

CHILDREN'S COURTS.

It is pleasing to record that Magistrates and Justices specially appointed to exercise jurisdiction in Children's Courts have endeavoured to carry out the spirit of the legislation under which these Courts have been established. The view generally accepted by child-welfare authorities in regard to the offending child is that less is to be achieved by punishment than by correction of conditions, care and protection, and the prevention of a recurrence of inimical conditions through the constructive work of the Court in conjunction with the Welfare Officers. As stated in a previous report, the child should be saved to the State, not punished by it.

A certain amount of controversy has been raised in regard to the practice of permitting the publication of proceedings regarding children's cases. The Child Welfare Act stipulates that in no case shall the name of the child be published, or any particulars likely to lead to the identification of the child. Most Magistrates take the view that the presence of reporters is embarrassing and foreign to the informal atmosphere that should obtain in a Children's Court, and that the publication of reports, far from serving any good purpose, may prove distinctly mischievous and harmful.

Associates of Children's Courts.—The personnel of the Children's Court may include Honorary Associates, of either sex, whose function it is to act as the children's friend and generally to assist the presiding Magistrate or Justice in arriving at his decision. So far, Associates of both sexes have been appointed only in the four large centres and in some of the smaller centres, and have proved of very material assistance not only to the Courts but to the officers of the Child Welfare Branch. The Department wishes to acknowledge gratefully the assistance that is frequently given by the Associates after the cases have been dealt with by the Courts.

Child Welfare Officers.—One of the duties of these officers is to investigate each case from a social-welfare standpoint and to furnish the Court with particulars as to family history, environment, conduct, progress at school, degree of mentality, &c. As a rule, in the larger centres the Child Welfare Officers are identical with the regular field officers of the Child Welfare Branch, but in the outlying towns and country districts the services of local voluntary social workers have been utilized to very great advantage. By this means the Department hopes to enlist the services of local organizations, with the object of dealing with the various classes of children in their own districts and in their own homes, where possible, by private effort directed from the nearest child-welfare centre.

The total number of children under the supervision of the Child Welfare Branch at the 31st March, 1928, was 5,816, classed under the following headings:—

Boarded out, at service, in receiving-homes, &c.	..	..	..	4,014
Under supervision	..	..	..	493
Infant-life protection	..	..	..	902
Deaf children	..	..	..	122
Feeble-minded children	..	..	..	285
Total	..	..	..	5,816

The number of children committed to the care of the Superintendent during the year ended 31st March, 1928, was 592, classified according to reason for committal as follows: Indigent, 241; delinquency, 24; detrimental environments, 75; not under proper control, 120; accused or guilty of punishable offence, 81; neglected, 51; and in addition 38 were admitted by private arrangement (section 12, Child Welfare Act), while 14 were temporarily admitted, making a total of 644.

Classified according to age at the time of admission, the numbers are as follows: Under six months, 65; over six months and under one year, 33; from one to five years, 123; from five to ten years, 146; from ten to fourteen years, 143; and over fourteen years, 134: total, 644.

NUMBERS UNDER THE GUARDIANSHIP OF CHILD WELFARE BRANCH.

Fully 95 per cent. of the children under fifteen years of age under the guardianship of the Child Welfare Branch are placed in foster-homes in country districts, where they have the opportunity of becoming members of some family and of being gradually absorbed into the community.