

**SUPERINTENDENTS' AND MATRONS' ASSOCIATION
OF VICTORIA**

REPORT OF BALLARAT CONFERENCE

2nd — 4th April, 1965

I was asked to speak on Relationships, and I was very pleased to do so; then I was asked to bring along an outline on what I intended to say, so that we wouldn't all say the same thing, and because I came very low on the list I had to read out what I was going to say, as one of the last persons. I found out that what I had read out was exactly what everybody else had said already and I had practically nothing new to say. So that's the unfortunate position I am now in. Everybody has been talking about Relationships all this conference; so I am just going on as I would have gone on if you hadn't had all these other people.

I want to talk about Relationships and I'm talking on the left to Superintendents and Matrons and I'm talking very simply about things as I have found them. I want to say a lot of things I think should be done, but it doesn't mean that I did them; it doesn't mean that I was a success and that I always did the right thing, because by no means did I do it.

Now, I think we have to have one goal; we all must have this goal, and we have all been talking about goals. But we have to have one special goal - and that is the goal of teaching the child to make relationships. We have to teach the child how to live in this society and we have to teach the child how to make relationships - whatever else we do - or whatever else we don't do, we must have this as a primary goal.

We want the child to make deep friendships; we want the child to love other people. When the child marries, we want this person to love his or her children. We want this person to love her husband. Do we want the children who are in your care or in my care, to grow up to be able to love other people? We want them to grow up so that they can fit in with society, and they are not going to feel outsiders like second rate sort of people, like a person who doesn't know what to do under any circumstance. And this has happened all too frequently in the past. I've met a lot of people since I've retired, who tell me that they have been brought up in institutions, and there are other things people say to me - things like this: 'I am married to a man who was brought up in an institution, and I have a great deal of trouble because I have to choose his clothes for him. I have to tell him when to put on clean clothes.'

You can see this is an institutional child - can't you! Another woman said to me: 'My husband has great difficulty in getting on with my mother, because he doesn't know how to get along with an older woman. He was brought up only by men.' She said: 'He doesn't even know what to call her - he keeps on calling her lady.'

Well, we don't want this to happen do we? I think we've got to work in from the beginning. We've got to know that children are born not knowing how to love, not knowing how to make relationships, not knowing what our very complicated society is like. The child has got to learn this thing and this thing is going to be learned in your institution.

This is my message - this is why I've paused - that's for you to take in the fact that the child has got to learn that it has to make relationships to get on with the world in general in your institution.

In order to go into this, I thought I would talk about the staff in institutions, because obviously the Superintendents and Matrons are not going to be looking after the children all the time - in fact perhaps not at all. It therefore depends what staff you've got and on what relationships the staff can make with the children.

*

Dr. P. Towsley, M.B.E., M.B.B.S., Former Medical Superintendent of "Turana", Social Welfare Department.

four. Do we have that in our institutions? Well, sometimes on paper the ratio of staff to children sounds pretty good, but when it comes to the point, it doesn't mean that you've got this ratio on duty. You may have eight or ten staff and say forty children, but that doesn't mean that you are going to have the whole ten staff on duty; you are only going to have two, or possibly three and it may only be one - isn't this so! And how are you going to make these sort of relationships. Now, as far as the staff go, it depends a great deal on the staff's attitude towards the child, and why the staff has gone into this job. Some of you have gone into this job because you are dedicated and want to help children. Some of the staff you've got probably haven't gone into this job for this reason at all. They may have gone into the job because it was offering, or it was a suitable locality or for some reason which is not a frightfully good reason. They may not intend to make this their life's work. Very few of the staff come in knowing very much about the subject do they? They mostly come in knowing nothing. They've got to learn in your institution on the job. The staff is therefore going to be introduced to children who have a difficulty, who are there in a difficult situation, in an abnormal situation, and new staff come in to this very strained situation. They immediately think: these children are very odd because they are not like the brothers and sisters we have known, or people we have known in the past. They behave in a very strange way; and so they do. They try out new staff to see how you get on.

When we're thinking about staff, I wonder whether the staff realise that there is a goal, that we have a goal we're working towards. I think some of the staff do, but I don't think that the new one you put on yesterday knows. I think that this has to be inculcated into them, that we have a goal, that we are working towards something in the end. Not just - 'can we get through today - and get all the kids off to bed and we'll all be right, we've had a meal' and so on, but we're working towards a goal, and this particular goal is the desire to teach these children to make relationships, and how to get on with the world in general.

The staff at first don't realise that the child is in the institution all the time. The staff goes away and have days off, they go on leave and the child stays in the institution. The staff goes down the street, the child goes to school and comes home again.

The child is not getting a great deal of society as it is, it is living in the institution; particularly the staff who live out of the institution notice this. They go away, they go home again, perhaps two or three days, they come back again, and those children haven't stirred out. They are still in the institution. I think with staff it is very important, not only that they are warm and that they are loving but that they can enjoy children. I think you need to enjoy children; I think you need to laugh with them.

When I was at "Turana" the staff used to be sometimes having a little game with the children and laughing, and when I came in - stopped! As though I would be upset about it - I was never more delighted! They used to be apologetic for playing and laughing with the children, but we should enjoy children shouldn't we!

There are some people who are not very good at talking to children; there's a special art I think in talking to children. I think they need encouragement to talk to children because the children need the conversation of older people. They want to be interested in the adult too; they want to hear adults talking together; they want to hear adults talking to children and the staff is doing the right thing by talking to the children. I think now, as far as staff goes, the relationship between members of the staff is a very important one. I think where your staff is not getting on together, your children are going to suffer and they are going to show something's wrong.

you've got a section in it and something's going wrong. Children are behaving badly in any one section. One thing worth doing is enquiring if the staff are getting along together, because if the staff are not getting along together, it will show in the behaviour of the children.

It is of course an ideal thing to say that the Matron or Superintendent must also get along with the staff. I suppose that is possible. There must be some members of the staff that we don't get on as well with. If you are a public servant there are members of the staff who are permanent members of the staff who have to stay on the staff and you can't get rid of them. It is very sad! You may have what you think is a good reason but you can't convince anybody of it.

I think the atmosphere from the institution comes from the top; from the Superintendents and Matrons and senior staff. If they are fond of children it will show right down to the lowest member of the staff. The atmosphere is going to show and I think it comes from the top. It is therefore a greater responsibility for the senior person than the person who cares for the child. I think it is very important that the Superintendents and Matrons get on with their staff, and it is terribly important for them to know their staff - and I know you are going to say where's the time to do all these things?

You need to know your staff from the point of view of what you are going to ask them to do; what duties you are going to give them; what responsibility they can take for example: taking children to a picnic or doing some special thing; what things you can leave for them to do. Some people you can't rely upon to do things at all. Some staff don't notice things about children. The staff need to be able to see what children need. Some children need a lot of encouragement; some children need a lot of affection; some children don't need as much; some children need to be told they look nice. I think it is important to tell children they look nice. Children don't realise it, but it is their parents who tell them they look nice; 'Let's put on this pretty dress', or 'You look nice with a blue bow in your hair', or 'Green always suit you or whatever it is'.

The staff are taking the place of parents, and it is worth saying these things to children. I've said to many children, "you've got such pretty blue eyes" and they'll say, "Have I got pretty blue eyes?". Why not let the child know it's got pretty blue eyes. If the child has nice curly hair why not let it know. I am all for letting it know and encouraging. I think the staff relationship with the children is helped by encouragement and by telling them nice things. There are plenty of nice things; say they've done well.

Now the next thing about staff I want to say is how they get on with themselves, not only with each other, but how they get on with themselves. It depends on what sort of person one is, whether one is willing to face her weaknesses and strengths. It is a very sad thing. You remember what Mr. Cathcart said only yesterday that he'd lived with himself for a very long time but still didn't know himself. I think we are awfully disappointed in ourselves sometimes when we do things that we wish to goodness we hadn't done; or when we face a situation in which we wish that we hadn't done it in that way; or when we do something which is a pity. Whether it be with staff or children we wish we hadn't done it. I think some members of the staff will say: 'Oh! I'm no good at this; I can't do it. It is no use saying to me that I can't do this training course because I'm stupid I couldn't do it'. That's one type of person, but it's not the desirable type of person because it is not a good attitude. They can do it of course - why not? Some members of the staff won't admit they are ever wrong. Sometimes we don't want to admit we are ever wrong either, do we? I think we want to know ourselves, and I think we want to have a relationship with ourselves.

remember Dr. Drew said yesterday when he was talking about aggression and whether the staff member takes aggression. How do we feel when kids call us rude names or say 'I hate you', or something. How is the staff going to take it, because the little girl you put on yesterday isn't going to know anything much about this aggression until you teach her. On this subject it is very difficult to have staff conferences and try and teach all these new people who come onto your staff. It is also difficult to have staff conferences if you haven't got anybody who is going to lead the conference in a way that is going to inspire other people; somebody who is going to have an authoritative voice. I think an authoritative voice in a Superintendent is essential don't you? If you haven't got an authoritative voice that is going to say: 'this is the way we are going to treat this child', then everybody is going to say - they think this and they think that and nobody's going to pull together to treat this child in any one special way.

Now I want to talk about children in the institutions. I didn't say about staff and their relationships to parents. It can be terribly sad for a person who looks after a child for perhaps a year, who's given it her best; who's sat by it when it has had toothache and consoled it when it had done badly at school. The parents have never visited it - and the parents come in the door and the child doesn't look once at the member of staff but makes straight for the parents. This can be a very depressing thing for the staff in relation to the child and they think, oh well what's the good of bothering, the child will leave me for her mother any day and look at her!

I've had this said to me many times but we can't avoid this happening, because the child has a permanent tie with its parents and is overjoyed when that parent comes in the door. Here is somebody who means something to me forever.

Now, let's go on to the children in institutions. We have had this said already, that the child's deepest need is the love of its parents. The deepest need is for the child to be brought up in his own home, with his own parents in a good sort of way. Well, for one reason or another the home may break down or for some reason the child comes into the care of people who run institutions.

Father Richards said the other day that the child may be in the institution because of death or some break down in the family. If he is in the institution because of death he may have had a very warm relationship with the mother who has died. He may be say eight years old - and he may have had eight years of satisfactory relationship with the mother who has died. It is a very sad thing indeed for this child to suddenly be placed in an institution but at least he has got an idea of a home, he has got the idea of affection which a child who has been brought up in the institution from infancy may never have. The child who has been put in an institution at birth has a very difficult road to hoe.

However good you are with your children in nursery; however much time you spend however much love you try to give - how can you give the same amount of love as the one mother can give who is looking after the child day and night.

In an institution you may for example have Mothercraft Nurses or staff on a forty hour week, you may have to have half a dozen persons looking after the one baby, more perhaps. How is this baby ever going to get used to loving anybody because nothing is permanent. You've got this person who is looking after her all day then goes away, and you've got someone else who is on duty in the evening. Tomorrow, it is not the first one she had, but a third one. How's the poor baby ever to make relationships when it doesn't know who he is relating to; so that the baby who starts in the institution is suffering under a great handicap.

Other children of course who come into the institution because they have been so badly treated or so badly neglected by their parents that they were removed from them by the courts. This child is in a very unhappy position and you are in a very unhappy position too; for you are now going to take over a child who is disturbed, who has been badly treated, who has made poor relationships with his own parents. The parents haven't liked him, and have neglected him, and ill treated him, and you are in this very awkward position of having to teach him how to make good relationships and how to look upon the world as a pleasant place. Now, I don't know how you are going to do it, but it is not easy.

Now, I want to talk about the institutional child and his parents. I've said already that some children have no knowledge of their parents and have lost their parents for one reason or another. Some receive some love, but not perhaps enough; some have been placed in an institution because of a breakdown of the parents. Nevertheless, I have found that the institutional child still longs for its parents. It's a sort of dream; they think even though mum was cruel, mum or dad was drinking that at some stage this will all come right in some way.

When I was at "Turana", I used to go round sometimes when the children were in bed and there was a certain section where two children were sleeping in the one room and I would find one child crying in bed. Frequently I have said to the other child, "Why is Betty crying?" and the other child invariably gave the same answer. "She's crying for her mummy!" Sometimes she didn't have a mummy, but she could cry for something she didn't have just the same.

At one stage we used to use anaesthetics to have teeth removed, and we used to give it to delinquent boys. Some of these boys were really tough, and had done the most tremendous things. They used to take a very bad anaesthetic for they were very nervous, and I think they were frightened of what they might say under the anaesthetic or because they might die. Coming out of the anaesthetic they used to frequently cry for their mothers - these great tough boys, big boys, crying for their mothers. I've given anaesthetic to thousands of children and it horrifies me how institutional children want their mothers. Some children cry for the mother that they've never seen. An eight year old child would cry for its mother - it hadn't got a mother - it had never seen it, but it was crying for something: its mother!

I go sometimes to one of the institutions near me and there's a little girl there; she came to me the first time and she said: "What does your daddy look like?" And I said, "My daddy died years ago." "What did he die for?" she asked and I said, "Well he was a very old man and he died." She asked "What did he look like?" and I said, "Well he looked a little like me; he had dark hair, brown eyes - he looked very like me really!" "What was he like when he was a little boy?" "I don't know I wasn't there. I suppose he had brown hair and brown eyes."

Well, the next time I went up to the same child and she said to me "Your daddy's dead isn't he; why is he dead?" The same story over again. "What was he like when he was a little boy?" I have seen the child four times and each time we have had that conversation. I'll tell you why I think we have this conversation - this child is an illegitimate child - she has never seen her father and I think she wants to imagine the father, and she's going to imagine mine.

Parents and children: now parents are a permanent tie to a child. It's a remarkable thing how a child will go to an institution and perhaps never see the parents at all and still want to find its parents. I've seen many people who are still wanting to find their parents; they've been in foster homes, in institutions, but they're still wondering - where are my parents? Why don't they want me?

They will tell you the story of: "when I was three or four, or two or whatever it is. I was put in an institution. Why did my parents do that? Where are they now?"

I had a letter from a boy the other day. His mother had died when he was born and he was illegitimate. He wrote: I am now twenty one. Can you tell me anything about my parents or didn't I ever have any. I wrote back and told him what I knew about his mother but how could I tell him about his father when we didn't even know who his father was! I think the children tend to drift back to their parents if they can find them, however bad they are; the tie is very strong.

When I was at "Turana" I used to go on a Saturday morning into town and I used to go by tram and walk down by the side of the fence and a whole lot of faces used to pop up to see what was coming. They'd see me and I'd have a hat on but I didn't wear a hat when I was at "Turana", and when I went to town I had a hat on - my best hat. The children used to say "Where you goin'?" and I'd say "I'm going to town." "When you comin' back" - "I'll be back for lunch." "My mummy's got a hat like that."

Well 'my mummy', I must tell you, in all cases would not have a hat at all, and if she had a hat it would be an old battered one and certainly not like mine I can assure you! However, the child was thinking of me as mum and wishing I was mum.

It is all very amusing to tell but it is all very pathetic really, isn't it!

Can the children make relationships with the staff in place of the parents? It is a difficult thing isn't it? With the staff ratio that we have already spoken about it is also very difficult.

I am now going to say something about siblings, in relationship between brothers and sisters, in institutions. I have found that brothers and sisters who mightn't have been enormously fond of each other at home, once they get into the institution really feel very close to each other. I have seen this at picnics where they get themselves together, and also concerts, whereas in an ordinary home they wouldn't have thought about this thing but because they are together in the institution they feel they are a family once more.

I would like to say most passionately that I think that it is a very frightful thing that in Victoria we have to separate brothers and sisters as much as we do, when they are placed in institutions. If you are going to lose your mother and father; perhaps the home is broken, the parents have disappeared, the next best thing is your brother and your sister and it is a very sad thing to think of them separated.

Sometimes children used to go to "Turana" and bring a family and perhaps the eldest little girl was looking after the baby because the family was breaking down or because mum was drinking. The baby meant a great deal to her, but when we took the child into "Turana" the baby went into the nursery, we couldn't put it into the big ward - and so they were separated. The break in the family then, was worse a hundred times because her little baby was taken from her.

I've had children say to me: Our baby's dead! And I'd say "Dead?" thinking that there had been some frightful explosion and it had died or something, but they say it's dead because it's in the nursery and it was taken away from them.

I would like to say a word or two about the placement of children from institutions because I think it makes a great deal of difference to the relationship between the Superintendent or Matron and the child; also between the Superintendent or Matron and the staff, how the child is going to be placed. If the Superintendent or the Matron knows the child well, she will know its needs and where it can be placed very much better. If the Superintendent or Matron has got a very large institution and doesn't know all the children, she has to receive information about the children from her staff and therefore she must know the staff and know the prejudices of the staff and what she can accept from them about those children, when she places them.

I think it is particularly important in the case of fostering or adoption to know whether the child is going to be able to make a relationship; because some children cannot make relationships and if you put a child who cannot make a relationship into a foster home or into a home with adoptive parents, you will find the thing breaks down. This happens because the parents or the foster parents are so disturbed that they can't get through to the child. The mistake originally was in putting a child who can't make a relationship with these foster parents.

I want to say in conclusion that my message is: You have to make the child learn to make relationships in your institution. You have to learn to fit the child to fit in with its very complicated society and you have to teach the child in your institution, which is an abnormal way of having to teach the child. Also I do hope that you will think of a positive way of doing this thing which could possibly be brought up at your next Conference, because I feel that it might be for the best.
