

trained to spend their earnings to the best advantage. They are encouraged and assisted to link up with clubs of various kinds.

*Discharges from Control.*—The average age of the 709 children discharged from control during the year was sixteen years and six months. The policy is to discharge a child as soon as he reaches an age when he can fend for himself or when assistance from the Department is no longer regarded as necessary. There is an impression abroad that once the Branch obtains control it retains it until the child reaches the age of twenty-one years, but the above shows the actual position. Even where children are removed from their parents because of the faults of the latter we always give the parents hope, and encourage them so to order their homes and their ways of living that they may ultimately have their children back with them. This actually occurs in a large number of cases. We then retain control for a year or two to satisfy ourselves that conditions are satisfactory before finally discharging the children from control. For those few who require extra care or assistance control may be retained up to twenty or twenty-one years.

*Maori Children.*—In certain districts there is definitely a problem to be faced in connection with the welfare of Maori children. It would not be possible, even if it were desirable to do so, to remove any large number of these children and place them in institutions. Constant attention from the welfare officers and others, including officers of the Health Department and Native-school teachers, has in the majority of cases proved to be efficacious in ensuring reasonable conditions. Closer contact was made during the year between many District Maori Councils or Committees and liaison officers appointed to act as a link with our District Child Welfare Officers. Very satisfactory results have attended this practice, which it is hoped to extend still further. I am satisfied that the Maoris themselves must be given a large share in the responsibility of providing for the betterment of families—with assistance from Government officials to back them up when required. A difficulty is the suitable placement of the Maori child when the time comes for him to leave school. Active steps are being taken by the Department, through the teachers and the Vocational Guidance Officers, to bridge the gap between the school and employment. In cases presenting behaviour problems, the Branch has, either with the consent of the parents or through orders of the Children's Court, assumed control of children and taken steps to place them in suitable employment with safeguards regarding the spending of their wages and the use of their leisure time.

*Committals and Admissions.*—The number of committals by Courts during the year was 10 fewer than last year—586 as against 596. The private admissions show an increase—160 as against 92—and this is accounted for largely by the increased numbers admitted to special schools under the Education Act.

*Infant-life Protection.*—The foster-homes in which infants up to six years of age are placed apart from their parents are required to be registered under the provisions of Part V of the Infants Act, 1908. The homes are first inspected by Child Welfare Officers. If the home is suitable a license is issued, and thereafter, when children are placed, the home is subject to regular inspection to ensure that the health and general welfare of the infant are adequately safeguarded. There were 625 licensed homes at the 31st March, and the number of infants placed was 798. The relatives pay for maintenance under an agreement which has to be approved by the Superintendent or his authorized officers. This is to ensure that adequate provision, according to the needs of the case, is provided for the maintenance of each infant so placed. Many children remain in these homes after the age of six years, and quite a number are adopted by their foster-parents.

*Adoptions.*—The number of children adopted annually is rapidly rising in the Dominion. Applications come generally from those couples who have no children or who for other sufficient reason desire to make some child their own. Child Welfare Officers report to the Courts on all adoptions, and the responsibility for making the order of adoption rests with the Magistrate. The number of children adopted last year was 854, as against 685 the previous year. The ages varied from a few days upwards, but the majority adopted were in the group from infants up to five years of age. This is, of course, the best time for adoption, and, with the safeguards provided through the Courts and by this Branch, it is very satisfactory to record that almost without exception adoptions turn out successfully; proceedings for cancellation of orders are extremely rare.

*Registered Children's Homes.*—Under the Child Welfare Amendment Act of 1927, children's homes conducted by private organizations are required to be registered as such and to be open to inspection by officers of the Branch. There are 83 such homes, and from returns submitted by them, there were 2,928 children in residence on the 31st December, 1943, as against 2,789 for the previous year. With regard to the parental state, it was reported that in the cases of 138 children both parents were dead, in 213 cases the fathers were dead, and in 540 cases the mothers were deceased. In some of the homes improvements to buildings and other amenities were carried out by the controlling authorities during the year, and in others improvements are to be put in hand as soon as circumstances permit. Officers of the Health Department accompanied the Welfare Officers in their visits to many of the homes, and their recommendations regarding dietary and health matters generally were gladly accepted by the authorities. The reports of the inspecting officers showed that during the year a generally satisfactory state of affairs was recorded so far as the conduct of these homes and the health and welfare of the inmates was concerned.

*Illegitimate Births.*—From information supplied by the Registrar-General there was an increase in the number of illegitimate births for the year 1943, there being 1,467, as against 1,339 in 1942. All illegitimate births are notified confidentially to nominated officers of this Branch, and they inquire into the circumstances of each case with a view