

FIELD-WORK.

A staff consisting at present of twenty-two male and twenty-nine female officers is stationed throughout New Zealand in the main centres of population according to the needs of each district. Besides the preventive and miscellaneous inquiry work incidental to their duties, the officers are charged with the direct supervision and placement of State wards and of children placed under their legal supervision by orders of a Children's Court. These officers report directly to the Children's Courts and are given a fairly wide discretion by the Department in dealing with all administrative matters within their districts.

HONORARY CHILD WELFARE OFFICERS.

In order to assist the permanent officials Honorary Child Welfare Officers, male and female, have been appointed, especially in outlying districts. It is recognized that supervision, to be of value, should be as constant as possible, and the Department wishes again to express its keen appreciation of the valuable services performed by these honorary officers. They have the right to report to the Children's Court direct and attend thereat in the interests of any child who may be required to appear before a Court. There are at present about two hundred such officers acting throughout New Zealand, and we may take this as a sign of the active interest displayed by well-thinking men and women in their desire to assist the youth of the community. These officers, in co-operation with the local police officials, frequently deal with cases themselves without any prior reference to the permanent officers of the Department, thereby not only securing greater efficiency in the individual cases, but also effecting a saving of public funds. In special cases where, for various reasons, it may not be desirable for the honorary officer to act, our permanent officials are always on hand to take the necessary action, and usually if there is any possibility of committal, or the case is a serious one they attend the Court.

INSTITUTIONS.

There is provision under the Child Welfare Act, 1925, for the Hon. the Minister in charge to establish such institutions as may be found necessary from time to time for the proper treatment of children requiring institutional care. In the five main centres of population small institutions, known as "receiving-homes," have been in existence for many years, and they provide for girls and young children. In addition to these institutions there are in the four main centres boys' homes where boys of about nine years of age and upwards are admitted temporarily for observation and training. A boy may have proved difficult in his foster-home and have been brought into one of these homes for a period of disciplinary training. Children's Courts have power, when making an order for supervision, to order that a boy should remain for a portion of the supervisory period—usually from three to six months—in an institution, and these boys are admitted to the boys' homes. Both the receiving and boys' homes are used for the temporary accommodation of children changing board or service situations.

A start has been made at the boys' home in one centre of having a housemaster, whose duties include supervision in the evenings and week-ends when the boys are free from school. It is hoped to extend this system to other centres. Girls are sometimes placed for a period of training in receiving-homes before being placed in situations. At either class of home children may be admitted on remand or on warrant issued under section 13 (2) of the Act, pending the hearing of a complaint or information in the Court.

In Wellington the Department has a hostel with accommodation for about sixteen girls. These are usually apprenticed to trades or employed in shops or offices. This institution has proved of great assistance to the Department in providing for certain types of girl, and a short report on the working of the hostel for the year is to be found further on in this report.

Some eighteen years ago the Department had a small clothing-factory attached to what was then the Girls' Industrial School in Dunedin. When that institution was closed the factory was transferred to Wellington as part of the institution there. Since its inception it has been in charge of a competent forewoman, Miss McKnight. The factory has proved a useful training-ground for many of our girls who are fitted for that kind of work.

For cases of older children requiring a period of institutional training there are two institutions—one for boys at Weraroa, near Levin, and one for girls at Burwood, near Christchurch.

As stated in a previous report, the buildings at Weraroa are now old and unsuitable for the proper training and classification of the boys, and a scheme for the erection of new buildings on the cottage system has been approved. This will make for a better classification of the boys than is possible at present. A start has been made, however, in this direction in the existing buildings, and the process of re-organization is proceeding steadily.

For the year ended 31st March, 1939, 29 new cases were admitted to the Girls' Home at Burwood. The average age at admission was sixteen years and one month. The standard of education of these girls at admission was: Standard IV, 5; Standard V, 9; Standard VI, 4; Proficiency Certificate, 4; Competency Certificate, 2; post-primary education, 5. Thirty-nine girls left during the year, and of these 10 were returned to parents; 6 were found unsuitable for further training (of these 2 were transferred to Templeton Farm, 3 to private institutions, and 1 was returned to a receiving-home with a view to being placed out); 15 were discharged from control; 7 were transferred to other districts to be placed in situations; and 1 girl was married.