CHILD WELFARE IN IOWA – RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

A paper given by Dr. Emma McCloy Layman before the Iowa

Conference on Child Development and Parent Education on

May 5th, 1940.

Three years ago, at the meeting of this conference, Dr. Mae Habenicht ably summarized the developments in the field of Child Welfare in Iowa, up to that date. Because of the comprehensive nature of Dr. Habenicht’s report, we shall content ourselves with only a brief review of some of the points made at that time, and devote most of this paper to a report of more recent happenings.

The welfare of underprivileged children in Iowa has long been a matter of concern to various groups and private individuals, but it was not until the conclusion of the first World War that sentiment became crystallized into a wide-spread conviction that the protection and care of children should be the responsibility of the State. The first organized attempt to promote legislation to make possible a more effective safeguarding of the welfare of children was the appointment of the Iowa Child Welfare Commission by Governor Kendall in 1923. This commission made a thorough and comprehensive study of child welfare needs in Iowa, and recommended to the legislature that ten interlocking bills be passed. Only four of the bills were adopted by the 1925 legislature, and these in much modified form. These included a bill creating a Department of Child Welfare in the Board of Control, with power to assign its duties, regulate its procedure, and establish its policies, and bills to license Child Placing Agencies, Boarding Homes, and Maternity Hospitals. Two years later a new adoption bill was passed.

As a result of the action of the 1925 legislature, a Bureau of Child Welfare was established on July 1, 1925. Although this Bureau was empowered to assign its own duties and establish its policies, the lack of adequate supporting legislation and an inadequate annual appropriation ($5,000) made it impossible for the Bureau to perform those functions which the Governor’s Commission had intended for it. The result was that the activities of the Bureau were confined chiefly to making plans for children committed to the care of the State.

In the decade following the establishment of the Bureau of Child Welfare, a number of studies were made in Iowa, to determine child welfare needs, and recommendations were repeatedly made to the legislature, but were completely disregarded, so that the situation in 1935 differed very little from that found by Governor Kendall’s Commission in 1924.

The passage of the Social Security Act in 1935 gave new impetus to interest in the welfare of children in Iowa. Part 3, Title V of this act “authorizes an annual appropriation of $1,500,000 for Federal grants to the States to enable the United States, through the Children’s Bureau, to cooperate with the State public welfare agencies in establishing, and strengthening, especially in predominantly rural areas, child welfare services for the protection and care of homeless, dependent, and neglected children and children in danger of becoming delinquent. The funds are to be used for payment of part of the cost of district, county, or other local child welfare services and for developing State services for the encouragement and assistance of adequate methods of community child welfare organization in areas predominantly rural and in areas of special need.” The federal funds allot[t]ed [sic] each State submitting an acceptable plan consisted of an annual grant of $10,000, plus an additional amount dependent on the ratio between the rural population of the State, and the rural population of the United States.

A State Plan for Child Welfare Services in Iowa was submitted to the United State[s] [sic] Children’s Bureau in 1936, and was approved, making available to Iowa a Federal allocation $37,325 a year. However, in 1937, when a new plan was submitted, the United States Children’s Bureau stated that Iowa’s annual state appropriation of $5,000 for child welfare was not large enough to indicate the existence of a Child Welfare Program in Iowa. Consequently, the Committee on Retrenchment and Reform granted an additional appropriation of $10,000 per year for both years of the biennium ending June 30, 1939. The 1939 legislature increased the State appropriation to a total of $75,000 for each year of the biennium ending June 30, 1941, thus making possible considerable expansion in the child welfare program.

In Iowa, the Child Welfare Services program was administered by the Bureau of Child Welfare under the Board of Control from July, 1936 to July, 1937. When the 47th General Assembly established a State Department of Social Welfare, in the spring of 1937, a Division of Child Welfare was created within that Department, to take over a large share of the child welfare functions formerly carried on by the Board of Control. At that time, the Division of Child Welfare assumed responsibility for two phases of the child welfare program – that of services to children, and the licensing and inspection of children’s agencies and institutions. Subsequent legislation has made some changes in the administrative set-up of the State Department of Social Welfare, but changes in the child welfare program have been in the nature of extending and strengthening the program in existence, rather than uprooting or supplanting it.

At the present time, the State Department of Social Welfare is administered by a full-time Board consisting of three members. Within the Department are two major service divisions – A Division of Public Assistance and a Division of Child Welfare, each with a Director whose duties and responsibilities are defined by the State Board.

Under the plan now in operation, the program of the Division of Child Welfare is carr[i]ed [sic] out by five Sections in the Division. However, this sectioning within the Division is chiefly for the purpose of simplifying the problem of administration and supervision, and does not imply any clear-cut and mutually exclusive separation in function. Actually, the program is an integrated one, having as its keynote that of “service” to children, with the five Sections working closely together, each serving to make the functioning of the others more effective.

In the Plan for Child Welfare Services covering the present fiscal year, the objectives of the program were stated as follows:

“(1) To establish a Bureau of Child Welfare Services within the Division of Child Welfare which will be a permanent state service.

(2) To extend and strengthen this service and to develop other indicated necessary services with supplementary funds supplied through the Social Security Act, Title V, Part 3.

(3) To coordinate and integrate the normal statutory functions of the Division of Child Welfare with the established services in order that a sound, well organized and efficient state program may be realized for the protection of the children of Iowa ‘who are homeless, dependent and neglected, or in danger of becoming delinquent.’

(4) To increase the State’s interest in and awareness of the problems of its children who are homeless, dependent and neglected, and in danger of becoming delinquent, and to provide the best methods of handling these problems.

(5) To insure services which will meet the needs of every child who comes under the definition of a homeless, dependent and neglected, or delinquent child.

(6) To coordinate all existing facilities and resources available for the care of dependent children in the State of Iowa.

(7) To raise the standard of care of children by utilizing on the state staff a corps of well qualified persons equipped by education and experience to deal with the problems of children, and to encourage the progressive value of that staff by granting periods of educational leave for workers who have demonstrated their ability to profit by further training.”

The carrying out of these objectives involves the coordinated activity of each of the five Sections of the Division.

The largest Section of the Division is the Section of Child Welfare Services. It consists of a Supervisor, and 13 Children’s Workers who are giving service on children’s problems in 16 Iowa counties. These workers are paid by the State, with funds secured chiefly through the Social Security Act, while office space, supplies, mileage, and stenographic services are supplied by the counties. These workers devote the largest share of their time to doing direct case-work with children and their parents, but perform additional functions which include (1) consultation with agencies doing work with the children; (2) general community interpretation concerning child welfare needs; (3) investigation of prospective foster homes; (4) supervision of children in boarding homes. This Section works in close cooperation with the Section of Agencies and Institutions, the Foster Home and Consultant Service, and the Section of Psychological Services.

Those counties not included in demonstration units are given service by the Section of Foster Home and Consultant Service. This Section is staffed by a Supervisor and four consultants, each consultant having as her territory one quadrant of the state (giving service in those counties not served by Children’s Workers). This Section is charged with the responsibility for setting up standards for boarding homes, and recommending for licensing those boarding homes which meet the standards set up. In performing this function, the Section of Foster Home and Consultant Service works closely with the Director of the Division and other state office staff members. The Consultants, in their county contacts, are engaged in the following activities: (1) consultation service given to agencies dealing with children’s problems; (2) community interpretation designed to stimulate interest in child welfare; (3) direct case-work service on a few selected cases, on a demonstration basis; (4) investigation of foster homes; (5) interpretation to agencies and individuals concerning desirable and undesirable practices with reference to the use of foster homes. The Consultants do not hesitate to call on the Section of Child Welfare Services, and the Section of Agencies and Institutions, and Section of Psychological Services for assistance in making plans for children.

The Section of Agencies and Institutions is staffed by two consultants and an Acting Supervisor (Director of the Division of Child Welfare). In addition to the function of licensing and inspecting all private child placing agencies, children’s institutions, and maternity homes, this Section assumes responsibility for setting up standards for these institutions and agencies, and giving consultation service to executives and board members of institutions concerning general and specific conduct of the institutions or agencies, and any children’s problems which exist. This Section also works with the other Sections of the Division.

When the Child Welfare Services program was first put into operation in Iowa, a psychologist was included on the Child Welfare Services staff. In March, 1939, a second psychologist was added. In July, 1939, the Section of Psychological Services was made a permanent service in the State, financed chiefly by State funds, supplemented by federal funds. Since December, 1939, there have been three clinical psychologists on the staff. The Section of Psychological Services provides a means for studying the child in his own community, and interpreting his behavior, personality, and capacities in the light of his social background and physical condition, this interpretation to serve as a guide to those concerned in planning for the child’s future. It is in no sense a child guidance clinic of a treatment nature, except in so far as treatment is possible through community interpretation and short-time contacts with the child. This unit was organized principally to make more effective the work of the Child Welfare Services program in the diagnosis of children’s cases. At present it works in cooperation also with the Foster Home and Consultant Service, and the Section of Agencies and Institutions. The activities of the Section of Psychological Services are of three types: (1) diagnostic tests and interviews; (2) consultation service; (3) general community interpretation.

An outstanding need in Iowa for many years has been that of adequate provision for training and supervised field-work experience for students and workers interested in the field of case-work with children. A step toward meeting this need has been made this year by establishing an in-service training unit in Johnson County, cooperating with the Division of Social Administration in the State University of Iowa. It is the primary purpose of this Section to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their aptitude for child welfare work, as a basis for selection of individuals to be given further training, and to furnish field work experience under expert supervision to workers returning from school. This Section is at present staffed by a Supervisor who teaches courses in case work with children in connection with the Division of Social Administration at the State University, and supervises field work on children’s cases in Johnson County, in addition to performing such functions as are assumed by County Children’s Workers in other counties.

During the four years which have elapsed since Child Welfare Services were first made available to children or Iowa, various forces have operated in such a way as to make progress difficult, at times. However, in spite of these, very considerable gains have been made in a number of areas. As evidence of progress, we may cite the following.

(1) There has been increased financial support for the Child Welfare program, from the State and Counties.

(2) Each year has brought an increase in the number of counties desiring and using the services…..of a County Children’s Worker.

1. There has been an increasing use of consultants’ and psychological services.
2. There is a better understanding of children’s problems in the counties.
3. Boarding homes are coming to be used more intelligently.
4. Standards for boarding homes, child placing agencies, institutions, and maternity homes have been set up.
5. Agencies and institutions are becoming more interested in studying and planning for children as individuals.
6. An in-training unit has been started.
7. Schools have become more interested in making provisions for the exceptional child.
8. Interest in vocational planning for the adolescent boy and girl is beginning to develop.

Child Welfare in Iowa is on the march, but it can continue only so long as there is the interest and support of the lay public of the State.

Source: Iowa Social Welfare Department, 1940