

The following figures show the number of children dealt with under the foregoing headings Nos. (1), (2), (3), and (5) :—

Industrial schools and receiving-homes..	..	..	..	..	3,839
Juvenile probation ..	..	..	..	..	281
Infant-life protection ..	..	..	..	..	797
Afflicted children—					
Deaf ..	..	..	..	..	118
Feeble-minded ..	..	..	..	..	198
					5,233

CHILDREN COMMITTED TO THE CARE OF THE STATE.

During the year considerable progress has been made in the direction of providing for the supervision of children in the districts to which they belong in preference to their being brought into one of the four centres and from there placed out in country homes. Agencies have now been established in all the smaller centres of population—Whangarei, Hamilton, Napier, Wanganui, Palmerston North, Nelson, Greymouth, Timaru, and Invercargill; and small receiving-homes or clearing-houses have been provided at Napier, Hamilton, Wanganui, and Nelson. This is undoubtedly a step in the right direction, for it eliminates the need for the long journeys formerly undertaken by country children to the nearest principal centre with the necessary responsible adult escorts, and provides for additional supervision of all children placed out in country districts by experienced lady officers whose headquarters are in close proximity to the foster-homes and places of employment of the young people who are still under the control of the Department. By an arrangement with the police and Court officials the services of the lady Boarding-out Officers in each of the aforementioned centres, and of the Manager of the receiving-home in each of the four larger centres, are now available for investigating all cases of children coming under the notice of the police, and for assisting Magistrates when the children are brought before them in Court. The receiving-home eliminates the need for children to be detained or escorted by the police, and provides for the temporary shelter of any child who for various reasons and for the time being cannot be provided for by its parents or guardians or relatives.

To complete the present system receiving-homes should be established in such centres as Palmerston North, Greymouth, Timaru, and Invercargill, but the present financial stringency renders such an extension impossible at the present time. To provide for this deficiency, however, arrangements have been made with respectable householders for the temporary accommodation of dependent children who may be from time to time (usually without notice of any kind) brought under the care of the Department.

By an arrangement with the Pensions Department the Boarding-out Officers now undertake the preliminary inquiries regarding all applications for widows' pensions. This work was formerly undertaken by the police, who have carried out this duty with tact and discretion, but there is no doubt that it is more fitting that the necessary inquiries and visits to the homes in question should be the work of experienced lady officers. On the principle that where money is paid out by the State there should be some means of ensuring that it is used for the purpose for which it is granted, occasional visits are made to these homes by the Department's lady officers, all of whom are trained nurses. Such visits are also made for the purpose of giving advice (if sought) to the mothers (the great majority of whom are respectable members of society) regarding the physical welfare of their children, or of utilizing the organization of the Branch in assisting in placing the children, when old enough, in suitable employment.

In a great many cases the services of the Department's lady officers are availed of by Magistrates in investigating applications for the adoption of children. I consider that all such cases should be reported on by the Department before being dealt with by the Courts. Speaking generally, I have been impressed by the scrupulous care exercised by Magistrates in deciding all adoptions, but in many instances not only the children in question but the adopting parents as well are known to the Department's officers, who are therefore in a position to give an opinion based not on a single visit but on experience of the conditions extending over a period of years in the majority of cases.

BOARDING-OUT SYSTEM.

The majority of the children committed to the care of the State are not detained in institutions, but are boarded out in foster-homes situated mainly in suburban areas and in districts in close proximity to the smaller centres of population. At the end of June of this year there were 2,018 children boarded out—1,954 from Government receiving-homes and 64 from private industrial schools (Roman Catholic). Arranged according to the ages of the children the numbers are as follows: Under five years, 427; from five to ten years, 713; from ten to twelve years, 358; from twelve to thirteen years, 213; from thirteen to fourteen years, 183; and over fourteen years, 124. These numbers include nearly 400 epidemic orphans of all ages, who are placed mainly with relatives. It is pleasing to note that the authorities of private industrial schools (especially St. Mary's, Auckland) have adopted the boarding-out system to a limited extent for the purpose of providing for the children belonging to these schools.

The rate paid to the foster-parents for the maintenance of each child is 15s. a week, but for infants under twelve months 17s. 6d. a week is paid. Each child is provided with a very complete initial outfit, the foster-parents being required to maintain the clothing at this standard. Medical attendance, medicines, and dentistry are provided by the Department, as also are school-books and school stationery. Upon Boarding-out Officers and Managers of Receiving-homes rests the responsibility of selecting proper homes and of supervising the inmates in these homes. No hard-and-fast rules can be laid down as to the type of home to be selected, or the number of times a home should be visited, or the methods of supervision. Much depends upon the personality, ability, and intuition