

the young man, his past life and character—and the people who wished to adopt the baby.

Under the circumstances it would not have been wise to make the young mother keep her baby, but it did seem wise to help her keep her chance for an education and to help her keep her place in her community. It also seemed right that paternity should be established and the young man made to feel the seriousness of the situation. I believe from the treatment of this case that several people are going to be better men and women,—the parents of the girl, the girl, the man, the foster parents and the baby himself as he grows to realize his place in life. The problems here were not just the adoption of the child. They were the unmarried mother and father, the illegitimate child and the broken-hearted parents.

But shall we say that the local child welfare board can settle back now and feel satisfied that there is nothing more to do? True, there is probably nothing more to do regarding the baby. But what about the girl? Does not the hardest part of the problem come now? Has not the child welfare board the responsibility of helping the girl regain her happy, young girlhood? This fearful experience cannot be wiped out of the girl's mind and soul, but day by day and month by month she must be helped to interpret it sweetly and honestly so that she can face her future normally. What kind of a woman's character the girl has depends now upon what is given to her by the people of her community. Are you members of the child welfare board interpreting your problems in that light? When you have an unmarried mother and an illegitimate child, do you see the relations to the facts which you gain? Do you always obtain enough facts so that you can understand the problems? We must realize that the deep responsibility is put upon us when we are touching in some way one of these children,—when we are helping to mold the future of these children. We are arranging the tomorrows for them. But before doing so we must know what today and yesterday and the yesterday before that has given them. I read recently a quotation which perhaps sums it all up, "The human soul, not the body, should be the starting point of all our labors."

Proceedings of the State Conference of Social  
Work Twenty-ninth Annual Session,  
Sept. 10th to 13th, 1921, Hibbing, Minnesota

SECTIONAL MEETING, TUESDAY MORNING

A STATE PROGRAM FOR MENTAL DEFECTIVES  
*Agnes Crowley, Supervisor, Department for Feeble-minded,  
Children's Bureau*

Work with feeble-minded children and adults is very closely linked up with all other phases of child welfare work. Many of the problems met in the latter field result from lack of proper activity in the former, and treatment in the various phases of case work with children must be based on a complete understanding of the whole subject of feeble-mindedness. We are continually finding among our new commitments in feeble-mindedness cases who have first made themselves know as relief problems, as the parents of neglected children, as unmarried mothers,—and occasionally unmarried fathers,—as delinquent children or dependents, or as a combination of several of the foregoing. The numbers of the feeble-minded necessitate state and even national action, for any effective plan for solving the many problems offered by them is beyond the efforts of a private agency, but because the situation is one in which the majority of social agencies are forced to be interested, it has seemed desirable to bring to you an outline and to solicit your suggestions for a state program for mental defectives.

Our law dealing with the commitment of the feeble-minded which places the patient under the guardianship of the state,—as vested in the Board of Control,—is working on the whole fairly well, though we are still meeting officials who find no room in their mental picture of feeble-mindedness for anything but a helpless idiot and who consider any high grade imbecile or moron as good as the average of the general public,—the officials who can not see that it is these higher grade defectives who are contributing in large measures to the various institutions in the state for the defective, dependent and delinquent classes and who are reproducing their kind in alarming numbers. For the present, however, except in a few minor technicalities, the law relating to the commitment of the mentally deficient is adequate.

However, there is a piece of legislation regarding the feeble-minded which is practically a dead letter and which needs some changes before it can be made effective. That is the law which makes it illegal to marry any feeble-minded, epileptic or insane person. We can never expect to enforce this law as long as we make it possible for license clerks to truthfully assert they have no means of knowing when the person is feeble-minded; in fact they may never see the second party to the marriage, since both do not have to apply for the license. In order to make this law effective, other legislation is necessary and toward that we must bend all our efforts and educate public opinion.

First, we must make possible a survey of the state to locate our feeble-minded. This can be done principally through the examination of our school children and after the first census is compiled it will be a comparatively small task to keep it up to date. At least, one other state has begun such a survey with the idea of keeping a confidential directory of the feeble-minded for official purposes.



Secondly,—and this needs to be done not alone for the feeble-minded group,—we must change our marriage laws so that both parties to the marriage will have to appear when filing an application for a license and so that a few days will intervene between the time the license is issued and the ceremony performed. Many of you will readily call to mind highly undesirable marriages which could have been prevented had there been even twenty-four hours' delay before the ceremony, as contrasted with the occasional alliance we have been quick enough to ward off though the bride was ready in her new organdie dress and the bridal veil was hanging on the wall. May I here comfort those sentimentally inclined by stating that in our experience the bride has not always proved inconsolable over her frustrated plans for matrimony, but has been heard to remark that after all she did not know the man very well and maybe she would not have liked it on the farm to which he planned to take her. These people drift into matrimony in such a casual fashion that separation from their proposed life partners is not always a matter of deep sorrow to them. In fact, many of them drift out of their alliances with as little feeling as they entered them. We recently had an example of this when one of our feeble-minded girls—let us call her Annie—ran away from her employer and was persuaded by an old friend named Maggie not to return. Maggie had a lodger, Bill, whom Annie had met a few times. When she broke away from her job, she was rather at a loss to know just what to do next and as Bill tells it she came into her friend's house one evening when he was there and after exchanging the usual pleasantries with him, suggested that he marry her. Bill was a bit embarrassed at this proposal since he had little ready money and did not consider himself in a position to marry, but as Annie urged him to do it, he finally sought advice from Maggie. Maggie, however, refused to get mixed up in it, so Bill yielded to Annie's entreaties (evidently she thought marriage would remedy her mistake of running away) and in the morning he spent all his cash, some seven dollars, on the wedding.

Another marriage which had even less planning was performed a few years ago at a fair when a feeble-minded girl was persuaded to marry a feeble-minded man just to create a little diversion for those attending the fair. As a result there are now three idiot children awaiting admission to the custodial department of the institution and two or three other children in need of special training and state supervision. This little side show at a small county fair is going to cost Minnesota many thousand dollars.

It is important that our marriage laws be corrected not only to improve the race by the elimination of the mentally defective, but to make it unnecessary for the normal to bear the by no means small burden of supporting such large numbers of the unfit.

Even those most prolific in plans for curtailing the reproduction of the feeble-minded, and eventually eliminating the whole group, admit that we will have the defective with us for a long time to come and that we must train those who are educable and if possible turn some of them from liabilities into assets. This training is offered either by the state in the institution for the feeble-minded or by the public schools. The institution at Faribault, now practically filled to its capacity of nearly 1,800, can not possibly take in all the defective children whose home conditions are so bad or who are themselves so vicious that institutional care is necessary. The state decidedly needs increased institutional facilities for this group. On the other hand, there are many definitely feeble-minded children who

can be safely left at home and trained in the special classes of the public schools. In the larger cities these children are gradually being taken care of, but in the rural districts no provision is made for them and they continue to drag on through the district schools making demands on the time of the teachers which would be more profitably spent on the normal pupils. Of course, while the little red schoolhouse remains a sacred national institution we can not expect school boards to start special classes for the two or three or four subnormal children to be found in each group of twenty or more children collected in the one-roomed schoolhouses. But we should strive for the sake of the normal as well as the defective child to encourage the establishment of consolidated schools with their possibilities for special classes for the feeble-minded as well as for increased opportunities for the other children, and in addition we should make the establishment of special classes compulsory as other states are doing and not allow school superintendents to dismiss the whole subject with the sweeping statement made recently by one of them that there are no feeble-minded children in his county.

Any state program for work with this group of the population needs to include a psychopathic hospital with its facilities for the observation and diagnosis of borderline feeble-minded cases as well as cases of mental disorder and for the training it offers to the medical men who later are called on to act on the boards of examiners in hearings in feeble-mindedness or insanity. Our last legislature could not be made to see the need of such an institution. It is up to us to put that need before the people of the state so that we shall get a psychopathic hospital in 1923.

All our correctional institutions contain a considerable number of delinquents who are mentally defective and non-reformable,—in some institutions the proportion is estimated to be as high as 50 per cent. These persons, who frequently are returned again and again to the institutions, not only serve as a bad influence among the other inmates during their various incarcerations but often commit serious crimes while enjoying their intermittent stretches of freedom. As soon as we recognize this group and make some special provision for the defective delinquents as a class, just so quickly will the reformatories be able to turn to their real business of reforming the reformable.

After the special classes are provided for the trainable defectives and institutional facilities for the custodial cases and defective delinquents, we must turn our attention to the large group of high grade imbecile and moron adults who under suitable conditions can be made self-supporting. Our commitment law makes it possible to place these people under the guardianship of the state, and thus direct and control their activities. To make the guardianship most effective we must have the co-operation of all our child welfare boards and of the communities as a whole in order that we may find the right kind of work, homes and recreation for these people who are under supervision. Many times it is necessary to remove the patient from his old surroundings to new ones, until he is finally adjusted, and to this end the child welfare boards should begin to work out plans so that a patient from one county can be placed in a home and given a new start in another county when a change is desirable. Each community should be made to realize its responsibility toward its defectives and trained to protect, not exploit, them. It should be remembered that the feeble-minded person has not good judgment and is very suggestible, that if the community offers him guidance and protection he will likely be a peaceable citizen but if the community fails in this

