

The Department's policy is governed by this view, and its boarding-out system, which has been in operation for over sixty years, not only has justified its continued use on the results achieved but also is in accord with the practice now generally followed overseas.

When a child has to be admitted to an institution after committal, then, as stated earlier in this report, an endeavour is made to restrict the period to as short a time as possible. Usually no time is lost in finding a foster-home which will provide an environment and a type of control suited to the needs of the individual child, although it is regrettable to report that for various reasons a sufficiency of suitable foster-homes has not been available during the war years and the immediate post-war period. This has caused the Department some concern, and it is hoped that a return to more normal conditions generally will effect some improvement in the position.

Due care is exercised by the Department's officers in selecting foster-homes, and, after the placement of children in them, adequate safeguards are maintained to ensure firstly, that the officers have not been misled by an erroneous and superficial impression which is not justified on further acquaintance, and, secondly, that the home does not deteriorate to a stage when it no longer merits approval. It would be too much to expect that perfection could be attained in these matters and it is not surprising that unsatisfactory placements sometimes occur, particularly considering the difficult children occasionally to be placed; but, despite this, the Department's record of foster-home placement is one from which it derives considerable satisfaction. Frequent visits by the officers, augmented by supervision on the spot by honorary officers and at school by teachers, give the Department the opportunity of checking up on the treatment of the children, but it is pleasing to be able to state that occasions are commendably rare when serious deficiencies are revealed. Foster-parents are deserving of high praise for taking on themselves this worth-while community job, and although the board rates are good and the Department assists in other ways, yet it is appreciated that something more than the material recompenses of the task impels people to assume these obligations. The satisfaction which comes of helping a child with an unhappy start in life to become a decent and useful citizen is one of the benefits derived by foster-parents, and enjoyment of the companionship of growing children is another. With these thoughts in mind, it will be realized that a substantial increase in the number of foster-homes will be of mutual advantage to the children and the prospective foster-parents.

At the 31st March, 1946, there were 1,924 children placed in foster-homes. This is the lowest figure for many years. For a long period up to 1943 the figure was above the 2,000 mark, but since that year the annual figures have been 1,980, 1,976, and now 1,924.

EDUCATION

Children under the guardianship of the State have the same opportunities as other children of receiving primary and higher education. With the exception of a small number of children whose education is provided for at institutions, State wards attend the ordinary schools in the community. Children are encouraged to continue with their post-primary schooling whenever this is justified, and pupils with special aptitudes are assisted by the Department to attend University.

At the 31st March, 1946, 283 of the children placed in foster-homes were receiving post-primary education and 7 Maori children were residential pupils at Maori colleges.

PLACEMENT IN EMPLOYMENT

State wards, if normal children, are placed in employment at standard rates of wages. In some cases, however, where children are so handicapped physically or mentally that they cannot compete on equal terms with their fellow-workers of the same age, under-rate workers permits are obtained through the local officers of the Labour Department. In these cases their placement in the right environment is regarded as being of paramount importance.