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COMMUNITY SERVICE IN OUR SCHOOLS.

One hundred and fifty inter-high school delegates interested in social welfare work recently attended a national conference in Johannesburg sponsored by the South African Institute of Race Relations and the Johannesburg Social Welfare Department. The results of the conference are discussed by the writer of this article - Mrs. Willard Eybers.

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For some years past the chief emphasis in education in our schools has been on the development of the individual. During this same period outside the schools there was phenomenal growth in social services given by the State, municipalities and private bodies. People had come more social-conscious, and this consciousness soon became reflected in the more progressive schools in various parts of the world.

South Africa has not lagged behind. As early as 1942 several leading schools were encouraging the formation of study groups to discuss social problems. These groups fostered, as they naturally should do, a desire for practical activity. A group in one large boys' school organised classes to teach the Natives who worked at the school to read and write. This project grew, and through its efforts several hundred Natives have been made literate.

Another, a girls' school, has adopted a farm home for convalescent Native children, and groups of them visit it regularly, taking clothes and supplies. The students and staff of the University of the Witwatersrand have brought into being the first Community Health Centre in South Africa. It is modelled on the famous Peckham Pioneer Health Centre in England. The chairman of the Johannesburg centre maintains, quite rightly, that "in some respects we have set an example from which many countries older and more socially advanced than our own could learn with profit." Each year the proceeds from The Rag of the University of the Witwatersrand go towards its support, as well as to that of a Non-European Health Centre and Clinic, and other social welfare work. Many students of the Department of Social Welfare and of the Medical School give their services to these projects. Other schools have other community projects.

Study groups interests led eventually to conferences during the vacations to which representatives of other schools were invited, and visits were organised to various institutions. The logical consequence was the formation in 1944 of the Inter-High School Council for Community Service in Johannesburg for the Johannesburg schools, in order to co-ordinate the work undertaken by the schools and to encourage other schools to participate.

It became apparent that many schools in the Union were undertaking some form of social activity, even though in some cases it was limited to fundraising for a society working for the less privileged members of their community. Young people were obviously keenly interested in social problems and welfare work. Efforts of this kind made for others do more to develop personality and character than any direct attempt to improve the individual's personality would do.

In March, 1945, Mr. Rheinallt Jones, Director of the South African Institute of Race Relations, was instrumental in convening a meeting to consider the possibility of organising a conference so that the inter-high school movement might be extended throughout the Union. The Institute and the Johannesburg Social Welfare Department sponsored the first national conference, which was held in Johannesburg from April 1st to 5th, 1946. I believe that this is the first conference of school children interested in social welfare work to be held in any country.

One hundred and fifty delegates attended. Unfortunately, Government schools from two of the provinces could not send delegates as the conference did not fall within their school holidays, but representatives from private schools attended. It is to be hoped that the importance of this movement will become so obvious that in future Education Departments will be co-sponsors, and so arrange their school calendars to ensure that at least one week will be common holiday for the schools in all the provinces, thus enabling scholars

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from the whole Union to attend.

The delegates attending this conference also expressed the hope that the Departments would make provision for at least one school period a week to be devoted to social science, so that all young people, upon matriculation, would have some conception of how other sections of the community live and how the lot of the less fortunate may be ameliorated.

The aims of the Inter-High School Council are twofold:

Educational:

- (a) To bring youth into closer contact with the community and its social problems, and to train youth for citizenship and public service.
- (b) To encourage social studies as part of the general school activities.

Practical:

- (a) To foster practical welfare work amongst Europeans and Non-Europeans.
- (b) To participate actively in combating social and economic problems.

Both Boys' and girls' schools throughout the country were invited to send at least two pupils from Standards IX and X, and one teacher, to the conference. Many of them sent more. The idea of a joint conference of teachers and students is a sound one, since the young people must obviously take their first step in social work under the guidance of those who have the necessary background, who can make arrangements for contacts and excursions, and can lead the discussions. The teachers must also provide continuity in whatever project the school undertakes.

It seems advisable that each school should keep its social work specialised and intimate, so that the pupils may see results, and feel a genuine personal interest in those receiving their assistance. These pupils, naturally, have only a limited time to devote to extra-curricular projects.

There was ample evidence at the conference that the presence of the teachers did not cramp the style of the young people, who themselves presided over the sessions, thanked the speakers and hosts or hostesses at the various institutions, and who generally took the lead in many things. It is important that their idealism should not be stultified, but that it should be almost imperceptibly tempered by realism.

Four Johannesburg schools contributed largely to financing the conference. The delegates were chosen by their respective schools, which in some cases paid their fares. The actual cost of the conference to each delegate was 9s.: 5s. registration fee and 4s for lunches and teas. Hospitality was provided, and the Johannesburg Municipality placed three busses at the disposal of the delegates free of charge for the excursions.

Some of the places visited were many miles outside the city, and during the course of the week long distances were traversed. During the long trips there was community singing, which added to the good-fellowship and offered some light relief. A domestic science expert of the City Council served delightful lunches and teas at various institutions en route, so that a minimum amount of time was lost. The City Council also gave the Youth Centre and all of its facilities for the meetings. This centre is intended to provide social, recreational and cultural facilities for young people, between the ages of 15 and 25 years. In its foyer many interesting exhibits were on display. The Institute of Race Relations provided the secretarial work.

Not only was a Red Cross nurse constantly on duty at the conference room, but one also accompanied each bus. There was an official on each bus to answer questions about the places visited or to be visited, and books or pamphlets explaining the work of each institution were distributed, so that the pupils could refresh their memories at a later date. No effort was spared to ensure that the visitors received the maximum permanent benefit.

Addresses were given by experts in social science and were of a very high standard. There was no "Talking down" to the audience, and adults interested in public work could profit from them. The introductory talk on Social Welfare given by the Director of Social Welfare, Johannesburg, provided a comprehensive background for subsequent discussions. It was explained that social welfare in its widest sense did not stop with aiding the poor. Its primary concern was to prevent tragic social and personal evils from arising by enabling all members of society to maintain security. There were many agencies under several different authorities busy with this constructive programme involving social insurance (workmen's compensation) family allowances, adult education, community centres, sheltered employment, vocational guidance, etc. To the young people in schools today would fall the task of administering present services and extending them where necessary. Not only trained social workers, but civil servants and many others, were engaged in administering relief and providing other facilities. A basic knowledge of the problems involved would definitely make for more intelligent and sympathetic administration.

Many human beings had to be assisted in adjusting themselves to their environment. There were numerous causes of maladjustment which had to be studied and understood, such as deformities, lack of education, continued illness, mental instability, drunkenness, etc. The programme of the conference set out to indicate both remedial and promotive services available to all sections of the community, from infancy to death.

On each of three days a social group of services were considered - services for youth, for adults and for the family, respectively. Each day opened with a talk explaining the services provided, by various authorities, for the group under discussion, and was followed by visits to institutions providing these services. Under social services for youth, the St. Vincent's School for the deaf, the Baumann Creche, the Mayfair Play Centre, the Non-European Babies' Home, and the Diepkloof Non-European Reformatory was visited.

At St. Vincent's School for the Deaf the method of teaching the deaf and dumb were shown, and the facilities provided for their play.

The Baumann creche is run by the Child Welfare Society. It provides day care for sixty European children of pre-school age whose mothers are forced to earn their living outside their homes, or who are war-workers.

The Mayfair Children's Play Centre is one of several such afternoon play centres, run by the Municipal Social Welfare Department, for children between the ages of six and twelve years, whose home circumstances are such that they are left to their own devices from the time they leave school at midday till the late evening. The children are taught useful and creative leisure-time activities, and the home circumstances are investigated with a view to assisting families in general to bring up their children so that they may be an asset to the community.

The Non-European Babies Home, Orlando, is run by the Child Welfare Society as a place for safety for Native children in need of temporary shelter on account of any disturbance of their home life, such as illness, imprisonment or death of parents, or while an inquiry under the children's Act is pending. If the children cannot be eventually returned to their homes, they are passed on to permanent institutions or foster-care. The home, which was established in 1940, is situated in Orlando Township, and accommodates forty-five resident children from birth to twelve years. A day creche for up to forty children is also conducted on the premises.

The Diepkloof Reformatory is for Non-European male delinquents, and is run by the Union Education Department. The Reformatory, which was established in 1912, provides accommodation for four hundred and fifty youths.

On the following day, in order to get some idea of what was being done for adults, the delegates were taken to the Men's Sheltered Work Depot, to the Rand Epileptic Employment Association Farm, the Randjeslaagte Jubilee Home for the Aged, the Ksenzeleni Blind Institute and an Institute for the Deaf.

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The Men Sheltered Work Depot, run by the Municipal Social Welfare Department was established in February, 1944. It provides employment for physically handicapped men who are unfit for the open labour market. The depot trains men in spinning and weaving, woodwork, leatherwork, metalwork, and simple tailoring. The men receive cash payment for work done, and may, where necessary, be given food parcels, clothing or rent. Some of the case histories of the men in the shelter proved most interesting.

The Rand Epileptic Employment Association's Nursery and Poultry Farm provides employment for uncertified European male epileptics. The farm was established in 1935, and forty-five men are being cared for at the moment. In conjunction with the farm, a hostel is run to provide accommodation for the men employed on the farm.

Randjeslaagte (Johannesburg) Jubilee Memorial Homes were established in 1938 as a fitting memorial for the city's golden jubilee. Accommodation is provided in the form of flats and rooms for married couples and single women. Applicants should have an income not exceeding the Government old-age pension (approximately £5 per month), and must have been resident in Johannesburg for not less than 20 years. So impressive is this living memorial that it is amazing that anyone should ever contemplate a stone memorial again.

Esenzeleni Blind Institute is run by the Transvaal Society for the Care of Non-European Blind. It is a home, workshop and training centre for the non-European blind. In addition to training in handicrafts for those incurably blind, the institute provides clinical treatment for the prevention of blindness. Esenzeleni was established in 1937, and accommodates forty-two blind and twenty-four under treatment. It is situated in Roodepoort.

Kutlwaning Deaf and Dumb Institute was opened in July, 1944, to train Native deaf mutes in housework and garden work, and to teach them elementary reading and writing. There are sixteen attending at present. Kutlwaning is run under the auspices of the Johannesburg Deaf and Dumb Association.

The Margaret Ballinger Home for Children is run by the European and African Association of Women. It is a holiday convalescent home for Bantu children between the ages of six and fourteen years, sent from clinics or hospitals.

Under the section "Social Services for the Family", the delegates visited the Maurice Freeman Township Housing Scheme, the Central Poor Relief Depot and Central Food Depot, the Coloured Housing Scheme, non-European Vocational Training School and University Community Centre.

The Maurice Freeman Township Housing Scheme is a sub-economic scheme which contains houses of various sizes as well as blocks of flats. Every house has its little garden. There is a nursery school which is already too small. Another feature is the community hall. There is a very able woman in charge who does a great deal to stimulate community interests and gatherings.

The Council Poor Relief Depot is run by the Municipality and subsidised by the Government. It distributes poor relief in the form of food parcels, clothing, rent, blankets, etc. to indigent persons or families, on the recommendation of any one of the city's welfare agencies. Delivery contractors deliver the food daily throughout Johannesburg. Poor Relief is only intended to tide people over a difficult period, and ~~xxx~~ cases in receipt of assistance are visited by welfare workers who make every effort to re-establish the recipients' independence.

The Central Food Depot receives for distribution to 15 sub-depots in the poorer parts of the city the food provided under the State-aided Products Scheme. This is a scheme whereby nourishing foodstuffs are made available to families with incomes of less than £25 per month at prices considerably below the market level. Vegetable clubs have also been organised at most of the sub-depots, vegetables being bought in bulk and distributed once a week. Vegetables to the market value of 8s. may be purchased for 2s.6d.

The Coronationville Coloured Housing Scheme was commenced in 1939/...

in 1939, and of the 1,000 houses originally planned, 250 have already been built. The rents range from 6s a week for a one-bedroomed house with a kitchen-living-room, to 12s 6d. a week for a house with three bedrooms, a separate kitchen and living-room.

The Donaldson Community Centre was founded at the instigation of Lt. Col. J. Donaldson, D.S.O., founder of the Bantu Welfare Trust. The centre operates four night schools for adults, a women's club, a boxing club for young men, a boys' and girls' club. Vegetables clubs are also organised, families paying 2s.6d. for vegetables bought in bulk and distributed once a week. The centre aims to combat juvenile delinquency through recreational and educational means, and to provide wholesome leisure-time activities for the Natives living in Orlando.

Mention has already been made of the University Community Health Centre. Here health promotive services are stressed, such as nutritional work, recreation and general physical and health education. There are medical clinics, recreational and educational facilities, films, clubs, art and dancing classes. The membership is now about 2,000.

At each of these institutions a member of the committee or staff explained the origin, development and needs of their particular institution. What struck me as being an inspiration to the young folk was the fact that in most cases some individual had realised a tragic need for help in a particular section and set to work to ameliorate that suffering. Eventually the Government or local authorities were convinced of the need and subsidised the effort so that it could extend its scope.

One of the most striking examples is the Rand Epileptic Home. This came into being when a woman doctor tried to find garden employment for some epileptic patients, and discovered how much the provision of work within their capabilities meant to them. Young people sometimes become depressed by tragic conditions when they feel that nothing can be done, but during this conference they were shown how much even individuals could do, and how much their own country was already doing.

On the final day there was a talk on social administration and legislation. The happy combination of theory and practice throughout the conference was admirable. The only complaint was that there was too much to see, too much to learn. In the short period available they saw how much good work there was on which they could build that much better world which they feel so poignantly must come, if this is really to be the country of the common man.

The delegates decided that there should be a similar conference next year, and that every effort should be made to get the co-operation of schools all over the country. They expressed the desire for more sectional discussions in small groups at future gatherings.

Will our schools respond by incorporating social science into their already crowded curriculum? I trust that they will, for here is a new, vital, spontaneous development among young people that will undoubtedly help them to orientate themselves into a socially-minded world. Already some time is allowed for teaching civics. There could be no more effective way to teaching it than incorporating it into a brief social science course.

No pupil should leave high school without knowing the terminology of social science, for we are constantly meeting it in our everyday lives. In most public bodies there has been difficulty in getting the young married couple to take part. The young people who will be leaving school within the next few years, fired with enthusiasm for social welfare and acquainted with it, will be able to carry on the good work so ably done by their elders. They are badly needed in both voluntary and paid social work.

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We know how few of those who matriculate continue their studies into university. That it why it is important that the schools which launch them on their careers should stimulate them to accept seriously their duties and obligations as citizens. Even in the smallest towns today there is invariably some society or individual who is responsible for alleviating the lot of the unfortunate, the maladjusted, the maimed in body and mind. Every school can make some effort to assist in that work. The pupils most interested could then be sent to a conference in one of the large cities, where the work is highly specialised under expert direction. Each local centre would profit by the ideas brought home by the delegates, and South Africa would make enormous strides in its welfare programme. Youth is on the march. We should assist, not impede, its desire to create a better world.

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