

All the children in the inner areas are underprivileged in respect of environment. Beyond that no generalisation is possible.

The overwhelming majority of parents in these areas are good, hard-working people, who do their utmost for their families. There is a small percentage of problem or slum-minded parents and between the two extremes are my borderline cases,

The "problem" adults pass on to their children the same kind of heritage as they themselves received. Some are feeble-minded and mentally retarded.

Many live in houses possessing only one tap which is probably located over a gully trap in the back yard. Bathing facilities are limited to a dish or a tub. There is often no means of heating water, no adequate means of washing or drying clothes and no privacy. Overcrowding is the general rule. Feeding habits are often equally unsatisfactory - a diet of bread, saveloys, fish and chips and cake is common,

Children from such homes never acquire the habits of washing daily and cleaning their teeth. Clean clothes, well-cooked meals and individual beds are unknown,

At an age when the "home" and "backyard" offer insufficient scope for their energies, they are forced to play in the streets, without proper facilities or the necessary leadership. Apart from this they are forced to witness brawls and drunken scenes and to listen to men and women shouting abusive and obscene remarks,

Their whole lives are sordid and spoiled. We know children of 12 or 13 who look and act like little old women, often caring for the younger children when they should be playing with dolls. It is small wonder that with such a background, they fail to become useful citizens.

Typical of many families of this kind is the B-family. Two adults with six children, live in an utter slum of three rooms. The house is perpetually damp, and there is no electric light, gas or bathroom. Two boys and a girl sleep together in a three-quarter bed while two older girls, aged thirteen and twelve, share a couch. One tap serves for all purposes. Clothes for the children are usually provided by social agencies. They are never washed or mended.

The whole family is below average mentally, one child of 8 being classed by a clinic as "untestable". A place in a special school was found for this child

but his mother refused to let him go. It is very doubtful if he will ever earn his own living.

While the child's experience on the physical side is harmful enough, the emotional damage is often irreparable.

The basic need of all children, a sense of security, is often lacking from birth. Apart from the mental stress set up by improper feeding and insufficient warmth, the affectionate, calm and unemotional atmosphere required for a child's development are absent. Constant nagging and abuse if, not by the parent then by a "landlord" or "landlady" or by other tenants are not unusual, The result is a neurotic and terrified child.

Wrong sets of values are presented to the children at all ages. The money available is sometimes adequate, but it is misspent. Children are often taken the rounds of social agencies and see clothes and foodstuffs being obtained for nothing, They never learn the pride that comes from independence, private ownership and the care of one's own things, nor are they ever instructed in the social graces, They grow up uncouth and unsure of themselves in every way. By the time they reach school age they have gained none of the confidence which they need in order to make progress in their new life, As time goes on they feel more and more incompetent and inferior.

Some become delinquents and later on petty thieves. One gaol sentence follows another, till the offenders can only be regarded as a financial liability to the state when in prison or a menace to society when at large.

Others only too often become those aimless individuals known to all social agencies who at first never keep a job and later on never get a job to keep, They always have a story of a "job to go to but never a record of success at any previous job, Some marry girls of their own type and run their homes, spend their money, and bring up their children in the same way as their parents before them,

There can be no question of attributing blame at any point in this cycle. It is futile to expect change where no change is possible. Only society is to blame for not ensuring that such children get adequate training.

Today, any child whose living conditions are below a certain standard in the eyes of the police or health authorities may be charged as a neglected child. If the charge is proved the child may be taken from its former home and placed in the care of the Child Welfare Dept,

The difficulty with this procedure is to fix a minimum standard of living. It would be impossible to do so in regard to diet but it could be done in regard to the number of persons living in one room and the number sleeping in one bed.

Many children in inner areas are infested with bugs and head-lice. With the number of sub-standard houses now in existence, this problem is not easily controlled, but it should be regarded seriously by the Public Health and Education Department authorities.

If such things as impetigo, scabies and pediculosis were made notifiable by regulation, the necessary action to fumigate premises and clean infested persons could be undertaken by municipal or State health authorities. Certainly some time would elapse before such pests were controlled but eventually it could be done.

At the present time, education, health, delinquency, and the conditions under which children live are all separate responsibilities while the provision of recreation is left to voluntary organizations. As one Melbourne Psychiatrist said; The child is chopped up into pieces. More good would be achieved if each child's needs were supervised by one person." Better results would be achieved if one official body was in close touch with all families in each district, treating all the needs of children as one problem and acting and directing where advisable. Necessary attention would also be given much earlier, than it is now,

EDUCATION

During the past twenty years there has been a vast change in our attitude to children, As with progress in other fields, the change started with the better educated groups in the community, whose children were the first to benefit by greater understanding and tolerance.

In a somewhat lesser degree the new attitude can be found in official quarters where it is probably most noticeable in the treatment of juvenile delinquents. The Education Department, however, is at present in the throes of conflict between the old and the new approach. Many headmasters, teachers and officials are well acquainted with modern child psychology and educational methods. What is possibly more important, they are emotionally stable and well adjusted themselves. There seems little doubt that such teachers have a greater understanding of children.

Other teachers, however, are so lacking in understanding that their pupils do not benefit from many reforms made by the authorities.

As examples of this the following cases may be cited:

Last winter, as usual, free milk was issued to schools. One class of six or seven year-olds were given theirs at the morning play break; It was inevitable that they would want to go to the lavatory sometime later. As the teacher refused to allow them out except one at a time, many suffered considerable discomfort and one or two had "accidents".

The result was that several children refused the milk offered, although they liked it,

On another occasion books were taken home on Fridays at lunchtime, since they were not needed during the afternoon. This went on for eight months with the teacher's knowledge.

For some reason a change was made one Friday, and many children who did not have their books were told to go home and get them.

At least one girl lived over a mile from the school, As the afternoon finished at 3-30 the teacher's request was obviously absurd and her mother did not let her return, yet this did not prevent the girl from suffering a good deal of anxiety as to the results on Monday morning.

Such incidents are not rare in our state Schools today and show that some teachers may do a great deal of damage, even while achieving personal success.

Great improvements in school buildings, as well as other changes, are planned. At present, however, the schools in inner areas compare badly with the newer schools elsewhere. The buildings are old and unhygienic, and they sadly lack adequate playgrounds and equipment.

Parents' Committees in many areas do an excellent job in raising money for cinematograph and other equipment, the Education Department adding £1 for £1 to the Committees' money. This is unfair to inner area schools where Committees can only raise a few pounds a year. Once again, the inner area is underprivileged" by comparison, It is thus left to outside agencies to provide amenities that are "essentials" by modern standards.

One state School in an inner area has approximately 500 pupils. Of the 500, 60 are in special opportunity grades for children within **I.Q.** of between 71 and 85' - the so-called moron group. And even leaving the two opportunity grades out, the school's mental average is still below that of any outer area school. It is estimated that some 40% of the children will not get beyond the 6th grade, while a number will not reach that grade. Many of these children require special attention and training to have even a reasonable chance of succeeding in later years.

Meanwhile the normal children at inner area schools (and there are hundreds of them) suffer not only from inadequate facilities, but also from constant association with their subnormal contemporaries.

Pediculosis and scabies are not uncommon, With the desks for two children now in use, a clean child has little chance of escape if placed next to an infested child. Children learn quickly in the inner areas and I have heard several children complain of the state of the boy or girl who sits next to them at school.

A headteacher of a State School has expressed the following views on school needs: -

AN APPROXIMATION TO THE IDEAL SCHOOL

School should be a part of modern life, pointing the way to full, wholesome living, teaching the skills, and tools on which earning a living depends and cultivating those attitudes which are conducive to happy living with others.

Pupils. Well clothed, well fed and clean. Eager and adventurous for the full harmonious life at present achieved by only a few.

Staff. Graduates well qualified and trained, sufficient in numbers for grades of reasonable size (say 30) with a supply of spare teachers to fill gaps caused by illness. " staff with a measure of training in Social work. A school nurse calling regularly to treat minor ailments, and to visit homes which are poor or broken, or where pupils are receiving unwise treatment. Matron to supervise hot mid-day meal and supply of milk, and care for children who are off color.

Moral Training. Continuous and touching all aspects of life.

Curriculum. Abandonment of activities not infringing on present day life (grammar and unnecessary arithmetic mainly). Extension of studies catering for life and leisure - music, art, literature, geography, history, etc.

Buildings. Airy, well-lit, sound-proofed corridors and Hall floor, Central Heating, easily adjusted windows, outside blinds on the sunny side.

Ample floor space for activities, single adjustable desks or tables and chairs!) Much "blackboard" of proper colour and chalk of most easily seen shades (these are not black and white).

Pictures, pot plants and blooms.

Main doors opening outwards.

One storey (for preference),

Hall for assemblies and celebrations,

Teachers' rooms and amenities,

Pupils' rest room.

Provision for cooking and sitting down to lunches.

Library room.

Work room, benches and tools.

Art room.

Artificial lighting (indirect) for dull days,

Interior decoration in tasteful light and with
easily cleaned surfaces.

Cleaning appliances which do not raise dust.

Non-bang doors.

Caretaker for cleaning, grounds, garden"and simple
maintenance (mending desks etc.)

Heat and Power,

Grounds. Ample up to 10 acres.

Gardens, trees, seats, incinerator, playing fields and yard; Kit such as swing, giant stride, bars, slide and sand pit.

Asphalt at points of most traffic.

Situation. Set in parkland and facing a quiet street - dead end if possible.

While ideal schools as outlined above may take years to build and staff, many of the prevailing evils of inner-area schools could be rectified in a short time.. The essential requirement of young children is an atmosphere which will build up a sense of security and lessen anxiety, the school becoming in effect a counter-influence to the local environment. Formal education is useless unless the child is emotionally stable and is fitted to participate in the broader activities of adult life. This is more than a question of bricks and mortar - it is a question of organized undertaking by entire school staffs.

The provision of a nurse or matron, with facilities for cleansing children, could achieve a great deal, Followup work by a social worker would be equally valuable.

RECREATION

It is possible that the hours spent by a child in various forms of recreation are most important in developing character than those spent in school.

Given love in the home and the necessary sense of security young children require little in the way of organized recreation. But they do require a fair amount of quiet play space, preferably their own garden, as well as their own toys, dolls, tricycles and other articles that are so important in childhood. Under such conditions little supervision is necessary. By making up their own games the children develop initiative. A simple thing such as a rope hanging from the branch of a tree will occupy them intermittently over a long period. A tea-party under a tree will while away a warm afternoon.

With children in slum areas or overcrowded apartment houses the picture is very different, Even with other factors equal, and they rarely are, thousands have nowhere to play but the streets. And even the streets are not comparable with those of outer areas. Very rarely are there trees, nature strips or large front gardens. Nor must it not be forgotten that many inner area homes know nothing of the minor social life of other areas. Events like the frequent reception of visitors play an important, if unnoticed, part in children's training. Their ease of meeting and conversing with strangers has much to do with successful adjustment during adolescence.

Through song and fable the home has been glorified, yet society has shut its eyes to the brutal fact that many children have no home in the real sense of the word. They never know a sense of security or freedom from fear and discomfort, They never live in the relaxed mental state that denotes absence of tension, nor can they ever be sure of the moods and reactions of their parents and others with whom they are in daily contact.

Healthy recreation is unknown, Its place is taken by easy forms of escape - the pictures and the partisanship of league football.

In my opinion, these are not in themselves bad. "Gangster" and "horror" films certainly have an adverse effect on some children, but only when the child is already neurotic. The mind of a mentally healthy child is as resilient as a healthy body. It can stand a good deal of stress without damage.

This is not a defence of commercial films or poor literature. Too much of the material seen or read by children is bad from many points of view. But if such things were the only bad influences that children were subjected to little

harm would result. The main danger from the films lies in the fact that for many children they form the main and sometimes the only form of recreation. Whereas participation in sport and social activities encourages an attitude of taking part in, the wider aspects of daily life, the commercial entertainments tend to have the opposite effects, They may serve a useful purpose as relaxation but are useless in the training of children, Probab~ the majority of children in outer suburbs are encouraged to adopt some constructive form of sport or other activity, Generally speaking, no such encouragement comes from the homes in the inner areas.

Nor have the attempts made by several excellent organisations to deal with the problem been successful on a large scale. There are 34 Girl Guides in Fitzroy out of a population of over 32,000 - less than half the membership, proportionately, for many other suburbs. Certainly the Girl Guides' Association has great difficulty in finding leaders, but it is suspected that the main reason for the low membership is the fact that the children's background has not prepared them for such activities and that encouragement from parents is lacking.

The same seems to apply to the Scouts and to boys of Clubs. Their membership is recruited largely from children from the better organised homes.

Some years ago enquiries revealed that many children had visited no other beach than Port Melbourne, had never been to the country and had never spent a night away from home, The Drotherhood of S.Laurence and other organizations have done much to rectify this but to give these children proper holidays under ideal conditions requires permanent camps and much financial assistance. Such camps are not merely "holidays but a vital social experience that the children need to improve their social development. As pointed out previously, many children know little or nothing of normal hygiene, good diet or clean individual beds. Properly run camps may achieve a great deal by giving the children new ideas and new standards,

Again it would appear that the leastprivileged children remain in that category. While such could be done by an organization with sufficient staff and money, the real answer lies first~ in the provision of good housing and secondly in seeing that all children are encouraged to participate actively in suitable forms of recreation.

EMPLOYMENT - -

As a general rule, the employment of most inner area children shows the same lack of opportunity as their home life district environment and education.

Some firms will employ juveniles with a callous disregard for their present or future welfare. They act as if their responsibility ended with the payment of wages. Legally, this attitude is correct, Yet many employers both large and small realize that it is to their own interest, as well as that of the community, to turn raw juvenile employees into reliable and satisfied staff members.

The appeal of high wages to juniors is often irresistible, and it is not uncommon for a boy of sixteen to earn up to £7/-/- a week at unskilled repetition work or in a noxious trade, Only in rare instances do these boys save for any purpose and their money is seldom spent wisely. They receive no training, and their employment does little to compensate them for their handicaps or to help them to become mature adults,

Enquiries from the Employment Officers of three large and reputable firms threw some light on this problem. In each of the three firms excellent amenities were provided - an Employees' Welfare Committee was in operation, and social and sporting activities were organised and well attended, Two of the firms sent juniors to night-school and paid their fees, Two ran a Superannuation Scheme and one firm, employing many women workers, a scheme by which each girl received a dowry on marriage. Not one of these firms was short of staff nor did they advertise for staff. THO stated that they had sufficient applications from persons recommended by other employees.

In each case I described the underprivileged, inner-area child and got the reply: "We do not employ that type". One employment officer added that it was not a question of snobbery but of efficiency, They used the best human material they could find.

To the question "How many of your junior employees come from what may be called Slum Areas?" the replies were significant. One officer gave a prompt and unqualified answer "None" The other two officers made a check. One company had none, and the other, one girl from Fitzroy, This, he explained, was a special case as the girl had been sent by a Welfare Officer.

One Company, besides having other juvenile labor, had 60 apprentices, A complete check showed that none of these lived in an inner area,

There is no doubt that amenities educational facilities and good treatment generally by the better firms are important factors in the development of juniors. Yet all inquiries indicate that the under-privileged children are seldom able to obtain employment with such companies. This is not the fault of the firms, firstly because each of them must inevitably choose the best material available, and secondly, because children of this type rarely apply to such firms for employment.

Several factors appear to operate in this situation. In the first place¹ the children concerned have not the confidence to apply to such companies for a job. Totally unused to meeting people, they are overawed by offices and by people so different from those they meet in their normal environment, Secondly this group tends to seek employment in their own locality, Sometime ago I suggested a possible place of employment to a boy of 16 and was told that it was "too far". The distance involved was three miles, with a tram connecting at each end.

Finally the better firms including some factories, insist on certain educational qualifications on employment. The underprivileged children simply do not reach the standard required.

The proposed law preventing the employment of any boy or girl under the age of fifteen is long overdue. It is to be regretted that the age limit is not sixteen years.

Some children are sufficiently developed at the age of fourteen to fit into a job, yet they are the exception rather than the rule.

It must be recognised that a great number of children have neither the ability to gain from a higher education nor the wish to do so, The additional year at school should be used not in academic work but in handcraft, social studies, sport and social activities - anything, in fact that would make it easier for them to enter the difficult world that lies before them. At this stage they should be no longer treated as school-children but taught to meet people on a basis of mutual respect. During that period good teachers could effect a great change in many of the children, a change that could mean that industry would be employing people who were emotionally adolescents instead of children - a vital difference,

In relation to the employment of children we must also consider the employment of school-boys for the delivery and street sale of newspapers.

Many boys are engaged in this work both in the morning and evening, thus working 4 or 5 hours a day in addition to their school duties. It will be seen that a boy working 5 hours a day for six days a week may thus work 10 hours a week when adults work only 40 hours. The work is just as strenuous as many adult tasks and should be prohibited. The boys' places could readily be taken by older persons who are unable to work in the ordinary way.

Certainly much responsibility for the welfare of adolescents rests on employers and on all adults whose work brings them into contact with junior employees, Many large companies recognise this responsibility and look after their staffs very well, Young people often owe a great deal to the understanding of older men and women with whom they work. Unfortunately this cannot be said for all companies and all adult workers.

Each individual has a level at which he will function most satisfactorily. The wise employer will try and select men with a view to the task involved, If the firm is a large one a task may often be selected to suit the individual.

Encouragement to improve should follow demonstration of ability and inclination, Every youth does not possess the necessary intelligence and drive to learn a trade or profession. To force a boy or girl into such channels if they lack the ability required is dangerous, for they not only fail but are left with a strong sense of humiliation as a result,

Many employees, on the other hand, may fail if their task is not equal to their ability. Some boredom and a sense of futility are almost inevitable in these circumstances,

Employers should realise that the background of many children has not prepared them for the difficulties they often encounter in an adult world. Many so-called delinquents have told me that they have left jobs because of a quarrel with a person with whom they worked. They feel inferior and uncomfortable - and escape, Not only have they lost a job, which is easily obtained at present but may not always be so, but they are perpetuating a childish emotional pattern which may do them lifelong harm.

It is a safe 'general rule that-a youth should be encouraged to persist with anything that he takes up. This applies not only to employment, but also to sporting and youth club activities and hobbies. .Constant changing of jobs is a danger sign: the longer a position is held the better the chances of future success, For these reasons, as well as in their own interests, employers should see that each

juvenile is in the charge of a suitable person, and secondly, should enquire into the reason for a junior's resignation and, if possible, prevent **it**.

A sympathetic foreman or personnel officer can iron out many difficulties of junior employees if they are encouraged to talk, Casual conversation during working hours and meal breaks will often uncover a situation in which a junior could be helped,

Social and sporting activities organized by large firms have many advantages from the point of view of young workers. As stated earlier, they have often commenced employment without that background that makes for easy social contacts. At their place of employment they have become familiar with people with whom they have something in common. Social activities with the same people hold no terrors for them; whereas to go to a strange place with strange faces is beyond them, The same applies when classes, lectures or film nights are held.

In many factories S.P. Bookmakers carry on almost openly, They do not hesitate to accept bets from juveniles, This also occurs in large offices and should certainly be prohibited, I have had several cases of young men whose gambling at their place of employment involved them in serious financial trouble,

It is evident that the responsibility for juniors does not all fall on the employer, Youth is an age of hero-worship, For a boy of 15 to hear an older man glamorizing a dubious adventure is not good. The difficulties of youth, particularly the underprivileged youth with whom this report is concerned, are the responsibility of every adult in contact with juniors, who are certain to be influenced by his attitude, language and example.

I would like to see an appeal on these lines sent to every factory and workplace. The response, I am sure, would justify the expense many times over,

DELINQUENCY

Most of the Children appearing before the Courts for delinquency may be classified into two groups. In the case of the larger group, the acts that lead to their appearance in court may be regarded as symptoms of behaviour problems that have their roots in insecurity. The other group, comprising a very small minority, show criminal tendencies and some determination to continue in the way they have chosen. The basic causes, of their behaviour may be the same as with the former group but the effects have gone deeper. Some of them may be near psychotics, in which case only psychiatric care could possibly help them. In some cases thorough understanding of the causes of delinquency is essential if the child is to be helped.

While the attitude of Children's Court Officers is excellent, it is not uncommon for cases to be dealt with by Honorary J.P.'s who are most unsuitable for the work. Several magistrates are over 80 years of age and suffering from deafness, and others of both sexes are over 70. They are not trained in law and are apt to convict a child without understanding the full details of the case and without hearing an adequate plea for the defence. Unless the probation officer assigned to the case has made a thorough investigation and is active in court, a miscarriage of justice can easily occur.

Some honorary justices fail to consider the background of the delinquents and are over inclined to intimidation. Often the young offenders have lived in an environment of intimidation all their lives. It did not prevent delinquency, nor will delinquency be cured by these means.

While it may be necessary to warn children at times, it is futile to think that any benefit will come from threats. In most cases the child is already suffering from anxiety. More good would result from a talk to both the child and the parents by a competent stipendiary magistrate or a psychologist attached to the Court.

The Children's Court has the power to inflict fines, place a child on probation, commit to a reformatory or Children's Welfare Department, or order a psychological investigation at the Department's clinic.

In the matter of fines, if a boy or girl is working and the fine paid from pocket money, the action of the court may often be regarded as a fair punishment brought on by the youth's own behaviour. Fines, however, may only be regarded as a punishment and this is not the main object of the Children's Court.

The probation system depends on the quality of the probation officers and is limited by their inability to effect the complete change of environment so often required. Many delinquents really require constant association with emotionally stable people. When this does not exist in the home, and it seldom does exist in these cases, little can be done.

Committal to institutions may in a few cases mean an environmental change for the better. More often, however, such action may be regarded more as a means of "protecting society" and as a punishment. To send a boy or girl to a "reformatory", which so far from reforming usually turns them into criminals, is such a drastic step that it should only be taken as a last resource. Before this a complete investigation by competent psychiatrists should be carried out and their recommendations put into practice.

An adult being sent to gaol for the first time may often get a sentence of three months or less. A lad of seventeen sent to reformatory is seldom; if ever, kept for less than twelve months, and often for three years. Such a period out of an adolescents life constitutes an enormous gap at possibly the most important stage of his development, and the result is failure to make an adequate social adjustment. Subsequent resentment towards society is inevitable,

Many institutions do their best with limited resources and staff, but few have the personnel to provide for the emotional needs of their wards. Till this is rectified the placing of any child in a home constitutes a risk which must be considered carefully along with the delinquent's chances of development in his old surroundings. It is doubtful if our reformatories have ever achieved any useful purpose beyond the temporary protection of society from maladjusted adolescents. As a system it is both futile and cruel.

The work of the court would be facilitated by the setting-up of modern hostels under a trained staff. Such hostels would aim at providing a happy and emotionally-stable environment to youths whose main problem has been the lack of such an atmosphere. As each boy would pay board the annual maintenance cost would

In my opinion some children are charged in the Courts on inadequate grounds or for trivial offences that could be easily settled out of Court. One such case involved an 11 year old boy who had not previously been in trouble and who had a good school record. He had been sent to a woodyard with 1/9 to purchase half a cwt. of wood. Because the yard was in the charge of a ten year old boy whom he knew, he did not pay for the wood. Had the yard been attended by a responsible person the offence would not have occurred. The boy was reprimanded and warned that if he appeared before the court again he would be sent away. Not only do I consider that he should never have appeared in court, but also that the throat was out of all proportion to the offence and would only increase anxiety in the boy who was already unfortunate in his home environment.

It would appear that more good would result if a special officer were appointed to deal with such offences out of court. It is not a question of condoning them, but of dealing with them on the most effective level.

It is still impossible for a boy in one court to be treated with tact and understanding while another boy on a similar charge is handled in a harsh manner, though fortunately most of the courts are presided over by the Children's Court Stipendiary Magistrate. The appointment of a Magistrate should be made with regard only to suitability for the job and applications open to persons outside the Department.

Public-service seniority should not be considered in an appointment of this kind.

Some cases involving two or more offenders are taken to court without sufficient preparation and the part played by each child is not clear. This situation is difficult as nervousness often prevents a child from telling the court the whole story, and only careful and patient questioning will make the facts clear.

In some cases the police have interviewed children at their schools or places of employment.

This procedure may be necessary if the offence has been committed at the school or workplace but otherwise seems unfair to the child. Such interviews should be conducted at the child's home or a police station.

Only by attention to such details will the potential advantages of a special court for children be realised.

Many acts of delinquency occur that are not reported to the authorities, Probably the majority of people who suffer loss or damage to property at the hands of a child do not take the matter to the police. A number to whom I have spoken recognises that adolescence, especially for inner area youth, can be a difficult period that will pass after a year or two. Many good citizens and successful men have found it so, They are not only thankful that that period is passed but also that they were not found out during it.

Irresponsible behaviour during adolescence is not unknown amongst boys of well-off families who attend public Schools and enjoy good facilities for sport and social activities. Lads from inner areas without those advantages must inevitably break the law more frequently and more obviously. Only society can be blamed for such damage as its causes are beyond the control of the youths concerned, Punishment will not prevent or cure behaviour problems due to physical or psychological disturbance during adolescence. Only by directing energy into safer channels can the damage caused by inadequate training be cut to a minimum.

With girl delinquents the same argument is equally valid, though more of the offences are of a sexual nature, Without opportunity for less dangerous activities such offences are inevitable, particularly when the girl's environment has made her familiar with sexual matters almost from infancy.

The greater tolerance shown to young offenders has played a big part in preventing them from becoming criminals, while the idea of a separate court for children represents a great advance in society's approach to the problem of juvenile delinquency. But the full benefit of such a court will not be gained till every person associated with it can see beyond the superficial "crime and punishment" aspect and understand the emotional stresses and aberrations which give rise to delinquent behaviour.

Truancy must be regarded as a form of delinquency, and it is more than a coincidence that this is far more common in the inner areas than in outer suburbs. A Schools' attendance Officer gave the opinion that truancy was largely a matter of environment and was due in a large degree to the attitude of the parents.

It is not uncommon for a boy of thirteen to be employed in a shop or factory. This is not only a deliberate breach of the law by the parents but also reflects on the employer, who has accepted a verbal affirmation of age on the

..part of the boy. The problem could be solved by Head-teachers issuing a discharge certificate, the onus being on employers to see that no boy or girl was employed without possessing such a document. There also seems little doubt that employing boys to deliver newspapers in the mornings and sell them on the streets in the evening plays a big part in raising truancy figures. This type of work also accounts for much fatigue and inattention in inner area schools.

A complete analysis of Department truancy figures in relation to the employment of school-age children would undoubtedly throw much light on this subject, Such an analysis should also show the proportion of truancy in different schools and districts, and the economic status of families involved. Much later delinquency begins as truancy and no effort should be spared by the Education Department and Children's Court authorities to seek out its causes and apply preventive measures,

A good mental and physical heritage, wise parents and a wholesome environment, together with the teaching of sound values and good recreation - only these things are the real answer to juvenile delinquency. While society allows large groups of children to lack them, it will continue. punishment for transgression is futile and the probation system is at the best an attempt to "cure" after the damage is done. Prevention and only prevention can be the final solution,

In discussing the problems of children in Institutions it is again necessary to avoid generalisations. Institutions vary a great deal in the way the children are housed, the amount of individual attention given, the attitude of the staff and so on.

One boys home, run on the cottage system with a House "Mother" and "Father", seems to have made the greatest progress in breaking away from the Orphanage tradition. In this home the boys show greater confidence in themselves and more alertness and independence than is usual in such places. On leaving the home to go to employment they can live in an excellently run hostel in the city.

In many institutions, however, one becomes sharply aware of the "Orphanage" atmosphere and is often left with the impression that the inmates have literally nothing. Not only do they appear to be starved for affection and love, they seem to lack anything on which a feeling of self-confidence can be built.

Among the more fortunate children living with their families several factors are important in developing self-confidence beyond the essential sense of security and love. They are accustomed to meeting many people of both sexes, They learn to go to school and other places on their own and to find their way about generally. They usually know something of other suburbs and the surrounding country and beaches. They have their own possessions and clothes which suit them and which they like. They are respected as individuals and often do not know what it is to accept a servile role, It is accepted by their family as well as by the child that they will do something worthwhile and fit smoothly and easily into an adult world,

Compared with these children the inmates of Institutions have very little. Almost complete segregation of the sexes is common and can only make later social adjustment difficult, Their freedom is often strictly curtailed so that they know little of the world about them. Generally they have no private possessions and clothes are only too often shabby, drab and ill-fitting. Discipline is usually too strict - it is a case of "Yes, Sir", or "No, Sir" every time they are spoken to. This treatment goes under the guise of "politepress". Its real name is servility,

The future of the children is usually vague, They know that they will leave the home and go to work. Beyond that - nothing.

In regard to experience outside the home, most institution children have an occasional trip to the beach or country. Such trips may be regarded as important for the pleasure they give, but are too rare to form a normal part of the childrens lives.

Corporal punishment is still used in some of the homes and from time to time there are rumours that it has been excessive. It is very doubtful if corporal punishment in institutions is a wise procedure. If an officer can administer such punishment at any time, the risk of injustice or excess due to temper is too great. If a boy is reported to a superior and then punished by him some time later, the element of fear enters and the punishment is carried out in cold blood.

In many cases the behaviour giving rise to such punishment may be due to irksome restrictions or to the incompetence of the administration or officers to handle their charges wisely. Many institutions have shown that corporal punishment is unnecessary. Why not the others? If any group of children should be spared this type of punishment it is those who have no normal home life.

Statistics show that 67 percent. of the younger inmates of Pentridge Gaol have spent at least some part of their early life in an institution. Of these convicts, only 20' have had a normal education. Such a proportion indicates that much more attention should be given to childrens homes, attention again involving the fixing of minimum standards of quarters, clothing and education as well as insistence on trained and well-balanced staff members.

When some homes are inspected, every attempt is made to impress the visitor. One cannot help feeling that if the staff were only concerned with the welfare of the children they would themselves point to the needs and inadequacies. Demands for a complete overhaul of the childrens homes should come from the homes themselves.

Most childrens homes are doing an excellent job with the limited finance at their disposal. They should be enabled to set up their own staff training centres to ensure that only properly trained and suitable persons are engaged in the homes.

To do this far greater financial assistance to all childrens homes is essential and this can only be a Government responsibility. In return for subsidies such institution should show good value for money received. to the Department responsible to the Government for this work. On theses homes depends whether many hundreds of children become social

assets or state liabilities. Until radical changes are made the production of human casualties will continue .

THE CHILDREN'S WELFARE DEPARTMENT

The care of certain groups of children falls to the Children's Welfare Department, The Department's task is undoubtedly a difficult one. Its officers must follow the regulations which have been drawn up to deal with each situation. Certain elements in the community do not hesitate to swindle the Department if it is possible, and each case must be investigated before Government money can be paid out.

The object of the Department, however, is the alleviation of hardship to children. To do this in all cases would often mean granting immediate assistance, which is seldom done. Deserted wives, for example, may find themselves entirely without money and unable to work without giving up their children, In such a case the Department may pay 30/- to the family but many weeks may elapse before another payment is made, The weekly allowance for the children is not granted until the woman has taken out a summons for maintenance against her husband. In the meantime she must fare as best she can.

It is unfortunate that in such cases the family's rent and the children's appetites cannot also be controlled by Regulation.

The scale of payments for the maintenance of children has not changed sufficiently to compensate for the enormous rise in the cost of living during the last few years, The maximum allowance per child, 12/6 a week is now inadequate. Attention to this matter is long overdue.

Another matter of importance is the payment demanded by the Department when a child is placed in its care by a widow, deserted wife or unmarried mother, In many cases the money can be paid without hardship. In other cases continuous payment is not always possible. One girl, unmarried, left her child in the temporary care of the Department while she undertook training in work that would enable her to maintain herself and keep her child when qualified. During this period her income was too small to allow her to meet her commitments. To prevent Departmental action a social worker in touch with the case paid the money from her own pocket; otherwise the child would have become a ward of the state.

This has happened on several occasions and again illustrates the need for greater elasticity in the Department's Regulations.

While every effort should be made to avoid fraudulent claims and to mete out vigorous punishment to persons attempting fraud, such efforts should not impede aid being given, nor should the possession of a child be the means of extorting money that a woman is not in a position to pay.

Many destitute women with families have appealed to the Brotherhood of St. Laurence for aid. They have been afraid to approach the Welfare Department for various reasons. Some had been State Wards themselves and were frightened of it. Others had been living with their children in one room and knew that if they approached the Department an inspectress would order them to find better accommodation or place their children in an Institution. Apart from the impossibility of a woman with children finding good accommodation during the present housing shortage, how could it be paid for, if found? Such families are often entirely dependent on social agencies till State aid is given. If the Children's Welfare Department were all that it should be, every woman with a child would feel that advice and help could always be obtained without fear unless the woman has been guilty of wilful neglect,

A Melbourne doctor specializing in psychiatry contributes the following comment on another branch of the Department's activities: -

"At the Children's Welfare Depot, Royal Park, it is remarkable to find a really sympathetic, human staff. The Superintendent, Dr. Tewsley, and her predecessors deserve high praise. The Departmental Secretary, Mr. Pittard, has a thorough knowledge of overseas advances in Child Welfare, and a kindly cooperative personality. That excellent work has been done at the Depot is apparent. The medical aspect has been well managed, and much money has been spent on buildings and equipment. Yet something seems to be lacking, something which is more sharply outlined by the material improvements that have been painstakingly made over the years.

"That something is more felt than seen when a flock of toddlers surround you and clutch your hand in a vacant, lost, manner. The lack of love, the need for home life and mother are not easy to replace. Even more disturbing is a fault which could be far more easily corrected. At the Depot, the oldest inhabitants are the mentally defective children and the recidivists, or recurrent delinquents.

"These are the children who set the pace. These are the children of whom the staff despair, and these children set the example for all newcomers to the Institution,

"Children whose only misdemeanour has been to lose their parents enter and become steeped in an atmosphere of case-hardened anti-social attitudes and crime. The future of the 'clean skin' children is quite difficult enough without this type of education.

" Despite the efforts of the staff to overcome the problem, it, still exists, and the immediate solution is the provision of separate institutions. Then the recidivists could not contaminate the others, and more headway would be made in helping the orphans into society on the right foot."

CON C L U S I O N

In the foregoing pages, an effort has been made to show that many children are underprivileged and, as a result of this, will remain underprivileged throughout their lives.

The continued reports from ever-changing governments that the slums will be abolished will be great news when that day comes. With slum abolition every effort should be made to see that no children remain underprivileged in any other direction.

With unemployment practically non-existent there is an opportunity to raise the minimum standards of living allowed in our society. The physical condition of children attending state Schools could well be a starting point.

Equally necessary are the teaching of individual skills (handicraft and sport), the protection of children from problem elements and the inculcation of a friendly attitude to society instead of the hostility that is so prevalent at the present time.

The vast difference between the upbringing of different groups, particularly noticeable in education and speech, is perpetuating class distinctions for which there is no need.

Apart from this type of disunity it would appear that many youths are the victims of individuals who attempt to gain power by playing off one group against another. Political Parties, Unions and in some cases denominations are not innocent in this matter. One need not go beyond the political youth groups for examples of deliberately aroused antagonisms, Truth and the rights of others are only too often forgotten when a large organized group start to clamour for their own "rights"

These are bad influences to which to subject young people. We are too apt to forget the far more important needs and rights that are common to all children and adolescents. It is these common needs that are the concern of the Brotherhood of **S.** Laurence - needs which, if fulfilled, will constitute the greatest unifying factor in the lives of the Australian people.