

PAUPERS AND  
PROVIDERS

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*Charitable Aid in  
New Zealand*

MARGARET TENNANT

Allen & Unwin/Historical Branch

# CONTENTS

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*In memory of Maude Belk*

Jointly published in 1989 by  
Allen & Unwin New Zealand Limited  
and Historical Branch  
Department of Internal Affairs

Allen & Unwin New Zealand Limited  
in association with the Port Nicholson Press  
Private Bag,  
Wellington, New Zealand

Historical Branch  
Department of Internal Affairs  
P O Box 805  
Wellington, New Zealand

Allen & Unwin Australia Pty Ltd.  
NCR House, 8 Napier Street  
North Sydney, NSW 2059  
Australia

Unwin Hyman Ltd  
15-17 Broadwick Street  
London W1V 1FP, England

Allen & Unwin Inc  
8 Winchester Place, Winchester  
Massachusetts 01890, USA

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ISBN 0 04 614020 4

Printed and typeset by SRM Production Services,  
Malaysia

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Mrs Carpenter, Matron, and children of the Waltham Orphanage, Christchurch, 1906.

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## Chapter 7

### 'GUTTER CHILDREN'

New Zealand's most famous pauper, John A. Lee, has written evocatively of childhood poverty in the 1890s; of threadbare cast-offs and life in worm-eaten hovels, of meals made from scrag ends of meat and stale dripping and scones, the rare and thrilling gift of a ripe apple, quickly turned to tragedy when the child was dispossessed of it by others as hungry as himself. School years brought a growing awareness of difference from other children, constant lateness for class as the household had no clocks, and eventual truancy. Lee also recalled visits to the Otago relieving officer, a grim-faced man named Clulee who, to childish eyes, seemed never to smile, the rancid third-grade butter supplied through the Otago Benevolent Trustees, meals of mince expanded by a turn of the tap and an additional pinch of salt.<sup>1</sup>

Lee was one of a number of New Zealand children for whom deprivation was a fact of life. Children receiving charitable aid fell into two categories: those who obtained relief along with their parents or, like Lee, in association with a single parent, and those maintained apart from their families or whose parents were dead. It is this second group on whom the chapter will focus although, as Lee's own career shows, children very easily made the transition from one category to the other. Indigent parents might be relieved of one or two children so that they could more easily support themselves, and it was not unknown for 'unfit' parents to have their children forcibly taken from them. Poverty and family dispersal were closely associated.

By the time of the 1885 Hospitals and Charitable Institutions Act there was already disquiet about children's experience of 'pauperdom'. Increasingly, the charitable aid boards' provision for children was challenged as inappropriate, especially once other organisations began to compete for a role in child welfare. This, more than any other area of welfare, shows the interaction of charitable aid with church and voluntary groups, and with agencies of the State. Like Lee's semi-fictionalised account, it draws us into the experience of one particularly helpless group among the poor – children who were destitute, orphaned, or abandoned in a

country promoted as an eminently desirable place to be born and raised.

In practice, the failure of parental support for children was apparent as early as the 1850s, when capitation payments were made to individual women and to church groups for child care. Some of the first welfare institutions in New Zealand provided for orphans and destitute children: Auckland's St Mary's, run by the Sisters of Mercy from the early 1850s, the Parnell Orphan Home (Anglican), established in 1866, and the Otago Benevolent Institution, also opened in 1866. By the end of the provincial period there were ten institutions in existence for orphaned, criminal, or neglected children. Two of them (the industrial schools at Caversham and Burnham) came directly under the Justice Department, the rest were local or church establishments.<sup>2</sup>

Legislative provision was also made relatively early, the 1867 Neglected and Criminal Children Act allowing for the establishment of industrial schools and for the removal of children from undesirable situations. Its reference to children found begging or receiving alms, frequenting public places, sleeping in the open air, and consorting with thieves, prostitutes, habitual drunkards, or vagrants suggests a perception that all was not well with some New Zealand families.<sup>3</sup> It certainly shows that the 'moral delinquents' of the 1950s and 'street kids' of more recent times have their historical antecedents. The Act's timing was significant, in a decade marked by the social disruption of the gold rushes. Male parents, in particular, seemed to be wanting. An 1870 police survey of forty-eight 'street children' in Auckland (the term was a contemporary one) showed that roughly 75 per cent had lost one parent, usually the father, through death, desertion or imprisonment. Of fifty-five children supported by the Canterbury Provincial Council in foster homes or church institutions during 1871, twenty-three had lost their father through death or desertion. (The mothers of ten of these children were in prison.) In eleven cases the mother had died but the father was still living, and ten of the children were full orphans. One child had two parents who were believed to be alive, but were missing. The remaining parents were unable, mostly through illness, to support their children.<sup>4</sup>

By the early twentieth century, mothers were more likely to share in the blame. In 1915 the Benevolent Committee of the Otago Hospital and Charitable Aid Board referred to the 'callousness' of women who parted with their children: 'They have not the proper feelings of motherhood, and do not show the regard for their children which one would expect' a member complained.<sup>5</sup> Throughout, charitable aid authorities failed to appreciate

the pressure of extreme poverty on family ties, believing that their clientele *wanted* to abandon their children out of fecklessness and greed. On the whole, the boards removed children from charitable aid families less as a matter of policy or ideology than because they saw financial savings to be made in individual cases. Since savings were never certain, charitable aid authorities tended to be less interventionist than the Education Department, for example. In the 1890s and 1900s they were frequently criticised by women's groups for putting the ratepayer interest above those of children who 'needed' to be 'rescued' from unwholesome environments.

In theory, the charitable aid boards were responsible for destitute children only, those institutionalised on account of parental neglect or their own criminality being a charge on the State. The latter came, first, under the Justice Department, and, from 1880, the Education Department. The fact that there were two agencies responsible for children in need of care, the charitable aid boards (which came under the supervision of the Hospitals Department) and the Education Department, was later to cause considerable confusion and debate about responsibility in individual cases. There was no specific mention of children in the 1885 Hospitals and Charitable Institutions Act, though its 1886 amendment enabled charitable aid boards to appoint guardians for children in their care, and the 1909 Act formally empowered the boards' responsibility separate homes for children. In practice the boards' responsibility for children ranged over four areas. Orphanage work was the least extensive, for there was only one charitable aid orphanage in New Zealand. Some boards made alternative provision for children in their benevolent institutions, but this was an increasingly controversial practice. A third response involved the placement of children in foster care, as the charitable aid boards ran fostering schemes parallel to those of the Education Department. Finally, the boards also paid for the support of children in private and state industrial schools.

Only one orphanage ever came under charitable aid board jurisdiction. The forces which brought the Lyttelton Orphanage under the North Canterbury Board's management were similar to those which operated in the case of the Canterbury Female Refuge. In 1868 a committee of the Canterbury Provincial Council had considered how best to provide for destitute children. It decided to convert the old Lyttelton Hospital into an orphanage, and on 1 July 1870 the Canterbury Orphan Asylum opened. After the abolition of the provinces it came under the government-nominated and -funded Christchurch Charitable Aid Board, and

in 1885 was transferred to the newly constituted Ashburton and North Canterbury United Charitable Aid Board.<sup>6</sup> From this time the Lyttelton Orphanage (as it was now known) followed a troubled course as it came under committees less attuned to children's welfare than to the vagaries of local body politics. The various inquiries and newspaper exposés which followed suggest that the experience of children in New Zealand institutions at the turn of the century was a decidedly dismal one.

On 12 January 1886 there were seventy-one boys and thirty-two girls in the Lyttelton Orphanage. A large number were not full orphans, but had one and sometimes both parents alive.<sup>7</sup> The Orphanage records show that parents themselves sometimes applied to admit their children, presumably because they were too poor to care for them. For those admitted, life was a monotonous round of housework, prayers, schooling, meals, and more work. Twice a week the routine was varied by a march, and the more privileged boys were involved in band practices.<sup>8</sup> For some, domestic chores began as early as five or six in the morning. Until 1888 the children were taught by the master and a governess at the Orphanage, but in the 1890s they began to attend the nearest public school. Even this had its drawbacks. The children had to be up even earlier to attend to their duties and be ready for school on time. They had to rush back to the Orphanage, and return to the school by one o'clock in the afternoon. They had no ulsters or overcoats, and in wet weather were either kept from school or sat all day in wet clothes.<sup>9</sup>

For girls, in particular, schooling was a mere formality, and they were even more likely than the boys to be kept back from the classroom for domestic tasks. Domestic service was their inevitable destiny, as it was for most female children in institutions at the time. In 1890 the Board's Orphanage Committee resolved that Orphanage girls should be withdrawn from school at age thirteen, regardless of educational achievement, to be prepared for service at, or before, attaining the age of fourteen.<sup>10</sup> The opportunities for boys were slightly broader, as they were apprenticed to trades or went into the Navy. Often, however, boys were returned from apprenticeships, the reports simply noting that they were 'unsatisfactory'. A letter of 1909 suggests that girls placed out as domestic servants also became more assertive as they got older. The Board's secretary wrote to a woman that it was a very difficult matter to get girls for domestic help, especially for places in the country. They all sought to live in or near the town, and to have the liberty to go out whenever they wanted in the evenings, he complained.<sup>11</sup>

At various times, the Board's Institutions Committee decided to flex its muscles, seeking to curb the master's control over the Orphanage. The period between 1885 and 1890, when most of the children were fostered out, was marked by the forced resignations of managers and matrons, staff accusations against the manager, and frequent complaints about cruelty. In 1886 a new master reported on a severe shortage of clothing, dirty bedding, and only one comb having been provided to dress the hair of ninety-six children.<sup>12</sup> A month later a visiting workman accused him of ill-treating a little boy. He had seen a six-year-old standing naked outside in the hail, while another threw cold water over him. The little lad was screaming, black and blue with cold, and could hardly stand, the workman claimed. An inquiry showed that the boy had soiled his clothes in class, and that this was a frequent way of washing down such children, to discourage them from 'dirty habits'. The master denied all accusations, but two years later was dismissed for excessive discipline, and for his inability to get on with staff.<sup>13</sup>

Such troubles were well publicised in the press, and probably hastened the Board's 1890 decision to foster out most of the children. Unwilling to surrender a valuable income from Orphanage endowments, the Board retained a small number of inmates – between seven and fifteen – in what was then a very old, incommensurate building. Its destruction by fire fourteen years later came as a distinct relief to the Board.<sup>14</sup> But the children, and the all-important endowments, had only just been transferred to a smaller property at Waltham when the institution became the subject of a major scandal, culminating in a public inquiry in late 1905.

The whole affair was heightened by the long-standing tensions between women Board members and their more conservative colleagues. The Ashburton and North Canterbury Board, it will be remembered, was one of the first to have female appointees, and was also under the close scrutiny of women's organisations in Christchurch. In this instance the women's persistent criticisms of the Orphanage led to a commission of inquiry, which confirmed a number of shortcomings in its management. The usual institutional deficiencies were apparent – dirty bedding and monotonous food (a shortcoming allegedly aggravated by the matron's consumption of all sorts of dainties in front of the children). A 'deadly dull' daily routine was varied, the Commissioner said, by 'an occasional whipping or period of silence'. The Board's secretary, Thomas Norris, exercised stringent economy over all aspects of the Orphanage management. Regular baths for the

children had only just been instituted, largely at the behest of Mrs Ada Wells, one of the Board members responsible for the inquiry.<sup>15</sup> The children's bodily neglect was more readily excused than their spiritual shortcomings, for the most persistent charge involved a lack of moral teaching at the Orphanage. This was an almost inevitable reproach to a public institution at a time when churches were staking a claim to orphanage work.

The whippings were obviously thought to be within bounds, since a charge of harsh physical punishment was not substantiated. Nonetheless, crude psychological victimisation had obviously been practised, with children forbidden to talk for as long as a month, dressed in 'grotesque costumes' for outings, and taunted about their backgrounds. The matron was so unwise as to persecute a number of Catholic children and, more especially, to mock their religious observances. This was particularly foolish at a time of strong sectarian feeling, which had already been a factor in the establishment of separate church institutions. The Commissioner saw the matron's long-standing unfitness as further evidence of the Board's culpability;<sup>16</sup> a majority of the Board regarded the matron as a convenient scapegoat and, stubbornly rejecting any share of the blame, dismissed her. A new matron was appointed, her duties more closely defined, and the Board defiantly invited the Government to take over its destitute children if it thought it could do any better.<sup>17</sup>

Otherwise, the Orphanage seems to have continued much as before, the new matron giving a continuity and stability which had previously been lacking. It remained under the United Board and its successor, the North Canterbury Hospital and Charitable Aid Board, whose willingness to maintain the connection owed much to the institution's endowments. These freed it from any large demand on the local rates. Between 1910 and 1915 the number of children in the home trebled to forty-seven, with a noticeable increase in those aged fifteen and over. The Orphanage was extended in 1914, enabling continued control over inmates who had gained employment in towns, 'girls especially'.<sup>18</sup> From 1919 girls were in the majority in this age range, despite the higher number of boys overall. National figures on charitable institutions show a similar pattern in the 1920s.<sup>19</sup> This reflects the closer supervision exercised over young women, in whom the consequences of a moral lapse were thought costly, both for themselves and for the State. Ideally, female inmates of orphanages, reformatories, and industrial schools were to be kept in a state of dependence for as long as possible, their release into domestic service or marriage simply extending their tutelage. More pragmatically, female inmates provided a convenient free

labour force in their spare time, contributing to the cost of their keep. The managers of such institutions had good reason to keep them under control for longer than for boys; charitable aid boards, however, were generally less willing to support children beyond the age of fifteen.

Although it turned more toward foster care, the North Canterbury Board continued its children's home (the preferred, and more accurate, term in use by the 1940s) until very recent times. Many placements in the institution were temporary while families worked through some short-term disruption, or while the mother was in a maternity home (one interesting consequence of the move toward hospital births between the two world wars).<sup>20</sup> But the other boards stayed well clear of orphanage work, having been warned off by the earlier troubles at Waltham and by the active opposition of the Health Department.

The total number of 'orphanages' or children's homes increased markedly from the 1900s, but these were run by the churches, not the State or the charitable aid boards.<sup>21</sup> It is significant that religious groups moved into institutional care at the very time that the Education Department and most charitable aid boards had rejected it as inferior to fostering. Faced with sectarian rivalry and declining church attendances, the churches were anxious to gather up their own, and their new social service departments provided them with the resources to do it. Basically, the churches felt that institutions provided the most certain context for moral and spiritual training of the young; they found it easier to raise money for something as tangible as an institution, and were often left large sums of money on condition that it was spent in exactly this way.<sup>22</sup> They could also afford to be more selective in their clientele than the Education Department and charitable aid authorities, one member of the North Canterbury Board claiming in 1913 that Christchurch religious organisations 'would not touch' illegitimate children, for example. (By way of contrast, nearly half the children in the North Canterbury Board's care at this time had been born outside wedlock – seven of the twenty-one in the Orphanage, seventeen of the thirty-two boarded out and, even though they were outside the Board's direct control, seventy-six of the 131 children maintained by the Board in government and private industrial schools.<sup>23</sup> Until at least the 1950s institutional care of children remained the preferred approach of church groups. By the 1920s the Child Welfare Branch of the Education Department had a policy of fostering state wards in all but the most exceptional cases. While hospital boards were empowered to establish institutions for the 'reception or relief' of children, these were in practice convalescent hospitals, children's wards, and the like.

Although there was only one charitable aid orphanage, some children did receive indoor relief in the benevolent institutions. This procedure was not widespread, for it was apparent even in the 1880s that boarding out might be cheaper than institutional care, and there was a feeling that children should be kept apart from the elderly and disabled poor. There were, however, two local authorities with rather more invested in the practice than the others. Despite the Department of Hospitals constantly impressing upon them the impropriety of their arrangements, the Otago Benevolent Trustees continued to take children into the Benevolent Institution until 1893. Children provided a source of cheap and ready labour and, as long as there was space in the Benevolent Institution, it was sometimes easier to admit children who needed temporary care than to seek out foster homes. The Southland Board placed indigent children first in its Bowmont Street Home in Invercargill, and later into Lorne Farm, at Makarewa. Here, the children's proximity to chickens, cows, and a rural lifestyle was supposed to outweigh their proximity to the Board's elderly male inmates. If nothing else, the rural setting made the arrangement more palatable to government departments, and enabled the Southland Board to maintain children at Lorne until the 1920s.

The experience of children in the benevolent asylums was no more agreeable than in orphanages and other institutions geared specifically to their reception. The Otago Benevolent Institution had taken in children since its opening in 1866, and they were actually in a majority there until 1875.<sup>24</sup> The Benevolent Trustees were reluctant to accept children into the Institution, fearing that the availability of places would simply encourage parental irresponsibility. All the same, there were seventy-five children in residence in January 1891, some apparently admitted on a temporary basis while their family situation became more organised, or while a parent served a prison term.<sup>25</sup> Other children were refused admission if of weak intellect, or if their parents' reason for disposing of them seemed unduly frivolous.<sup>26</sup>

Throughout, adult self-interest was well to the fore. Children were seen as economic liabilities while small, but became assets to the family when old enough to work. This was shown in parental requests to substitute a small child for an older sibling in the Institution, and in the tendency for older, stronger children to be 'adopted'. Common enough were requests to the Otago Trustees and to other charitable aid authorities for 'a good, strong girl, able to milk a cow', 'a child of useful years' (and the particularly audacious request of one Carterton farmer to the Wellington Benevolent Trustees for *ten* such sturdy youngsters<sup>27</sup>). To the credit of most charitable aid boards, the more blatant requests

were indignantly refused, but many children must have been committed to the care of taskmasters who were more tactful in framing their request. At the same time, the boards exacted their full share of children's work while they had them in care. But children did not have to be orphans, or destitute, or separated from their parents for their labour to be an exploitable commodity, as school medical inspectors and truancy officers found well into the twentieth century.

The largest group of children discharged from the Otago Benevolent Institution in any one year was the one 'taken out by friends', presumably relatives and acquaintances, whose altruism must also be suspect. Those 'placed at service', the next largest category, at least received some remuneration for their services. As usual for children in care, domestic service loomed with a grim inevitability for the girls, and farm work for boys. To ensure a better product, the Trustees instituted a six-month 'training period' for all children about to be discharged.<sup>28</sup> (Significantly, one argument in favour of foster care was that children reared in an institution had no home training, and that when they left it they were unable to work or were unfit for work, unaware of the requirements of a normal household, and so made very bad servants.<sup>29</sup>) In the meantime, however, the older children saved the Benevolent Trustees some of the cost of domestic labour in the Institution.

For the most part, the children's experience of indoor relief in a benevolent asylum differed little from that of the elderly inmates who were their main associates. There was virtually no attempt to cater for individual needs, little, it seems, in the way of play, variety, love, and affection. Treats such as the annual trip on the Union Steamship Company's steamer came their way, along with the well-meaning entertainments by ladies' groups and Sunday schools traditionally imposed upon the institutionalised of all ages, classes, and interests. An equally doubtful diversion was 'drill' by the local fire chief. One Benevolent Trustee proudly related how the little boys could evacuate the building and have the hose trained upon the window in five minutes flat.<sup>30</sup> Such activities at least provided some form of contact with the outside world, but for the most part the children were isolated, since the Institution had its own teacher. Their most immediate contact was with old people increasingly marked by sickness and debility. Concerned outsiders feared moral, if not physical, contamination of the children. The solution was obvious, but the Trustees hesitated until they were quite certain of the financial savings involved in foster care. The children's interests prevailed, and in 1893 the last nineteen of them were satisfactorily boarded out at a weekly cost

of 5s 6d – 2s a head less than the amount paid to the foster parents of state wards.<sup>31</sup> The Benevolent Trustees could congratulate themselves on having struck a bargain.

The Southland Hospital and Charitable Aid Board continued to admit children to its benevolent institution long after this date. The Southland Board's Bowmont Street Home was opened in Invercargill in 1886 and, as in other centres, children crept into a home which was quite unsuited to their needs, one which was really an old men's home. They remained in residence, despite MacGregor's objections and at least one deputation of local ministers in protest to the Board.<sup>32</sup> There were the usual fears of hardened old lags corrupting innocent youth – the more so since in the Bowmont Street Home boys of under twelve shared a dormitory with elderly men.

The Southland Board responded to criticism by opening a new institution at Lorne Farm, Makarewa. First the fit elderly then the children were transferred, in 1902. The children lived in a separate wing from the adults, and the rural setting was thought sufficiently advantageous to win official approval. Reports from the Hospitals Department commended the new institution, noting with approval the ninety-five acre farm, dairy, and cultivations. In 1905 there were twenty-two old men and forty-six children in residence, and a staff comprising master and matron, housemaid, ploughman, and sewing mistress to instruct the girls. As well as working on the farm, the children attended the local school, and were described as being healthy, happy, and encouraged in their 'particular avocations'.<sup>33</sup>

These were the reports of visitors impressed by signs of neatness and order. We may doubt that the institution made especially enlightened concessions to children's individuality: a report made by an Education Department official in 1908 complained of younger children herded together under the care of two inmates, and a 'workhouse' atmosphere to the place. The inspector, Miss H. Petrement, confirmed that the children seemed well nourished and clad, but noted they had an 'aimless' way of walking and sitting, and that there was not a plaything in sight.<sup>34</sup>

Reports such as this give only a glimpse of life for children at Lorne. Another report, again from an Education Department official anxious to see the children removed, suggests something of the children's backgrounds. In 1921 there were thirty-one children at the Farm, four girls and twenty-seven boys, twelve of the total illegitimate, eight with only one parent living, and three full orphans. None had two parents living together, though the mothers of some illegitimate children had since married men other

than the child's father. Brief comments on the parents were uncomplimentary:

Mother Amy Loft, address unknown. Her 6th illegitimate child... Mrs Maggie Matthews Mother, Mental Hospital. Father dead, Nephews of notorious McLeod... Miss Florence Nixon, Invercargill. Menace to town, reputed father serving sentence now... John Cantrell... father, drunken waster but good worker. Mother obtained divorce.<sup>35</sup>

Family disruption and ex-nuptial birth appear to have been the main forces pushing children into the Board's care. Both, of course, were associated with poverty, especially for mothers, and in three cases with psychiatric ill-health.

In 1926, the Southland Board bowed to pressure and agreed to foster out the last seven boys in residence at Lorne. Lorne Farm became an infirmary for the elderly, though its internal management probably did not change greatly. In finally separating the young from its elderly inmates, the Southland Board became the last to abandon the nineteenth century concept of a benevolent asylum, catering for a range of the 'helpless poor'. The thrust of institutional care in the twentieth century was for ever more specialised institutions, differentiated by inmates' physical capacity, age, and gender.

For children, however, non-institutional care was the ideal. By 1900 the superiority of foster care was part of child welfare orthodoxy and, in this, as in so many aspects of child welfare, New Zealand was following overseas developments. Although introduced earlier in Britain, foster care, or 'boarding out', was implemented more widely and more successfully in Australia from the 1860s. Australia's experience showed that children from reformatories and industrial schools, as well as pauper children, could be successfully fostered.<sup>36</sup> After visiting Australia and observing the systems in place there, William Habens, New Zealand's Inspector-General of Schools, recommended similar provision here.<sup>37</sup> This was formalised in the 1882 Industrial Schools Act and soon percolated down to the charitable aid boards as acceptable social policy.

Boarding out was promoted as a distinctly advanced practice with all sorts of advantages for the children involved, for their natural parents, and for the fostering families. Habens claimed that:

It is found that the homes in which [children] are placed are improved in their general tone by the influence of the lady-visitors, and that parents who were content to let the State maintain their children in



schools become jealous of the influence of foster-parents, and strive to become worthy to claim the right to care for their own offspring.<sup>38</sup>

In theory, boarding out provided an opportunity to intervene in two sets of families, and to impose ideal standards of child care and cleanliness. Some Australian historians have seen the popularity of foster care as a means of dividing the working class and undermining its disreputable elements.<sup>39</sup> However, in New Zealand it is doubtful whether supervision of foster homes was so extensive as to allow for this degree of direction, at least until the appointment of child welfare officers in the 1920s. The implementation of boarding out policies left a good deal to be desired.

In the hands of the charitable aid boards, foster care could easily degenerate into a supplementary form of outdoor relief. The boards claimed that they were no less anxious than the Education Department to place children in a 'normal' family situation, and that they might as well exercise direct supervision as pay the Education Department to supervise destitute children on their behalf. But the practice also enabled economies to be made. It allowed families on outdoor relief an additional weekly income, though 'pauper placements' were everywhere condemned. The boards also tended to pay less than the Education Department and so, it was claimed, only inferior persons were recruited as foster parents.<sup>40</sup>

Duncan MacGregor and Grace Neill had no doubt that economy was the boards' real reason for maintaining their own boarding out schemes. MacGregor strongly approved of boarding out, but insisted upon respectable rural foster homes and strict supervision. Neither was characteristic of the boards' arrangements. In his 1892 report MacGregor supplied an extreme example of the kind of abuse which could occur, a case with an almost Dickensian ring to it:

At Mr. Stickley's house, Mount Eden, eight children are boarded. Four of these children are paid for by their mothers and friends. The other four are paid for by the Auckland Charitable Aid Board. The surroundings and interior of this house are squalid and dirty in the extreme. The wife, Mrs. Stickley, tried to excuse the confusion by saying that they were clearing-up and were caught at their worst; but it was evident that the normal condition of the place was filthy beyond measure. It was only by persisting in seeing everything for myself that I found my way into a side room, where two girls - Mabel and Alice Edgcombe, aged respectfully [sic] ten and seven years - slept. The bed occupied by these two children was unspeakably filthy. The bedding was very scanty, and so filthy as to be unfit for a dog-kennel. The mattresses were wet and rotting, and clearly had not been attended to in any way for a very long time . . . After completing my investigation at Mr. Stickley's house, I resolved to see the two children, who

were at school. I called out the two girls, whom I found fairly clean in their dress at first sight; but, on closer examination, I found them very insufficiently clad for this cold weather, and the boots worn by the older one were completely useless. The soles were entirely gone, and the child would have been better bare-footed. The most distressing thing of all, however, was to hear these children, in reply to my questions about their bed, say, 'We have a nice, clean, warm bed.' When I told them that I had just seen their bed, and tried to find out why they told me what was not true, they looked at me and were evidently too terrified to say a word more. All I could discover was that sometimes they were beaten by a big boy named 'Cecil,' with a stick. The girls have a pinched look, and are very thin. I believe they are not sufficiently fed.<sup>41</sup>

One can sympathise with Mabel and Alice Edgcombe, torn between their dread of 'Cecil' with the big stick and MacGregor's awesome presence. Their home was certainly a far cry from the wholesome rural influences which were supposed to dissociate children from the pauper taint. But it appears that many foster parents, like the appropriately named Stickleys, thought it only worthwhile to take in large numbers of children. In 1905 a visit by the chairman of the Ashburton and North Canterbury Board to children boarded out in and around Christchurch confirmed that this was the case there. More seriously, he discovered that many foster homes were not even chosen by his Board. Parents, many of them single mothers, placed their children in foster homes, promising to pay maintenance. Eventually, they absconded or otherwise defaulted, and the person in charge of the home appealed to the Board as a more reliable paymaster. Without any intention on its part, the Board had become responsible for a number of children it could not even shift to a more suitable home without obtaining legal guardianship. Where children under four were involved, such foster homes needed to be licensed under the 1896 Infant Life Protection Act. In the chairman's view, this made very little difference to the quality of care. Many of the 'baby farmers' (as he called them) took in not only the maximum number of infants permitted by their licence, but other children as well. As a result of this report, the Ashburton and North Canterbury Board resolved to readvertise for private foster homes and attempt a more judicious selection.<sup>42</sup> There is no indication that major changes resulted - innovations in the area of child care were not to be the prerogative of charitable aid boards anxious to keep down the rates.

It is difficult to gauge how many children were boarded out by charitable aid authorities, since many capitalised on the official endorsement of foster care, returning as 'boarded out' children who were actually maintained in private institutions. In some

instances, children maintained on outdoor relief with parents and relatives were also returned as 'boarded out' with their families.<sup>43</sup> Despite these practices, in the 1890s only the Auckland, North and South Canterbury Boards, and the Wellington Benevolent Trustees claimed to have any more than forty children boarded out in any one year.<sup>44</sup> A 1919 return suggests that only slightly more than one-third of all hospital and charitable aid boards had any children 'boarded out', and many of these were actually children supported in church homes. It appears, however, that by the First World War charitable aid boards had realised their limitations, were withdrawing from child care, and instead handing destitute children over to the Education Department. The number of children maintained by the boards in state industrial schools almost doubled between 1908 and 1919 (see Table 6).

As we have seen, the charitable aid boards did not run their boarding-out schemes because they had any strong commitment to child care. The 1885 Hospitals and Charitable Institutions Act had made them financially responsible for destitute children, even those under the Education Department's direct supervision, and the 1886 amending Act made this responsibility retrospective. As long as this liability existed, there was an incentive for the boards to keep children under their own control, and to manage them more cheaply than the Education Department.

From the boards' point of view, the real trick was to ensure that children were committed to industrial schools as 'neglected' rather than 'destitute' (an abandoned child could theoretically be both). In the 1890s the Canterbury Board's secretary, Thomas Norris, regularly attended the Christchurch Magistrates' Court to ensure that children were committed under those sections of the Industrial Schools Act which made the State liable. Nor was he beyond more direct intervention in his Board's interest. On at least one occasion he instructed Miss Frances Torlesse, an Anglican social worker 'Re girl —':

It will be well to endeavour to arrange so that the girl may be left in the street in order that a constable may take her to the Resident Magistrate to apply for a committal to Burnham [the local state industrial school]. . . . She has no home: it is not shown that the father is unable to support her: & therefore the Colony as a whole may as well bear the cost of her maintenance in preference to the local ratepayers having to do so.<sup>45</sup>

Other boards had an arrangement with the local police to notify them when a child was likely to be committed as destitute, so that they might hastily deny liability.

**Table 6 Children Maintained in Industrial Schools by Charitable Aid Authorities and Amounts Received by the Education Department from Boards**

Year	Amount paid £	Number of children	Number of children maintained by boards in private industrial schools <sup>3</sup>
1908	8 376	542	152
1909	8 613	596	132
1910	9 337 <sup>1</sup>	678	98
1911	10 681	713	106
1912-13 <sup>2</sup>	10 677	766	117
1913-14	11 290	759	138
1914-15	11 383	769	164
1915-16	12 810	855	167
1916-17	13 383	836	169
1917-18	10 897	954	141
1918-19	11 972	1009	134

Source: *AJHR*, E-4, 1909-1919

1. Adjusted from 1912 Annual Report.
2. Prior to this, amount is based on the calendar year.
3. Amount paid direct to managers: not able to be ascertained.

Once a child was placed in an industrial school or boarded out by the State, the charitable aid board supporting that child was likely to quibble about the cost of support and to criticise the Education Department's efforts on the child's behalf. The boards and the Department wasted large amounts of energy in such disputes, at a time when public opinion increasingly favoured total state control over destitute children. Thomas Valentine, the Inspector-General of Hospitals, endorsed the Education Department's role in caring for destitute children; the Education Department was willing to assume total responsibility for them.<sup>46</sup> The sticking point was finance. In 1911 the Director-General of Education, George Hogben, had warned that removing the boards' liability would encourage them to throw an increasing burden on the State. He suggested that the boards might even break up homes in order to place the children in state institutions, thereby shifting the burden of children's support away from the ratepayer.<sup>47</sup> However, by the end of the First World War it was clear to the Education Department that the time and effort required to collect payment from local boards was out of all proportion to the amount received, especially since half had already come from state subsidies. Although the number of destitute children maintained

by the boards in industrial schools nearly doubled between 1908 and 1919, the amount paid by the boards increased only slightly, and by 1917 had actually started to decline (see Table 6). The 1920 Hospitals and Charitable Institutions Amendment Act (No.2) repealed the boards' financial liability for indigent children in the State's care, the sole charge to be in future on the Consolidated Fund.

As predicted, the first reaction of some of the larger boards was to turn children under their direct care into state wards. Even children in institutions such as Lorne Farm suddenly became 'uncontrollable' and 'without direct means of support', though it was difficult to see how they could be either in an institution run by a charitable aid board.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, the Otago Hospital Board decided in 1921 to withdraw all maintenance from children they supported in private and church orphanages, with the aim of forcing their committal through the courts and throwing liability onto the State.<sup>49</sup> After 1920, most children requiring long-term care apart from their parents came under state supervision and support or went into church homes: the charitable aid boards restricted their attention to certain short-term cases of need, and to children receiving outdoor relief with their families.

Initially, children were regarded as just another element among the 'helpless poor'. There was a modicum of ranking among them, innocent orphans being regarded with more sentiment and sympathy than abandoned children or 'street urchins' with criminal proclivities. Provision for destitute children was hesitant, the authorities ever fearful of encouraging parental irresponsibility. By the 1880s, however, there were signs of a growing emphasis on the value of child-life to the State, a readiness to regard even criminal children as reformable, and a willingness to intervene in the family to 'rescue' children of doubtful parentage.<sup>50</sup> A whole raft of legislative, organisational, and institutional activity was directed at children from the 1890s. The Infant Life Protection Acts and regulations governing the early registration of births affected illegitimate and unwanted children most directly, but these were paralleled by tighter restrictions on children's employment, more stringent school attendance regulations, the raising of the age of consent, reorganisation in the industrial schools, and the establishment in 1912 of a school medical service.<sup>51</sup> There was also a growth in the number of orphanages and voluntary societies concerned with the physical and social wellbeing of children, with the Society for the Protection of Women and Children (founded 1893), the Canterbury Children's Aid Society (1897), and Plunket (1907) among the most vocal.

The Education Department, with its expanding range of specialised staff, played the larger role in these developments. By 1918 the Department employed juvenile probation officers, attendance officers, district agents under the Infants Acts, visiting nurses, and the personnel of the special and industrial schools branches. Many of these men and women had some mandate to investigate private homes and worked closely with schools and voluntary workers. From 1925 the appointment of Child Welfare officers provided a core of professional social workers with a well defined career structure to oversee the welfare of children. Child care came to be seen as a specialised activity, within the family itself, where the mother was supposed to need training and guidance in the rearing of future citizens, and within those agencies which had assumed the role of surrogate parent.

The hospital and charitable aid boards had neither this pool of expertise nor the will to compete in these developments, and their responsibility for destitute children was gradually eroded. From 1920 it was clear that any negotiation of responsibility for children would involve not the agencies of the State and the hospital boards, but the State and voluntary or religious groups. (The fact that there *was* such negotiation says much for the sentimental appeal of child-life – at the time there were few groups competing to provide for deserted wives or bedridden old men.) The advancement of state regulation and inspection proved overwhelming in the end, though the idea died hard that children's best interest was served by the personal influence of godly people.

The hospital and charitable aid boards were geared to a diffuse and minimal response to social problems and retained their 'Poor-Law' taint well into the twentieth century. Children were too precious to be handicapped by an association with pauperism which, Inspector-General Valentine claimed, was 'known to be infectious'.<sup>52</sup> The boards' expanding medical role made them even more inappropriate custodians for the young and healthy. The condition of the elderly could be translated into medical terms. So, on a more temporary basis, could that of unmarried mothers. The boards still concerned themselves with sick children, and from the 1900s were likely to build separate children's wards in which to do this. But otherwise, children's care and supervision was to be the responsibility of the Education Department, whose special function was, in Valentine's overly optimistic words, 'the rearing and educating of children amidst the best environments'.<sup>53</sup>

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## Abbreviations:

AJHR *Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives*

CW *Child Welfare Division, Education Department Archives*

H *Health Department Archives*

IA *Department of Internal Affairs Archives*

Le *Legislative Department Archives*

NZH *New Zealand Herald*

NZJH *New Zealand Journal of History*

NZPD *New Zealand Parliamentary Debates*

ODT *Otago Daily Times*

SS *Social Security Department Archives*

## INTRODUCTION (pages 1-9)

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(pages 163-180)

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### 3. PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS

#### a) Interviews

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 Mrs Joyce Rowell, Wellington, 24 January 1980  
 Mr S. Stewart, Palmerston North, 20 May 1977  
 Miss A. Tocker, Lower Hutt, 7 September 1979

#### b) Correspondence

- John A. Lee, Auckland, 15, 30 November 1979  
 Miss Margaret Sutch, Wellington, 2 January 1980

In author's possession are letters from eleven other correspondents who were involved in the receipt or distribution of charitable aid, mainly in the 1930s. These people were assured of confidentiality.