

PREVENTIVE WORK.

I look upon the preventive side of our work as of the greatest importance.

It is our aim, by constructive social-service activities, to prevent as far as may be possible a continuation of conditions under which a child is disposed to develop anti-social tendencies which may lead later to his appearance in a Children's Court charged with some offence; also by the same methods to improve conditions generally for the handicapped child. Cases are reported to the Department by parents or relatives, school-teachers, school medical officers, the police, welfare agencies, or interested private persons. The Child Welfare Officer then visits the home to ascertain conditions, and as a first essential must gain the confidence of the parents. Without their co-operation little can be done. It is gratifying to state that this is forthcoming in the great majority of cases. Where the parents are genuinely interested in their children any little first resentment is soon broken down.

It cannot be too strongly urged that the well-being of children and the safeguarding of their interests are never entirely the duty of any one section of the community. The best results can be obtained only by the fullest co-operation of all, including parents, teachers, clergymen, police and Court officials, social-service organizations, and all private citizens having the interests of young people at heart.

It would be very difficult to state with any degree of certainty the causes of juvenile crime or delinquency in individual cases. There is no question, however, but that broken homes and lack of parental control are a frequent predisposing factor in juvenile delinquency. Often the attitude of the parents towards their children is caused through a lack of appreciation of the possible harm that may result therefrom. This has proved to be so on numerous occasions when our officers have, with beneficial results, suggested a different line of approach. Generally speaking, parents are found to be willing to co-operate. We are at present considering what further action might be taken to secure the fullest co-operation from parents.

Reference to reports from other countries shows that the position with regard to juvenile delinquency is very much the same in all countries. When one looks around the world to-day one wonders whether the social institutions, including the education systems, of the various countries have evolved on proper lines. I suggest that there is evidence of a lack of the kind of training that would make the child better fitted later for parenthood and its attendant responsibilities.

The cinema has been blamed for being one of the causes of juvenile delinquency, but I must say that no substantial evidence is forthcoming to support such a statement, so far as this country is concerned. Rather, indeed, I look upon it as an aid to the general training of the child, but the parent should exercise common-sense in the child's attendances. Indecent publications have a deteriorative effect on children, and parents should exercise a wise supervision of their children's reading.

At the end of the year there was a total of 1,691 such children in their own homes under supervision of Child Welfare Officers.

TABLE 2.—PREVENTIVE CASES.

The following table shows the number of cases notified by Child Welfare Officers during the year ended 31st March, 1939:—

District.					Number of Families.	Number of Children.
North Auckland	..	..	..	..	14	41
Auckland	..	..	..	..	28	46
Hamilton	..	..	..	..	62	244
Gisborne	..	..	..	..	26	53
Hawke's Bay	..	..	..	..	13	21
Hawera	..	..	..	..	54	93
Wanganui	..	..	..	..	17	38
Palmerston North	..	..	..	..	18	47
Wellington	..	..	..	..	33	48
Nelson and Marlborough	..	..	..	..	4	15
West Coast (South Island)	..	..	..	..	6	19
North Canterbury	..	..	..	..	42	51
South Canterbury	..	..	..	..	22	48
Otago	..	..	..	..	37	65
Southland	..	..	..	..	13	19
Totals	..	..	..	..	389	848

ANNUAL REPORTS TO CHILDREN'S COURTS.

In order to assist the Courts, and with a view also to having some definite records in the matter, the Department requires the District Child Welfare Officers to submit to the presiding Magistrates and to the Department a report at the end of each year on the cases dealt with during the year. These