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Mid-cent. White House Com. on Children and Youth
Iowa Commission.

Report of Committee on Protective Care of Children

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IOWA COMMISSION ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH
OF THE
MIDCENTURY WHITE HOUSE CONFERENCE

REPORT OF COMMITTEE
ON PROTECTIVE CARE OF CHILDREN

OCTOBER 1950

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PROTECTIVE CARE

Introductory Statement

The Protective Care Committee met five times in general sessions, and subcommittees met at other times.

The Committee defined its area to include: (1) protection of the neglected child separated from his family; (2) foster care in institutions or family homes; (3) Day care of children; (4) Adoptions; (5) provisions for legal guardianship. In the discussions of the Committee, and at the four district meetings of the Commission in March 1950, the preservation and strengthening of family ties was stressed as the first step in the protection of children. The Committee reviewed the general social situation in the state as a background for the problems which make protective and foster care of children necessary.

General Social and Legal Changes Related to Child Protection:

1. The very high marriage, birth, and divorce rates in the past five years have increased the total number of families, the total number of young children - nearly one third of all minors in the state being under five years of age - and also the number who are the victims of broken homes. Nearly 17 percent more families were established from 1945 to 1950 than in the five preceding years. The number of divorces for the last half of the 1940's increased nearly 36 percent over the first half, and nearly 6,000 children a year have been involved. There have never been so many before. This instability of family life is an important contributing factor to the need for protective care of children.
2. In an effort to provide better care of children who are the victims of divorce, some courts have required investigations prior to the settlement order. An attempt in 1949 to require a proctor to investigate in every divorce case involving children was made by the Child Welfare Legislative Committee, but failed to pass. However, the emphasis in the 1949 legislature on problems of child desertion and its attendant economic and social problems, resulted in the passage of two laws. One adopted the Uniform Extradition Act, which will make possible the return of deserters who flee to other states. The other provided reciprocal aid to other states on desertion cases, so that deserters may be tried where they are found, if in a state having a law similar to Iowa's. A dozen states took the same action.
3. The war-time problem of child care is still reflected in the recognition of baby-sitting as more than an incidental occupation for youths. Although limited in coverage and only in the early stages, the development of some employment service in a few cities for the placement of baby sitters, and of training them, has significance.
4. A legislative change, the value of which is open to study, added to the authority of the juvenile court the power to punish parents for wanton neglect of their children.
5. There has been definite retrogression in family housing, with thousands of families still in temporary shelters five years after the close of the war. Practically every city has a trailer or shack area of permanent residents, not counting the veteran-students and their families in college communities. Many families which have had to purchase houses at excessive prices have sought additional income from: (1) employment of mothers; (2) renting rooms; (3) boarding other people's children. The effect on family life has been marked in some instances.

6. The discontinuance of many supervised public day care facilities shortly after the close of hostilities resulted in a great increase of unsupervised private arrangements which often were deleterious to the emotional welfare of children if not actually to their physical welfare. Far more mothers of young children remained in the labor force than before the war. Jobs have been available and divorce and separation have made employment necessary.

A number of the committees of the Iowa Commission have pointed out significant achievements in the last five years, and also some unmet needs, which are of special significance in the area of child protection. These will be reviewed as part of the Protective Care Committee's survey of the present picture of foster care in Iowa.

Surveys have been made by the Committee or under its supervision, of:

1. Public opinion about and knowledge of, existing resources for the care of neglected children.
2. The present picture of foster care in Iowa.
3. Personnel employed by public and private child-caring institutions - their training, age, experience, salaries, and duties.

Reports of Surveys:

1. Questionnaires on community resources were answered at district meetings by only 73 persons, and those were relatively close to the problem; therefore, they could not be considered an adequate cross-section of opinion. It is interesting to note that most of them thought that the agencies giving protective care were doing a fair to adequate job, slightly higher percent thinking that private family and child caring agencies did a more adequate job than did the local public agencies. Most of the persons thought that the needs were too great for the existing facilities, with the overload heaviest on the county welfare departments.
2. The Iowa Poll conducted a scientific survey on the question:

"Suppose you knew of a child living in unfit or bad surroundings here in this county. Would you know who to see or call about checking up to get this child cared for?"

Slightly over half of the answers stated the "County Welfare Department", with a somewhat higher proportion in the cities and towns than in the country, and more women than men giving this answer. Since the county welfare department is the only county-wide agency serving children and youth in most counties of the state, this is a significant answer. Other answers were widely scattered, the second largest percent, 8.1, mentioning the Red Cross, Community Chest or Salvation Army; third choice was the juvenile authorities. More than one fifth did not know who they would call; in rural areas it was 29 percent.

3. The personnel study is still in the process.

Present Picture of Foster Care In Iowa:

Nearly 9,000 children were given some form of foster care in 1949. Of these,

1242 were in the care of the two state institutions for dependent children; 4627 in the care of private agencies and institutions; 1779 in day care facilities; and 355 in local boarding homes under the supervision of the county child welfare workers; 737 cared for in four county detention homes. At the beginning of 1950, 3547 children were being cared for by public and private agencies, less than half of whom were in institutions. Over 700 were in adoptive homes awaiting a final decree of adoption. In addition, the day care facilities had 670 children currently on the roles, and there were 348 in county boarding homes.

There have been outstanding achievements in the last five years in the foster care program. The greatest change has been in the provisions for the care of state wards. In 1947 and 1949, the program of the Board of Control was re-organized with technical experts to assist the Board in the field of mental hospital care and child placing. A large increase in appropriations to modernize the program and improve the physical plants of several institutions was made. The citizens of the state have taken a deep interest in the problems of the state child-caring and correctional institutions since 1945. They helped with surveys, and with legislative changes. In addition, there were official surveys which led to more varied programs for children under care.

There has been a marked reduction in long-time institutional care of children, scarcely any institution in the state, public or private, operating at full capacity now, whereas ten years ago, most of them were full and some were overcrowded. Several developments have made this possible. First, the expansion of case work services to children in their own communities with planning on a basis of individual needs, has reduced the number of placements which offered little more than custodial care. Second, family foster care has expanded greatly, including boarding, free, wage, and adoptive homes. Efforts are being made as never before to find suitable foster homes for children who, because of age or handicaps, are not readily placed. Third, personnel standards and the professional services of children's agencies have developed rapidly. More selective and specialized services are offered. Intake practices of child-caring agencies tend to set the standard by which some local workers with less skill can make a better evaluation of the needs of a child and choose the resources best able to meet them.

One feature of improved programs is less "institutionalization" of children under group care, and greater opportunities for participation in the normal life of the community, as going to public school, extra-mural recreation, freedom to attend church with a small group of friends, shopping, etc.

The removal of the statutory ceiling on the amount which can be paid from local tax funds for the support of children in foster care under private agency auspices made it possible to expand resources. As agencies could secure payment which more nearly approached the actual cost of physical care of children, they could use their income from private sources for more personnel and accept more children for supervised placement.

Only 77 boarding homes were licensed during the 1949-50 year, chiefly because of the limitations in coverage of the boarding home law, which does not require a home with less than three boarding children to obtain a license. More than eight times that number are known to be in operation at any one time. Nineteen day-care homes and day nurseries were licensed. It was noted that the Education Committee located 45 nursery schools throughout the state. Since the type of program which should be offered in what is called a day nursery and in a nursery school should be comparable, the results of the sample survey of nursery school

standards proposed by the Sub-committee on Pre-school Education will be of particular interest to the Protective Care Committee.

The Committee has not been able to get accurate data about the employment of working mothers, but the best estimates of those able to judge is that there has been a substantial drop since 1945, leveling off in 1947 at a rate which is still much higher than in 1940. More working mothers now seek day-care facilities for their children because of non-support or abandonment by the father. Fewer are able to pay full fees. The need of G. I. student-families for income to supplement government allowances led wives to work, keeping up enrollment in day care facilities.

In the 1949-50 school year, approximately 600 children attended schools which were part of the private institutions in which they live, and nearly 800 children were in schools at state institutions for dependent children and the correctional institutions. About half of the elementary school pupils in child-caring institutions are sent to the public school, as are most of the secondary school pupils.

In this connection, it should be noted that 1949 changes in the school tuition law have eliminated some difficulty foster children experienced in attending public school in districts where their parents did not live. One new law removed the statutory ceiling on the amount of tuition which can be paid from public funds. School costs had outstripped the legal ceiling, forcing districts to raise tuition rates above the amount which counties or the state could pay. With the closing of many rural schools, tuition for the foster children in rural homes to attend city schools needed adjustment. Other laws provided for state sharing in the cost of transporting children to school.

Four county juvenile detention homes are in operation, giving mainly short-time and emergency care to slightly more than 700 children a year. In the last five years, there has been a reduction in the number of children provided for in detention homes. Because of the rapid turnover of children, the cost of care is high, especially in the detention home which includes a school.

Institutional detention care is not used extensively in Iowa, and is generally not needed, as studies show that less than one-fifth of the children being brought into juvenile court need to be detained. Family boarding homes are used instead, if children cannot be left with their parents or guardians while awaiting action by the court. However, family foster home facilities have not been developed to the extent needed, and the committee recommends consideration of subsidized homes to meet the need.

A state-wide survey made by the Federation of Women's Clubs brought the following answers as to detention care provided juveniles (there was general agreement that juveniles were treated humanely): "some are sent to the county home under supervision of the matron"; "placed in jail"; "in jail in extreme cases"; "in own home in custody of probation officer"; "in sheriff's office or juvenile ward"; "with parents"; "placed in foster homes"; etc.

It was noted that the Committee on Handicapped and Exceptional Children received replies to a community resources survey stating that some children were being cared for in county poor farms. This was also reported in the Protective Care section at one district meeting. The Committee recommended a survey on this subject to discover if county farms have many children and if such care may meet the needs of the particular children adequately.

The Committee held discussions on problems of providing boarding homes, how to find and keep good ones, how to finance the care of children adequately, and the need to raise the standards of all boarding homes. Lack of boarding home facilities in many parts of the state was a serious unmet need in protective care. Payments were found to be from \$30 a month and up to \$50-60, independent arrangements usually bringing the larger fees.

The fact-finding of several committees revealed a lack of facilities for the treatment through group living of emotionally disturbed adolescents, and for foster homes to which they could be transferred as a step to returning them to community living. The same need exists for homes for severely handicapped children who cannot receive care in their own homes.

A number of private institutions giving only residential care to children were found not to have any case work services. There are many long-time placements in these institutions. An evaluation of the individual needs of the children would be helpful in the long-range planning for them. Inability of the Board of Control to pay for boarding care in family homes limits it to giving institutional care regardless of the needs of the child, unless free homes can be located.

Another problem noted was the difficulty of some Community Chests to reach their goals, and the difficulties some of the private children's agencies have experienced in securing increased financial support to meet increased costs of operation. This has resulted in: (1) limiting the number of children who could be accepted for care; (2) limiting the ability of the agency to pay for and keep trained personnel; (c) continuing personnel practices which prove unattractive to potential employees, thus limiting the range of choice open to the agency.

The Committee made inquiries about preventive services, and was encouraged by the expansion and improvement in quality of such services in the last five years. Public child welfare services have increased 70 percent in five years, and there has been a comparable increase in psychological services supplied by the state. Aid to dependent children grants keep many children in the care of their families or relatives, and eliminates the pressure to make placements of children mainly because of financial need. Family agencies are giving more time to family counseling and parent guidance. However, more trained personnel is needed, and more time given to families in trouble in the rural counties. Only 27 percent of the state's population is accessible to any family welfare agency except the county welfare department. The poll of public opinion conducted by the Iowa Poll for the Protective Care Committee showed that only one third of the people thought their local services for the care of neglected children were adequate.

There are now 13 out-patient clinics for mental health problems whereas there were only two in 1945. The supply of psychiatrists has also increased, but is limited to urban centers. Additional clinics planned for various parts of the state will make service more quickly and easily available to rural areas. Local case work and psychological testing have resulted in more careful screening and planning for children on an individual basis without resorting to institutions as the basic resource for child care.

Inter-agency planning of all state and private organizations concerned with protective care has strengthened programs and developed greater understanding of mutual problems in the last five years.

Inquiries were made as to housekeeper service, but little of it was available, and that often not of the right type. This is a lack deserving further study.

The Community resources survey showed a lack of local facilities for children. Placements were often determined by what was available rather than by consideration of the needs of the child. Whether or not financial support could be secured was also a limiting factor in some instances. At several meetings, the legal settlement provisions of the poor law were considered, and, while those seemed to interfere with successful planning in some areas, others reported that the needs of the child were met regardless of legal settlement. The discussions were indecisive, and no general survey has been attempted.

Protection in the child labor field was discussed, but no survey made. The Committee thought that each child needed a chance to learn to work; that the law should offer essential protections, but should be realistic. Since this question is being studied by the Committee on Employment of Youth, the Protective Care Committee made no survey, either of the law or of the practice. However, the Committee calls attention to the importance of on-the-job training for youth because of the contribution this can make to the development of skills, the satisfaction of achievement, and positive attitudes toward work and self-support.

The problem of illegitimacy and its many ramifications was also considered. Its relation to hasty and unplanned adoptive placements, to neglect of children, to financial need and how that can be met, suggested more study and interpretation. Since many mothers were reported to leave their home communities for care and planning, the question of finances and legal settlement arose. Many instances were cited showing the need for better understanding of what can and should be done, more information as to available resources being made known to doctors, hospitals, ministers, and others who often come in contact with persons in need of service.

Maternity homes have improved in recent years, with more enlightened social understanding of problems of unmarried parenthood. More is being done by both private and public agencies to help mothers make good, and to plan wisely for their infants.

Guardianship of children was examined, and was deemed to warrant extensive and intensive study by a sub-committee under the guidance of technical experts.

Adoptions received a great deal of attention as an important area of protective care. Official reports show that from 1500 to 1650 children are being adopted each year in the state, nearly three times as many as ten years ago. Little is known, however, about those who may be placed with the intention of an adoption which is never completed. At meetings, many illustrations were given of placements made without adequate regard for the welfare of the child, of newspaper advertising which brings together people who want to dispose of a child and those who want to get one. An example was cited of a family from which the juvenile court had taken one foster child, and when the father was under indictment for crime, this couple secured another baby "through a friend, by payment of a fee". The demand for children so far exceeds the available supply that the pressure is great. Professions closely related to the problem report "the terrific pressure" brought to bear on them to help people find children they may adopt. At one meeting, some persons reported they did not think poorly-planned placements could be stopped while the demand was greater than could be met by the established agencies.

A survey of all adoption petitions filed in the state shows that a marked improvement has been made in the proper placement of children since 1947, following changes in the adoption law. The committee voted to review the entire subject, with a special sub-committee working over a period of time.

Plans and Recommendations:

1. The Committee has approved the plan of the Child Welfare Legislative Committee to improve the boarding home supervision law to bring all boarding homes under licensing requirements.
2. A committee has been appointed to study the question of guardianship of children. It includes representatives from the Protective Care Committee, the State University School of Social Work, and the State University Law School.
3. An inter-profession committee has been appointed to study the adoption law and current practice. It will have representatives from the Committee, the attorneys, doctors, ministers, osteopaths, nurses, hospital administrators, and judges.
4. A survey is planned of the extent of use of county homes (almshouses) for dependent children. This will probably be made by the consultants of the Division of Child Welfare early in 1951.
5. A plan not initiated by the Committee, but important to its work, has been made by the State Division of Child Welfare, to discuss jointly with child-placing agencies the problems of the ever-increasing demand for children to adopt which far exceeds the supply. The many angles of this complex problem will be examined.
6. The committee also calls attention to the need for parent guidance and training in their communities. The survey by the Federation of Women's Clubs also reported a widespread opinion that more work needed to be done with neglectful parents to help them to understand their responsibilities and to function better as parents.
7. Private agencies need more adequate support if they are to increase their services and get better-qualified personnel.
8. The Committee believes the available sources are not being used to the fullest extent because of lack of information about them by the public in general and by individuals in decision-making positions in particular.

The Committee plans to evaluate the findings of the sub-committees, and hopes through its work with them to stimulate thinking concerning the effect on children of certain independent adoption practices and of guardianship as it functions at present.

Another Public Opinion Poll, and possibly two, will be used to bring protective care problems to the attention of the reading public.

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