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HEDY'S CORNER . . .

FORMING A PLAY CENTRE

As evenings start to get longer you therefore may find time to be the prime mover for a most worthwhile scheme: a Play Centre. These can be got going in town or country. If there are enough Swiss youngsters around your district, an idea would be to give such a centre a "Swiss flavour" (subject to approval).

Play centres are controlled by the N.Z. Play Centre Federation and the Education Department. The advantage of a play centre over Kindergarten is that it can be started within a few weeks since no large sum of money has to be raised. First of all contact your nearest liaison officer with the request for her expert assistance. The scheme will stand or fall with the goodwill of parents. You need a minimum of ten up to no more than 30 pre-school children for enrolment. A committee of parents must be set up and a hall or other suitable building must be available with adequate outdoor space for activities in good weather. Usually this involves renting. A minimum of toys and equipment has to be collected. Mothers must take part in training so as to qualify as supervisors. Training entails a correspondence course as well as lectures by the University Extension Department and the certificates obtained are "mother helpers", "assistant supervisors" or "supervisor".

For a newly-formed play centre to be affiliated the appointed supervisor must have completed seven chapters of "Children at Play" by A. Grey, as well as possessing a First Aid certificate. Furthermore, a play centre must have been in operation between 3 - 6 months and be approved by the liaison officer and pre-school education advisory officer. Once affiliation is completed the education department pays an establishment grant of \$100 and \$2 per session held thereafter. A small fee is usually asked for each child per term and stalls are held to raise money to cover running costs.

The Federation requires 3-hour sessions to be held twice or three times a week. Children may enrol between the ages of 2½ to 5 years. Staff comprises a supervisor and assistant who must be trained or be in training and be approved by the Association. Mothers help in a roster system during sessions once or twice a month, depending on the roll of children. The ratio is one adult for three children.

Play centre playing is not organised. The equipment is there for the children to experiment for themselves. The staff supervise and guide the children. The one exception is when play involves teamwork, story time or singing in groups.

Next month: "Forming a Kindergarten".

—R.B.