



Meet the Local Associations

14: Staffordshire Association for Mental Welfare

By W. D. F. Foden, D.P.A.

Mr. Foden, who is County Mental Welfare Officer for Staffordshire, is Secretary of this Association.

THE Staffordshire Association for Mental Welfare was formed in 1920, to visit and befriend all mentally handicapped people living at home and to help and advise parents about home care, especially the early training of young children. It assisted the local authority in administering the services provided under the Mental Deficiency Act. The newly-formed Association was faced with the tremendous task of compiling a register of mentally sub-normal persons in the County, so that thought could be given to the type of services that might be needed. The only help then available was under the Poor Law Act. There were no training centres or special schools in Staffordshire and institutional care was extremely difficult to obtain.

Occupation centre opened

In the first year of its existence, 66 people came to the notice of the Association, of whom 25 were admitted to institutions. In 1922, an occupation centre was started in Stafford. It was open two afternoons a week and had nine children on the register. At that time, it was estimated that there were only 35 occupation centres in the whole of the country.

For a year or two, the occupation centre hovered on the brink of failure and the number on the register fell to five. By 1925, however, it had become firmly established, and a second one was opened in the County. Another followed in 1926 and, for the first time, guides were employed in escorting children between the centres and their homes.

In 1927, a second-hand motor car was provided for the use of the small headquarters staff, so that they were no

longer dependent on trains and bicycles. A proportion of the visiting work, after initial ascertainment, was carried out by volunteers. In that year, the occupation centres held their first sale of work, while another notable achievement was the holding of the first summer camp. This was the forerunner of annual



Two young visitors to a mental health Exhibition sponsored by the local voluntary committee.

holidays in Staffordshire for parties of mentally handicapped children from the occupation centres. The following year, the first of several voluntary committees was formed, to administer the occupation centres. It was recorded that 2,300 visits were paid in 1928, so evidently the motor car was proving valuable. Hot dinners were provided at the occupation centres for the price of 2d.

Steady progress

The 1930s were years of steady progress, when the seeds of the modern mental health services were sown. The Association pioneered refresher courses



A coffee morning in aid of voluntary committee funds at the Tan-y-Bryn holiday home.

for staff of occupation centres, special transport between home and centre, routine medical inspections and experiments in industrial training and social clubs. The milk-in-schools scheme was applied to the occupation centres, and a network of centres was established covering the whole of the County. Home teaching was also begun.

Notable achievement

A notable achievement occurred in 1938, when the first purpose-built occupation centre was opened at Newcastle-under-Lyme. Then came the war and, after it, the changes in administration brought about by the National Health Service Act. In 1948, the occupation centres were taken over by the Staffordshire County Council and re-named training centres. The County Council also became responsible for the employment of the teaching and social work staff.

The Association continued, through its local centre committees, to take an active interest in the work of the training centres, and it continued to plan and organise the annual summer holidays for children in attendance at the centres. At its Annual Meeting in 1959, the Association decided to ask the Staffordshire County Council to provide a seaside holiday home for the mentally disordered and, much to the delight of the Association, the County Council

immediately included this project in its building programme. A hotel ("Tan-y-Bryn") in Colwyn Bay was bought for this purpose in 1961. The Association then ceased to provide holidays, but the local centre committees have continued to supply the children with additional pocket-money when they go to the holiday home. The Association continues to work closely with the County Council, and enjoys an annual grant which covers all administrative expenses.

Expansion of care

The County Council has adopted a vast programme for the expansion of mental care. In addition to building more adult and junior training centres and replacing existing unsatisfactory premises with new buildings, the County Council hopes during the next ten years to provide 31 hostels, with a total of 600 beds, to meet the needs of mentally disordered people who do not require hospital care. This programme will offer wide scope for voluntary work and, at the Annual Meeting in 1963, the Association amended its constitution to meet future needs.

The Association has, at the present time, eight local voluntary committees, six of which are attached to training centres. The seventh consists of people in Colwyn Bay, who are taking a friendly interest in the welfare of residents at "Tan-y-Bryn". This committee acts as an important link between the holiday home and the local community.

The eighth committee was formed recently in the north of the County, and is of an entirely new kind. Instead of focusing on the work of a particular centre or hostel, it has a territorial basis, and will take an interest in mental health generally in its area. It is early yet to say how this committee will develop, but it is hoped that it will be the forerunner of a number of regional voluntary committees for mental health in the County. The new committee will certainly supplement the resources of the training centres and hostels in the area, and has already offered voluntary help to a psychiatric hospital and a hospital for the mentally sub-

normal serving the area. Visiting mentally disordered people living at home, who are in need of friendship and support, will also be included in its work and there will be an emergency transport service. It will work closely with other local organisations and statutory bodies, and assist in the setting up of psychiatric social clubs. Education in mental health will form an important part of its functions, and a panel of speakers is being recruited.

Raising funds

Fund-raising activities, though not regarded as of first importance, do form a substantial part of the Association's activities. The local voluntary committees between them raised £1,237 in 1963. The money is used for a wide variety of purposes, e.g. summer outings, additional pocket money for the children, Christmas parties at the training centres, visits to a pantomime and, of

course, additional equipment for teaching and recreation (ciné-cameras, tape-recorders, paddling pools, etc.). Two years ago, the Association launched an appeal for money to buy a mini-bus for the holiday home. The response was quick and generous and in less than six months over £1,200 had been subscribed and a vehicle was provided.

The period of uncertainty which followed the advent of the National Health Service has now ended, and great possibilities are opening for local voluntary associations in mental welfare. Community care can never become a reality without the active participation of people in the community, and this is where the voluntary association can play such a vital role. An immense amount of goodwill can be developed towards the problems of the mentally disordered and their families, if only the true facts are made known and ways found of making use of voluntary service.

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