

## Professional Direction

Leon Lyle was appointed superintendent on January 1, 1951. A trained, experienced welfare worker, Lyle had headed a similar, although smaller, home in Ottumwa. He was the first professionally trained person to head the Davenport institution. He began a program to put child care on a professional basis. He placed strong emphasis on child placement, accelerated the in-service training of employees, and began psychological and social service activities at the professional level. His establishment of better screening procedures prior to placement led to fewer returnees.

A year and a half after he took over, Lyle made his first report to the Board of Control:

. . . In recent years there has been a change from the self-contained children's institution, providing only long-time institutional care, to a community and state oriented *children's agency*, giving wider and more inclusive services to Iowa's children. In the following ways, we have attempted to provide these larger services to children. . . .

1. *Care on a more personalized basis* for the children who need and require institutional care for a considerable length of time. . . .

2. *The "screening" of children* — a sorting out process on the basis of individual study of the child — to determine if the child should remain here for care for a longer

period, be referred to another kind of institution, or some other plan for care to be made more suited to the child's individual requirements. . . .

3. *The placement of children* in private foster family homes for adoption, in free homes for education and family living, or for work placement. . . .

To carry out these functions, Lyle asked the board to provide sufficient funds for salaries to hold present staff members as well as to employ additional professionally trained personnel.

Two years later Lyle was able to tell his superiors that "all three phases are going well, aided by the board's action in providing a full-time psychologist, a social worker, a recreation director, and more registered nurses."

After five and a half years as superintendent Lyle noted that "through mutual understanding and good case work practice, many hard to place children — the handicapped, the older children, and the less wanted have been placed." He also was working on a boarding home program:

Much progress has been made in developing a boarding home program for the care of more severely handicapped children and for children with special needs. Institution funds are used to help pay for care of these children who are more in need of foster care than institutional care. Our budgeted money is, therefore, used for care inside and outside the Home, as may be best suited for each child. . . .

He had these comments on the changing needs in institutional care of children:

Other Midwestern states having dependent children's institutions have all changed their programs to meet changing needs . . . Our story in Iowa is more recent, perhaps less dramatic and not yet so well known. But here too, a change has been taking place. The children who now reside in the Home for any length of time are the "retarded" children of "borderline" intelligence and the emotionally disturbed or psychologically damaged, — those in need of special education and individual understanding. These children, especially in the older age groups, are mostly those unacceptable in foster homes and public schools. Other children who may stay longer than usual are the severely physically handicapped and the children of color. In both cases, foster homes are hard to find.

Lyle resigned on September 1, 1960, and was succeeded by James F. Holmes on December 1. Holmes had joined the staff in February of 1953 as a social worker. A graduate of the University of Iowa, he had majored in sociology.

From 1958 to 1960 both Lyle and Holmes noted a rise in the number of children being admitted to the home. They attributed this increase to economic conditions and because the county welfare departments and probation officers were making greater use of the facility. When the population increased to 298 children on June 30, 1960, Holmes reported to the board:

Several years ago, the Annie Wittenmyer Home, as most institutions, was quite crowded. Looking back at previous reports, it seems the crowding was primarily due to lack of an adequate placement program. Children came and stayed. In recent years more children have been plac-

ed which reduced the number of children in residence. It appears now that admissions to the Home are increasing considerably but we have been unable to increase the number of placements at a corresponding pace. Consequently, we have an increased number of children in residence.

As in years past, it was easy to place the placeable children. There has always been a crying need for babies and few in that category remained long if they met adoption requirements. While this is not true for older children, state agents have traveled the length and breadth of Iowa and have been able to place boys and girls in homes—some for adoption, some for board, room, and an education, others on the basis of providing a job.

With the placeable children being sent out almost as fast as they arrived at the home, the institution found that it had left in its care a group partially composed of slow learners or those hard to place.

Many factors contributed to the problems which have developed in connection with this group. Among them are:

By action of the Iowa State legislature in 1963 counties were permitted to use institutional funds to pay for foster home care rather than send children to the institution. As a result fewer children, three months to 10 years, were being admitted as the counties began to develop their own home care programs.

Changes made in Chapter 232 of the Iowa Code in 1965 opened the doors of the Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home to all children found to be dependent and neglected, even though they might also be retarded, disturbed or delinquent. These changes also prohibited sending children under 12 years of age to Mitchellville or Eldora. As a result the younger delinquent children were sent to the Davenport home. Prior to July 1965, there had been some selectivity permitted in the admission of children to the home because the law explicitly restricted the admission of retarded, delinquent, and emotionally disturbed youngsters.

Because of these changes, the home began to receive children of various types, many of them in need of specialized training. Although this training was difficult to provide, because of staff shortages, Superintendent Holmes said, "Being delinquent, retarded, normal, etc., does not in itself mean that they cannot be handled in one program. The type of the institutional program is more essential to good care than the type of child."

Until the 1967 legislature changed the Iowa Code, counties did not pay the cost of veterans' children in the Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home. This resulted in a reversal of benefits. Too many veterans' children were sent to the home when they might better have been placed in foster homes in the county and their care paid for at the county level.

Even educational procedures were caught up in the problems of the changing inmate body. Many of the children in current residence at the home were removed from their schools because of their problems. The majority of them now attend the 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. Thus, there is a lessening need for the lower grades. Holmes sees a great need for an increased professional staff and support and training of such a staff in special education procedures for maladjusted children. He added there is even a need to provide a counseling service in conjunction with classroom work.

Another educational problem calling for attention is that of the educable child. Superintendent Holmes told the writer:

"As the foster home program develops in Iowa, there is less need to plan institutional programs for the normal dependent neglected child. This should make it possible for the Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home to plan for those who really need group care. It is hoped that the Davenport institution can now develop a program of care for educable children who have special problems in adapting to the normal community. These are the children who felt they were rejected due to their inability to keep up with their contemporaries. For that reason their academic and relationship frustration turns into unacceptable aggressive behavior."

Within recent months the state's news media

have reported extensively on the Davenport home's personnel and disciplinary problems. As a result the Board of Control made a thorough investigation into the matter. The Iowa Legislative Interim Committee looked into the problem in October 1966, and at that time, Russell Wilson, chairman of the State Board of Control, told the committee that new legislation was needed in light of today's requirements. He also suggested a law to limit the number and type of children admitted to the home; and that a change be made in the payment for care of veterans' children. (Legislation accomplishing the latter was passed by the 1967 General Assembly.)

As in any publicly-supported effort, there will be those for and those against. Over the years the work and good done by the Iowa Annie Wittenmyer Home and its loyal staff of employees has far over-shadowed any criticism that might be made.

Today the home covers an area of 78 acres. Its extensive farm acreage of some years ago has been sold and the land converted into a subdivision of beautiful homes.

Today as yesterday, the home provides for group living in cottages. The children are provided with an educational program, medical care, recreational facilities, and entertainment.

The maximum capacity today is 315 and an optimum capacity of 250 children. For this the State

of Iowa has made a capital investment of \$1,067,-454.28. The total number of youngsters admitted to the home since that first admission on November 16, 1865, is 12,076.

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During the almost 102 years the Davenport home has been in existence I am sure many of the children complained of the food they were served. Many may have thought they had been abused; others may have complained of the clothing they were forced to wear; and others may have balked at the rules of discipline so rigidly enforced. But these same children also would admit they grew well and strong on the food they ate; that adequate educational facilities were provided and that a well-rounded recreation program solved the problem of leisure time for them.

More than 12,000 children, former residents of the Farmington, Cedar Falls, Glenwood, and Davenport homes, have been given a chance for a new life because Iowans, over the years, have looked out for and supported programs benefiting the less fortunate. Without doubt I will be joined by the entire group when I say, "Thank you, Iowa."

L. O. CHEEVER