the community's guarantee that the work of the Society is good. These men and women perform what is frequently a thankless task. They are doing something for the whole community in guiding, directing and guaranteeing the effectiveness of the work. I refer to the members of the Board of Directors. It has been a source of deep satisfaction to me personally to have been associated with the President and members of the Board during the year. Truly they have been a tower of strength. Also, I should like to express my very warm appreciation of the loyalty, skill and devotion of the staff: Mrs. Nisker, Supervisor, and the case workers; Miss Muir, Office Manager, and the clerical staff: Mrs. Butcher, Matron, and her assistant. I have mentioned the foster mothers, they have been wonderful in a difficult, though rewarding, task.

We have had many friends express their interest in numerous ways. They have been of great help throughout the year.

The Children's Aid Society is a community project - a working together of Board, Staff, Foster Parents and Community. It is a sturdy, vital expression of our democratic way of life, most truly a bulwark of defense.

Respectfully submitted

E. T. Smith

May 12, 1953.