

FINAL REPORT  
OF THE  
BETHNAL GREEN  
AFTER-CARE EXPERIMENT.

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OCTOBER, 1936.  
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BETHNAL GREEN LOCAL ASSOCIATION  
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In presenting this Report to the Council we wish to emphasise two or three points. They are not new; indeed they are all too old and clamour for action.

First, the Report shows that the road from school to industry for the child of 14 is beset with difficulties. School is the right place for a child of 14, but, whether he leaves school at 14 or 15, much more care should be devoted to the choice of his employment than has hitherto been the case. The "industrial talk" which we have established does go some way towards making a better choice of employment, and we feel that this system should be perpetuated and extended.

Second, continuous after-care for two or three years after leaving school is, in our opinion, indispensable, not only in order to advise on matters of employment, but also of health and the better occupation of spare time.

Third, perhaps the greatest of all evils to which young people are exposed at this age is the long and late hours of work. If the Evening Institutes are not as full as they should be, this is the main cause; if at this age young people show signs of under-nourishment and ill-health, this is the main cause; if their standard of conduct and intelligence deteriorates, this again is the main cause.

In a word, this Report shows that to educate children for nine years and then to wash our hands of them at the most critical time of life is folly - it is worse, it is a crime. If education in school must terminate at 14, education in the art of living in the years which immediately follow is imperative. Who will give it?

WYNDHAM DEEDES,

Chairman of the  
Bethnal Green Local Association  
of Care (School) Committees.

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THE OBJECT.

The experiment was begun in October, 1932, as the result of a feeling among many people in the Borough that the children leaving school needed more help in finding and keeping the right kind of work. It was thought that if the children were given more information about industrial conditions prior to the After-Care Conference, and, at the Conference itself, were interviewed by a small, instead of a large, Committee, their chances of obtaining suitable work would be increased.

METHOD.

An Industrial Talk was therefore arranged to be given by an official of the Ministry of Labour early in the term to the leavers. Later, each child and his parents were interviewed at a Conference to which only the Head Teacher, the Care Committee Secretary and the Juvenile Advisory Committee representative were summoned, instead of the usual larger conference. As the new arrangement excluded any representative of the Evening Institutes from attending the After-Care Conference, a talk on "Leisure" was also provided. This was to be given by the Head of an Evening Institute during the last term and was to be a general talk on the right use of leisure and on the opportunities for joining Evening Institutes and Clubs in the

neighbourhood. (This talk, however, has not proved entirely successful, and it is now proposed that, instead, a representative of the Evening Institutes should be present at every After-Care Conference.) In addition to the introduction of an Industrial and a Leisure Talk, it was also arranged to follow up the leavers from certain selected schools by regular visits to their homes for the first two years after their entry into employment.

All the children leaving the selected schools between October, 1932, and July, 1934, were included in the experiment. The final visits to the last batch of these leavers have now been paid, and the After-Care Committee is able to report on all the children (approximately 1210) for whom a two years' record has thus been obtained.

#### DIFFICULTY OF ACCURATELY ESTIMATING RESULTS.

It will be remembered that certain schools were chosen to be worked on the new method, while certain others were chosen for the purpose of comparison to be worked on the usual method, similar records being kept of all.

These schools were:-

<u>To be worked on the old method.</u>	<u>To be worked on the new method.</u>
Daniel Street Boys'	Hague Street Boys'
" " Girls'	Wilmot Street Girls'
St. Bartholomew's Mixed (later discontinued)	St. John's (Peel Grove) Mixed.

Cranbrook Road Girls' was worked on the old system for the first six months and, after Easter, 1933, on the new method.

In the Interim Report, submitted in February, 1935, it was suggested that the comparative method had not proved practicable. This opinion is confirmed in the completed survey. It proved even more difficult than we anticipated to overcome the effect of differences in tradition and personality in the schools chosen. A fair comparison is

impossible. For example, in one school under the new scheme there is a traditional connection with one particular firm which led the children to continue to go there in spite of the advice given in the Industrial Talk.

In another school under the old scheme, the skill of the Head Teacher in estimating the potential value of his pupils as workers has given them a better start than any number of Industrial Talks; for it is largely on the Head Teacher's estimate that the Juvenile Advisory Committee official relies in placing the children in suitable work.

Again, the different methods and capabilities of the voluntary workers who have co-operated in the experiment has made it difficult to compare the results of their supervision.

Finally, for the greater part of the time the experiment unfortunately coincided with the world-wide industrial depression, and this has naturally made it difficult to assess its value in normal years.

#### CONCLUSIONS.

At the end of the four years' working of the experiment, while we do not place any great confidence in the statistics produced under the comparative method of old and new scheme schools, we have, nevertheless, collected certain figures and observed facts and tendencies which lead us to conclusions we feel justified in bringing to the notice of the Council.

#### VALUE OF THE INDUSTRIAL TALK.

We are convinced that the Industrial Talk does in fact give the children a better opportunity to choose wisely, since it means a closer co-operation between the Juvenile Advisory Committee and the child. A slightly

larger percentage of children under the new scheme have been placed by the Juvenile Advisory Committee (approximately 30% under the new scheme, as compared with 23.8% under the old). Further - and this is even more significant - the number placed in their first job by the J.A.C. is steadily increasing. Since July, 1934, certain schools have been continued under the new scheme, and the figures available for these schools show that, while more than half the leavers between October, 1934, and Easter, 1935, found their own jobs, since the summer of 1935 more than half the total number of leavers have obtained work through the J.A.C. or Skilled Employment Committee. It is worth noting that this increased use of the J.A.C. guidance has taken place in a period when, owing to improving trade, it would have been easy for these young people to have placed themselves without help. Save in exceptional circumstances, the child who is placed by an official agency has a better chance in life, since his first job is selected by someone who has intimate knowledge of the industrial opportunities of the neighbourhood, a knowledge which the child cannot, and his parents are most unlikely to have. The Industrial Talk, too, seems to stimulate the children to seek a greater variety of employment. Thus, in the school mentioned above, which had a certain traditional connection with one firm, it may be of interest to note that the 13 leavers in October, 1935, desired to enter four different trades, viz. the needle trade, printing, box-making and food-packing. At the After-Care Conference these girls had sufficient knowledge of the trades they had chosen to be able to say which particular branch of the trade they wished to enter. They all obtained the work they desired and all but one were placed by the J.A.C. Such variety

of choice compares very favourably with the 33 children who left this same school in October and December, 1932, of whom 14 went to the one firm which had a traditional connection with the school.

#### VALUE OF THE SMALLER CONFERENCE.

The smaller conference too we feel to be an advantage. The child is less shy and more ready to speak up for himself. He already knows each of the four people present, the J.A.C. officer having established a friendly contact at the Industrial Talk. The time spent with each child at the Conference tends to be shorter than under the old scheme and, what is more important, to be of more use. For example, while ordinarily many precious minutes of every After-Care Conference are spent in telling separate boys that printing is a closed trade, this has been already explained at the Talk and the boys have had time to think over possible alternatives. Similarly with other trades, the children already know something of the conditions prevailing.

#### FACTORS AFFECTING THE INDUSTRIAL LIFE OF YOUNG PEOPLE. THE CHOICE OF WORK.

As mentioned above, we feel that the real value of the experiment lies in the mass of information gained by the systematic visiting of a large number of young workers and their parents over a period of rather more than two years. Of all the young persons under supervision, approximately only 40.3% obtained the work they desired. This was no doubt largely due to the industrial depression and does not necessarily indicate the normal state of affairs. Nor, in any case, is it at present as serious as it appears at first sight, for while we allow the child

to leave school at the immature age of 14, he is obviously not in a position to know what he really does want.

The length of time a young worker stays in one job does not seem as a rule to have any connection with whether he originally desired to do that particular work or not. Provided that he has been rightly placed in the general grade of work (clerical, skilled-manual, or manual) for which he is best suited, it is not of great moment whether he obtains any particular branch of that work. It is of far greater importance that he should be sent to a good type of firm where the general conditions and hours of work are good. A start in a poor firm inclines him to think that all work is of necessity dirty and disagreeable, and he is liable to become discontented and work-shy in consequence.

#### PERMANENCE OF ONE JOB.

Of the young workers under observation, approximately 67.2% kept the same job or only changed once during the two years. A comparison of the leavers from various schools inclines us to the conclusion that, while there are many contributory factors, the economic standing of the home plays the most important part in the permanence of the school leaver's job. The child from the poorer family tends to take work with a comparatively large starting wage, and this job is unfortunately the least likely to be permanent. The importance of the economic standing of the home is also emphasised in the figures available for the location of the child's first job.

#### LOCALITY OF JOB.

Of all the children, approximately 44.4% obtained their first work within a mile of the centre of the borough.



This means that they did not go even as far as the City to obtain work. In the poorest district this percentage rose as high as 57.9%. While we agree that other factors contribute to make the child get work near home, we feel that the inability to pay fares necessary and for meals out is the chief reason for the tendency to take a second-rate job near home rather than a good job one-and-a-half miles away.

#### HOURS OF WORK.

In our experience the long hours worked by juveniles are largely responsible for the difficulty of settling down in a job. When we realise that at 14 years children are expected to change from a  $27\frac{1}{2}$  hour week at school to anything from a  $44\frac{1}{2}$  hour to a 60 hour week in a factory, a good deal of apathy and ill-health are at once accounted for.

The long hours worked in shops have been improved recently, but in many cases the young people work till 8 p.m. or later, and, in order to keep within the law, are given free intervals (for tea, etc.) during the day, which is in fact no compensation for the long "spread-over" of the working day.

The length of these young workers' days, however, is short compared with those working in the unregulated trades. Among van-boys, for example, a 12-hour day is by no means uncommon. Thus, in 57 examples of van-work, 10 boys were working a 12-hour day or over; 9 were starting work before 7.30 a.m., and 38 were working such irregular hours that it was impossible to get any definite statement as to when they finished work at night. Two examples may be of interest. In one case the father urged us to

encourage his boy to "stick to his job". We found the boy's discontent was due to the fact that he was working a twelve-hour day, including Saturdays, i.e. a 72-hour week. In another case the father had to call at the firm's premises at 11.30 p.m. to fetch his boy home.

Another evil is the shift system. Among cable messengers and press boys, we found boys working constantly till 9, 10 and even 11 at night. These irregular hours effectually prevent the boys from joining in any organised leisure occupation, and indeed, apart from the effect on the young person's general health and bearing, long hours are, we feel, largely responsible for the general failure to attend Evening Institutes.

#### THE YOUNG WORKER'S LEISURE.

Throughout the experiment the greatest care has been taken to encourage the young people in every possible way to attend Evening Institutes and join Clubs and other organisations. The result has been very far from encouraging.

#### EVENING INSTITUTES.

The registration and attendance of all the young people under the scheme has been checked at the appropriate Institutes, as recommended at the After-Care Conference. This has, as far as possible, been done six months to a year after the young person left school. This checking has shown that over 70% of the school leavers were not registered. About 12% were attending regularly, and the rest so irregularly that they could not possibly be gaining any benefit from their courses of instruction.

## CLUBS.

Careful enquiry among 460 young people (from the schools worked under the new method) who did not register at the Evening Institute shows that 47% of them did not join any voluntary organisation or club during the whole of the two years. About 25% stated that they had attended one particular club for a year or more, and 28% were said to attend one or more clubs spasmodically during that period. Unfortunately it has not been found possible to check their statements, as was done in the case of the Evening Institutes, by inspecting the registers of the Clubs concerned. Such checking would, however, in all probability, have produced even less satisfactory results.

## CAUSES OF POOR ATTENDANCE AT INSTITUTES, ETC.

While we feel confident that the long and late hours of work are mainly responsible for these disappointing figures, and that any remedies, apart from the shortening of the working day, are merely superficial, some other interesting points have emerged. It seems clear that some connection between the Evening Institute and the Day School is an encouragement to regular attendance. Thus, where the Institute is held in the same building as the Day School previously attended, or where a Day School teacher already known to the young people teaches also at the Institute, a larger proportion of those recommended seem to attend.

We have also come to the conclusion that Evening Institute attendance is definitely influenced by considerations of social status, this being not necessarily identical with economic status. Those who normally go to a Commercial or Technical Institute are those from the better homes.

In order to check the accuracy of this impression, the address books of one Institute have been carefully analysed over a period of three years from October, 1932, to July, 1935. The number of young people attending from each street has been counted and the status of the street verified in the modern edition of "London Life and Labour". This has shown that, taking into account all the streets from which five or more young people joined the Institute in any one of the three sessions, 55.4% came from the better streets and 44.5% from streets of a poorer type. Only 6.4% came from streets in which there were no houses of the better kind. On one estate which had flats of both types, 64 young people joined the Institute; of these 48 (75%) came from the better blocks, although these are situated rather further from the Institute.

Taken together, these facts seem to suggest that the social standing of the home plays its part in Evening Institute attendance.

#### HOW LEISURE TIME IS ACTUALLY SPENT BY THE GREAT MAJORITY.

The result of all our enquiries shows that about 50% of the young people have no regular leisure-time occupation at all. Casual enquiries by the After-Care visitors as to what the boys and girls do with their spare time have produced little definite information. Frequently we are told that they "stay at home", but one most experienced visitor has only twice in the course of four years been shown some work actually done as a leisure-time occupation. A visitor who looks up the young people after working hours finds that they are often out after 8 p.m., and the usual explanation given is "out with a friend". But we do not meet many of the young people we are looking for in the

streets. Neither do the parents or the children admit to very frequent visits to the cinema. Usually they say they go once or twice a week. In fact it is an unsolved problem what these young people do with their spare time.

#### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS.

Apart from the young person's history as a worker and as a private individual, we have been able to collect a certain number of impressions as to his general welfare.

#### LACK OF PROVISION FOR MEDICAL CARE.

The evils of the gap between the school medical services and the age of entry into National Health Insurance have been brought to our notice in many cases. Many young people who leave school provided with spectacles lose or break them and often no effort is made to provide others. Even if the parents are willing to get them, too often the young person is sent to a local optician and not to a hospital. Payment for the new glasses is also a difficulty, especially since horn rims became the fashion.

The difficulty of getting time off from work makes the parents and children averse from getting treatment, and the number of hospitals and clinics which are open in the evenings or on Saturday afternoons is exceedingly limited. One boy who was quite anxious and willing to go to a foot clinic could not find anywhere suitable nearer than Southampton Row. The inertia of the parents may be responsible for many minor ailments from which juveniles suffer, but one can hardly blame them for it when one realises the difficulty and cost of obtaining treatment.

#### IGNORANCE ON THE PART OF THE PARENTS.

Unfortunately this apathy is not always limited

to neglect of the physical welfare of their children. It often covers their whole industrial and social life and means that, in fact, the young person has to fight all his battles himself. The parents frequently have no idea what type of work is available for the child on leaving school. The feeling that any job is better than none is still strong in spite of the lifting of the industrial depression. This often leads them to urge the children to take unsuitable jobs. They will ask for dressmaking for a girl with defective sight or garage work for a boy with rheumatism through ignorance that more suitable openings exist.

When the boys and girls are actually at work, the parents often cannot tell the name of the firm and frequently not even the name of the street in which it is situated. This is not due to reluctance to give the visitor the information, for they will offer to ask the children and have the facts ready by the next visit.

This ignorance also covers the rights of the young people as juvenile workers. Perhaps the most striking example we have met was the boy who put his hand in a wood-milling machine and lost his fingers. When we called the boy was receiving no compensation and his parents did not know he was entitled to it. (The matter was referred to a Poor Man's Lawyer and the boy ultimately received £200.) Several cases have been referred to the Trade Board re rates of wages, though it needs much tact to get the parents to agree to this. They are so afraid their child will lose the job in consequence. In very few of these cases is it possible to prove that the firm has paid less than the minimum rate, but, in our experience, the child usually gets a rise as the result of the enquiry.

Once the parents' confidence has been gained, they are also willing to allow breaches of the Factory Act to be reported. But they have very little idea of the protection it affords and, even if they suspect something of being wrong, do not know what to do about it.

#### STATUS OF THE JUVENILE AT HOME.

The juvenile worker has the status of an adult at home because his wages help to keep the family. This means that the parents often have little knowledge of their child's doings, of his friends, etc. Several cases have occurred of the parents asking the visitor to reprimand the children because they had no control over them. Thus the evil effects of long working hours are often combined with a lack of any strong home influence, and these young people are flung into all the difficulties and hardships of industrial life and the temptations of unplanned leisure without there being anyone whose definite job it is to help them.

#### GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AS TO THE USEFULNESS OF SUPERVISION.

By regular visiting it is possible to get the families to accept the After-Care Worker as an adviser and they are most anxious to get help. Of 23 boys from one school who were urged to go back to the Juvenile Advisory Committee for further advice in some difficulty, 18 actually went and were helped. But without the encouragement of the After-Care Worker it is practically certain that they would never have gone. When the visitor lives locally and can give a general invitation to his charges "Come in and see me if you get into any difficulty", the young people do come and a friendly chat with the visitor leads to a more formal visit to the J.A.C. for more expert guidance.

On the final visit the visitor is most frequently thanked and sometimes asked to undertake the after-care of younger brothers and sisters. We have found that one of the most useful visits is this final one. It should be made well after the sixteenth birthday, when the problems arising ~~from that event~~ have had time to develop.

In at least 10% of the cases under supervision it has been possible to give definite assistance in connection with such matters as illegal or unsuitable conditions of work, use of leisure, medical treatment, securing of holidays, etc.

Taken together, these facts suggest that systematic after-care work is much needed. The technical knowledge involved, however, inclines us to the opinion that it should only be undertaken by visitors (a) with sufficient experience of industrial life to appreciate where the difficulties are likely to arise, and (b) who have also established a close personal touch with the experts (J.A.C. Officers, Factory Inspector, Heads of Evening Institutes, etc.) which will enable them to refer their charges to a person and not merely to an organisation. Friendly visiting by people without these two qualifications (however well-intentioned) is not only quite useless, but may easily do harm.

The amount of work involved in systematic visiting and record keeping is far greater than at first sight appears. If an average of 30 children leave any one school each term, and ~~are to be visited every~~ six months for their first two years at work, the visitor must be prepared to pay a minimum of thirty visits per month without allowing any extra visits where special supervision is required. The usefulness of the visit is much decreased if the young people themselves are not seen, therefore all visits should be paid in the



evening. Volunteers who have taken part in the visiting involved in this experiment have, without exception, been much impressed by the interest and usefulness of the work they were doing. This feeling is so strong that in the case of four schools, though the experiment is over, the volunteers are continuing the supervision on the same lines.

In spite of difficulties we would urge the importance of securing skilled supervision of all juvenile workers for at least two years after leaving school. Our experience has shown that, at present, the success or failure of their start in life is largely a matter of chance, since neither they nor their parents are sufficiently aware of all the factors affecting their welfare. They need a friend with more varied experience and accurate knowledge. Skilled supervision, we reiterate, is essential to give a fair start in life to these young people on whom the prosperity of the country ultimately depends.

MARION STELLA PENLEY.