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WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN.

Annual Report for 1959.

For 1959 the Welfare Office again records *increased activity*. Whilst the annual report for 1958 showed 50% more registrations than in the previous year, the increase in the total figure for 1959 was only just under 10%, bringing the number of registrations to 1,700. This figure embraces some 200 cases previously known to us and which had to be taken up again. It must be remembered that the total of 1,700 includes not only the more and less serious cases, but also girls and women who applied to us for information and advice of various kinds. It does not include, however, the many enquiries received over the telephone, unless a "case" resulted. As it was not possible to obtain all particulars in every instance, we have refrained this year from giving detailed figures which, we feel, might be misleading. Our considered opinion is, however, that 75% of the applications came from the German-speaking part, 22% from the French- and 1% from the Romansh- and Italian-speaking parts of Switzerland, as well as 2% from foreign nationals.

Related to the *Cantons* we get the following picture. As in the previous year, the Canton of Berne was leading with 18% of the total number of registrations where the Canton is known at all. Again Zurich came second with 13%. Basle moved up to 3rd place with 8½%, followed by Lucerne with 8%. St. Gall had 7½%, and Aargau with 7% moved down to 6th place. Next came Vaud with 5½%, again the top Canton of the French-speaking part. Thurgau remained in 8th place with 3½%, whilst Valais and Neuchâtel moved up with 3% each, in company with Fribourg, Appenzell and Grisons. Solothurn and Schwyz had 2½% each, Unterwalden and Tessin 2%. Geneva and Schaffhausen improved with only 1½% each. Uri and Glarus had ¾% each and Zug with ¼% came down from 9th place 1958 to the bottom of the list last year. The number of applications from girls of other than Swiss nationality went down to 40, well below half of what we had in 1958.

As regards *denomination*, we must again point out that we were not able to ascertain it in every case. However, just over half the applicants were Protestant and just under half Roman Catholic, with only a handful of others.

When looking at our statistics it is interesting, as well as sad, to note that from amongst the more serious cases most of them concern *girls under 20*. The frightening figure of 8% was made up of girls under 18, whilst 38% covered the age of 18-20. This means that 46% were girls under age. Another 46% related to girls from 20 to 30 years of age. Though we are called the Welfare Office for Girls, our cases in 1959 included 5% of women between 30 and 40 and even 3% of women over 40 years old.

In 1959 we assisted 75 girls with their *return to Switzerland*. Some were cases where the Home Office gave us a time limit and we were then responsible for the girl's departure by that date. A third of this number concerned unmarried mothers, usually before the birth of the baby. This is about the same figure as for 1958. We repatriated 11 girls for reasons of health and 21 because of mental and nervous disorders. We also have to report three attempted suicides. In addition to the girls whose mental or nervous state made repatriation necessary, we also cared for about a dozen girls who had already recovered from some mental strain when they came to us. The number of ten deportations is just over half that of the previous year.

As regards *expectant mothers*, we have to report the same sad story as before. The father was very rarely prepared to acknowledge the child and was often not even known. In most cases the girls were afraid to tell their parents and we are therefore more than grateful to the Swiss Welfare organisations which provided suitable places where these young mothers could stay before and after the confinement.

In addition to the expectant mothers, we had to deal with some ten *babies born here*. Again we have to report that nearly half the children born here or later in Switzerland had coloured fathers. This applies also to the children of Swiss women married in this country who were under our care, most of them in unhappy marriages.

Court and Police cases fortunately went down considerably to 26 (44 last year). On the other hand the number of *home and hospital visits* increased by a fifth and we undertook 150 of these. It can hardly be realised what this meant in travelling-time and fares.

175 girls approached us because of *difficulties in their jobs*. We should like to stress here that these troubles did not arise exclusively because the employers were at fault. Unfortunately, again a great many girls came to England to take up domestic

jobs without having the slightest knowledge of housewifery, indeed many without even being prepared to work at all. In such cases, we often tried to persuade girls to return home. Where a change seemed indicated we referred them to the Anglo-Swiss Employment Bureau with whom we kept the same friendly relations as in previous years. Miss R. Hengstler took over last Summer from Miss I. Wyss who had run the Bureau so capably for many years.

The idea that we were a *domestic agency* still prevailed in Switzerland as well as amongst a host of would-be employers in this country. Over 100 applications came to us from Switzerland alone, most of which we referred to the employment agencies of the "Freundinnen junger Mädchen" and the "Katholischer Mädchenschutzverein".

We also undertook about 100 *domestic post enquiries*. Some were carried out by our own staff or members of the Committee and some by ladies of the Swiss Colony who had declared their willingness to help, and others again with the assistance of the "British Vigilance Association". When the Welfare Secretary's health became affected, Mrs. M. Woods kindly took over the organising of such enquiries and we are very grateful to her. We are also greatly indebted to Mrs. M. H. Ellis who, for many years in the past, again gave invaluable help to girls travelling through Folkestone, either on their return to Switzerland whilst in a bad state of health, or because they were refused landing by the immigration authorities. Many requests for *meeting girls on arrival* had to be declined or passed on to the "British Travellers' Aid Association". Some 250 girls were met at Victoria and London Airways Terminal, half of them by B.T.A.A., 30% by ourselves and 20% by Mrs. M. Liston, a Swiss, who met our arrivals at Victoria every Wednesday. We should like to express our gratitude to her for this help.

In the course of 1959 the *reception hours* were again changed to four times a week by request of the Embassy. As an innovation the mid-week reception was altered to 5-8 p.m., whilst those on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday remained at 2-5 p.m., and, of course, girls were received by appointment at any other time.

The Welfare Office staff, assisted by the President and other members of the Committee, coped with a great deal of *correspondence* with girls, parents, employers and authorities. The filing system was improved, made easier by the introduction of new filing cabinets. Thanks are due to Mr. A. Boller for several pieces of furniture. We are most grateful to him for the generous gift. Some old pieces of furniture, ugly or useless, were sold, and it was at long last possible to make the office more presentable as well as easier to run.

The changes which took place in the *organisation* of the Welfare Office in 1958 began to take effect in 1959. The Welfare Committee held four quarterly meetings — in January, April, July and November — in addition to the Annual General Meeting on March 9th. The Officers, consisting of the President, Mrs. M. Meier, the Vice-President, Mrs. A. Zumstein, the Hon. Secretary, Mrs. E. Knoll, the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. J. Zimmermann, and the Hon. Assistant Treasurer, Mrs. M. Woods, met between meetings and took decisions which the President felt unable to take alone. The spirit of co-operation amongst the officers was at all times friendly and most encouraging. The Committee was joined by Mr. R. E. Maag and Mr. R. L. Thomas in the spring, whilst Miss I. Wyss resigned in the Autumn.

At each quarterly meeting the Welfare Secretary, Miss M. Beerli, who was in charge of the Welfare Office, gave a *report* on the activities and described one or two cases in detail. The President then sent these reports, together with other important facts, to the two associations in Switzerland, "Freundinnen junger Mädchen" and the "Katholischer Mädchenschutzverein", who expressed great satisfaction with such comprehensive information.

The President was in constant touch with the *staff*, whilst the Hon. Treasurer remained in charge of financial affairs. Miss Beerli coped very competently with her difficult task and we are grateful for her unselfish devotion to our girls. During most of the year she had a student trainee to assist her. This additional help was possible owing to the much needed increase in the Federal Subsidy which we enjoyed for the first time in 1959. Unfortunately, each of the trainees could only stay for a limited period and it put considerable strain on the Welfare Secretary to have to train a new person so often. From February to August Miss R. Tomio worked with us, whilst Miss L. Ammann was with us from 1st June to 1st December. In November Miss R. Stuker took over. We should like to express our thanks to all these ladies for their services.

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Early in January Luncheon Vouchers for meals at the Hostel were introduced, which was a welcome addition to the staff's income.

In July Miss Beerli spent her well-earned holiday in Switzerland, where she contacted the two Swiss associations on our behalf. Unfortunately her health did not improve as much as had been hoped and she felt obliged to give notice on 31st October. Steps were taken at once to find a new welfare worker, but we finished the year without anyone in sight.

As in the previous year, the Welfare Office again received *valuable help* from the Swiss Ambassador and from Madame A. Daeniker, our Honorary President. The Committee is very grateful for their unfailing interest and support, and would also like to express gratitude to other members of the diplomatic and consular sections of the Embassy for their assistance. The *co-operation* with the two associations in Switzerland has already been referred to. We again kept up close and friendly relations with the "Swiss Benevolent Society" in London, and we wish to thank them for their assistance, in particular Mr. Zimmermann, their Secretary.

As already mentioned, the *subsidy* from the Federal Authorities was increased, and we are obliged to them for their support, as well as to the Ambassador for his efforts in raising the financial aid. The two associations in Switzerland and the "Swiss Benevolent Society" again contributed financially towards the upkeep of the Welfare Office. We are thus able to finish the year without a deficit, which is most gratifying. On the other hand it must be stated in all fairness that this would not have been possible if we had not had student trainees willing to work for a subsistence allowance only. Nor must we forget that some members of the Committee put in a great deal of voluntary work. At this point one must also remember that we do not get back quite a sizeable amount of money which we advance to deserving cases, or expenses with girls who cannot pay back. The worst offenders, however, are parents and girls of means who have neither gratitude nor decency and conveniently forget to repay and even defiantly refuse.

We are grateful to the Hostel and its Council of Management for putting an office at our disposal, and should like to express thanks to the Wardens, Miss R. Preiswerk and Miss C. Hagenbuch, who were always willing to co-operate. All these organisations were again represented on our Committee, and so were the Swiss Churches in London, with whom we kept in close contact.

The President represented the Welfare Office on the "Assembly of Presidents of Swiss Societies in Great Britain", who took a lively interest in our work. This was shown in particular by their generous donations, which enabled the Welfare Office to have leaflets printed for use in Switzerland. This financial help is all the more creditable as most of our cases concern girls and women who are not members of the Societies but mainly young people who go back to Switzerland.

At this point thanks should also be expressed to the "Helvetia Benefit Society" for a very welcome donation to our funds.

The Editor of the "Swiss Observer", Mr. A. Stauffer, is once again counted amongst our special friends and supporters.

We should like to express sincere thanks to our Hon. auditors, Messrs. A. Sigrist and W. Wagner, for their valuable services.

We are pleased to put on record that, as in the past, the Welfare Office continued to work very well with the British Authorities — Home Office (Aliens Department), Ministry of Labour and National Service, the Immigration Authorities, the Police, the "National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child" — for whose sympathetic attitude we are glad. Amongst many other organisations with whom we had dealings, we should like to single out the "International Travellers' Aid Association".

One of the outstanding events of the year was the *Swiss Fortnight* in October. The Welfare Office took part in a special exhibition at the Hostel on "Welfare Work in the Swiss Colony". The panel, which was designed by the President and beautifully executed by a young Swiss artist, Miss Edith Moor, showed the problems facing a young Swiss girl arriving in England and the best way to cope with them.

The work of the Welfare Office is essential and beneficial. It was felt, however, that the public at home should be better informed, and with this in view the Committee asked the President to prepare an extensive and informative *report for the press* in Switzerland. It was translated into German and French and was widely distributed towards the end of the year. It is too early yet to judge, but already there have been indications that it had the desired effect.

At the end of 1959 the Welfare Office completed its *first ten years of existence*. During that period its growth was more rapid than its founders anticipated. Taking stock, we may be satisfied with what has been achieved and are grateful to those who did

the work, above all to Miss M. Wolfer and Miss M. Beerli. We deplore, however, that lack of funds made it impossible to staff the Welfare Office adequately all the time.

At a moment when most of our Swiss Societies regret their dwindling numbers, our registrations go up. It is wrong to say we hope they will decrease. What we aim at is that our existence and activities get more widely known so that we can help more girls and women; we believe there are still a few hundred in this country in need of our help and advice who have never heard of us. To counteract such an increase we hope that fewer badly equipped and unsuitable girls will come to this country and thus fewer should come to grief. We therefore do not visualise a drop in our figures for the near future.

On the threshold of a new decade we should like to state that the worst worry is not that we may not be able to do the work properly, but the insecurity of our finances. Given an assurance that the federal subsidy will remain at the present level and the income from the supporting associations will not drop, we have every confidence that we shall find the right people to carry out the important work.

Without this assurance, though, we cannot take the responsibility of getting qualified and well-paid staff away from secure positions in Switzerland into insecure jobs with the Welfare Office. If our income were again to be curtailed, the work would suffer badly. We are not prepared to overwork our staff as a rule, nor to go back to a series of young student trainees who get pocket money only and who have to be trained and replaced after a few months, nor to rely on a lot of extra voluntary help. Our aim must be to have two adequately paid welfare workers. Furthermore, we trust that authorities, organisations, official and private bodies and institutions in Switzerland, as well as individuals, will help us in our efforts to spread information and will support us morally and financially. We at our end spare neither time nor effort to help when girls come to us. In our care girls and women in need find something apart from material assistance which, with all due respect, no consular, diplomatic or other official would be able to give them. Our duties are in the first place in the human and humane fields. It is highly individual and exacting work, at times deeply moving, at times exasperating, but it is extremely satisfying and brings its own rewards.

11 Belsize Grove,
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March 1960

Mariann Meier,
President.

COMMITTEE FOR 1959

Honorary President, Madame A. Daeniker; President, Mrs. M. Meier; Vice-President, Mrs. A. Zumstein (Katholischer Mädchenschutzverein); Honorary Secretary, Mrs. E. Knoll; Honorary Treasurer, Mr. J. Zimmermann (Swiss Benevolent Society); Honorary Assistant Treasurer, Mrs. M. Woods (Verein der Freundinnen junger Mädchen); Members, Mrs. M. H. Ellis, Miss R. Preiswerk (Swiss Hostel for Girls), The Rev. D. Voegelin (Protestantische Schweizerkirche), Miss I. Wyss, Monsieur F. Ansermoz (Swiss Embassy), Mr. R. E. Maag, The Rev. C. Reverdin (Eglise Suisse Protestante), Father J. Scherer (Swiss Catholic Mission), Mr. R. L. Thomas; Welfare Secretary, Miss M. Beerli.

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