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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

Annual Report for the year 1970 as presented at the 13th Annual General on 24th May, 1971.

1970 could well be remembered as the year of change for the Welfare Office. The Committee lost three prominent members, namely Madame Keller, Hon. President, Mrs. Ellis, who had been President since 1960 and Mrs. Thomas, Hon. Treasurer. Although the members had been forewarned of the resignations of Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Thomas, which took effect at the last Annual General Meeting, it was quite a shock to them to learn in January from Mrs. Kind that she would be leaving London in the early autumn as her husband had been assigned to a post abroad.

The replacement of Mrs. Ellis presented a real problem, as did a successor to Mrs. Kind, particularly as the latter maintained that any Swiss qualified Welfare Officer coming to London would have to receive a salary equivalent to what she would earn in her own country. This would of course strain the resources of the Welfare Office to the utmost limit and rule out the possibility of engaging a student trainee to assist with the office work or to help out during the holiday period. As a result of the ensuing discussions it was decided to approach Dr. X. Speckert, who was at that time President of the Swiss Benevolent Society, to offer him the Presidency of the Welfare Office and to put forward the suggestion that the Welfare Office be moved to Conway Street where Mrs. Kind and Mrs. Sharp, the Secretary of the Swiss Benevolent Society, who had worked part time at the Welfare Office over a number of years, could be of mutual assistance in time of need, thus eliminating the necessity of engaging extra help for the Welfare Office.

The Committee of the Swiss Benevolent Society were unwilling for Dr. Speckert to assume the Presidency of the Welfare Office but kindly agreed to place accommodation at the disposal of the Welfare Office at 31 Conway Street on the same generous terms as had the Swiss Hostel, namely free of charge and the transfer took place on the 17th April last year. Here one must pay tribute to Mrs. Kind who organised and made all arrangements for the removal of the Welfare Office to its new home.

The excellent relations which have always existed between the Swiss Hostel and the Welfare Office remain unchanged and both organisations continue to work in close co-operation.

The members would wish to place on record their gratitude to the Wardens of the Swiss Hostel and are indebted to the President who has given permission to the Committee to continue to hold meetings at 9 Belsize Grove.

At the Annual General Meeting Mrs. O. Grob, Vice-President of the Committee, kindly consented to take over the Presidency from Mrs. Ellis. The members are most grateful to Mrs. Grob for taking on these duties in spite of being heavily involved in other activities. In order that Mrs. Ellis should not sever entirely her connection with the Welfare Office the members requested her to remain on the Committee as Hon. Vice-President and Mrs. Ellis agreed to do so.

On the same occasion Mrs. Kaeufeler was elected Hon. Treasurer succeeding Mrs. Thomas who had kept the accounts since 1964 and who was shortly leaving London. The members remember with gratitude the valuable services Mrs. Thomas rendered the Welfare Office during her term of office.

During the year under review we were pleased to welcome Mrs. Gyssler to the Committee whilst unfortunately losing the services of Mrs. Baumann who owing to family commitments was unable to find the time to attend meetings.

There were few replies to the advertisement we put in "Sozialarbeit" for a fully qualified Welfare Officer but eventually we received an application from Miss Elsbeth Senn, who was personally known to Mrs. Kind, and her offer was accepted. Miss Senn took up her duties at the beginning of October and Mrs. Kind left the Welfare Office at the end of that month. Miss Senn has proved herself a worthy successor to Mrs. Kind who had given loyal and devoted service since 1966.

Early in November the Ambassador and Madame Keller held a reception at the Residence to bid farewell to Mrs. Ellis and Mrs. Kind, at which small tokens were handed to them in recognition of the splendid services they had rendered the Welfare Office. It was shortly afterwards that it was learned that the Ambassador and Madame Keller would be returning to Switzerland early in the following year so that we would once again be losing our Hon. President. The support of the Ambassador and Madame Keller and the keen interest they have always shown in our activity have been a source of encouragement to all those who work for our cause. We shall miss Madame Keller at our meetings and her practical and helpful guidance.

With regard to the activity of the

Welfare Office, the number of girls contacting the Welfare Officer showed a considerable drop. There was little reduction in actual Welfare cases but the constant changes of Wardens at the Swiss Hostel seems to have had an influence on the number of girls seeking general information or advice from the Welfare Officer. On the other hand, the change of address may have been the reason for there having been fewer visitors as the months following the transfer of the Welfare Office to Conway Street were unusually quiet.

The girls' problems and difficulties followed more or less the same pattern as in previous years. So many of them applying for posts where they have to do domestic work have had little practical experience and it requires much patience on the part of the employer and employee in the initial period. But of course cases do exist where the girls are exploited, particularly when they seek employment through advertisements and not through reputable agencies.

In all there were 14 Court cases, mostly for shoplifting but three for actual theft. At the moment drug offences play a minor part.

Ten girls who were pregnant sought advice from the Welfare Officer. Five of them were hoping for an abortion but three could be persuaded to return to Switzerland to have their babies where we were able to make arrangements for them to receive the help they needed.

Turning to the question of health, the Welfare Office had to deal with

WELFARE OFFICE

for

SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

(For Information, Advice or Help)

31 Conway Street, London, W.1

(Nearest Underground Station:

Warren Street)

Telephone: 01-387 3608

RECEPTION HOURS

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday

2 p.m. to 5 p.m. or by appointment

two deaths. One girl was killed in a road accident and another died from heart failure. Among other cases were appendicitis, cancer, burns and minor accidents in the home. There were six mental cases and all girls were sooner or later repatriated. Seven girls were reported missing, some of whom fortunately could be traced.

Financial assistance was given to 48 girls (4 rail tickets, 8 air tickets, £295.2.1d. in cash, £103.6.9d for fines).

The Committee are extremely grateful for the assistance given to the Welfare Office by the Swiss Embassy, in particular Consul F. Adams, Dr. Ch.

Bruggmann and Vice-Consul Ch. Abegglen, by the Ministers of the Swiss Churches in London and by the Swiss Benevolent Society, not only for their financial support but for the help given by their Secretary, Mrs. Sharp, and the Swiss Hostel. They also very much appreciate the support of the Editor of "The Swiss Observer" and the services rendered to them by the Auditors. London, May 1971

E. Knoll,
Hon. Secretary.
E. Senn,
Welfare Officer.

enough to give the creeps to the most hardy visitor.

A show of superhuman patience

When morning prayer was over, the children separated into three classes under the intensive care of highly qualified nurses. I sat as unobtrusively as I could in one of the classes and could see for myself the truly remarkable degree of patience and devotion with which a nurse was inculcating in her three subnormal patients the most elementary things. Of her three little patients one was an aphasic child. Somewhere in his brain the connection permitting normal speech was broken, with the result that his understanding of things was impaired. His only vocabulary so far was the word "no". For weeks the nurse had painstakingly been teaching him how to say "yes".

I was assisting at what seemed to be a session near to the goal when the child would actually be able to say the word "yes". The nurse, or mistress, as we should call her, was relentlessly repeating "yes", beating the rhythm with two sticks. The child was swaying his head constantly and thoroughly enjoying his tuition. When he produced a sound approaching the correct pronunciation of "yes" the mistress would congratulate him effusively, encouraging him to repeat what he had just done so well. Sometimes he remained without responding, turning his head around. Then the mistress would repeat in a firm voice "Yes! Yes! . . . Say Yes", Robert! . . . No, "Yes"! (taking a mouth piece to drum the word in his ear) "Yes! Yes! Yes! (the child is suddenly distracted) "Look at me, Robert! . . . Say "Yes"! "Yes"! . . . (at which point Robert says the word almost right) "Good boy, Robert! Well done! . . ." And so it goes on—not for too long, however, because the pupil

"NOAH'S ARK":

The Remarkable Life Work of a London Swiss

Many resident Swiss of London, and more particularly the parishioners of the Swiss Church, know of the remarkable work which Miss Alice Hoffmann de Visme, daughter of the late Rev. M. R. Hoffman de Visme, is doing with psychologically disturbed children.

As related in these columns some two years ago, she has founded with her own means a small day centre for children and young adults either emotionally disturbed or suffering from brain damage, aphasia, psychosis or autism, who have been rejected from other specialist establishments and for whom the normal outlet would be the almost certain deterioration of an institutional establishment.

Miss Hoffmann kindly allowed me to be at her "school" during a normal working morning.

The face of abnormality

For anyone who has never been close to abnormal children, the first encounter can be disturbing. When I entered the classroom the children were singing to the sound of a piano, or rather ululating, humming, giggling, twittering and moaning. They gazed at me with gaping faces. A beautiful little boy seated near to me stared at the strange visitor curiously. The morning's work had just begun at *Noah's Ark*. After a short break Miss Hoffmann sat at the old piano again and played a morning hymn. It was accompanied by the cacophonia of a happy class.

One child was gesticulating, another was swaying his head in all directions, another sat looking dumbly before him, another laughed, another buzzed, a little girl just sat quietly and smiled. A coloured child was thumping on the table. The eldest in the class, a 22-year-old boy who had been in Miss

Hoffmann's Day Centre for 12 years sat looking ponderously before him.

The other children present were younger, their average age seemingly under ten years old—all except a girl of Greek origin with a beautiful dark face. She was the only inmate of *Noah's Ark* for which any care within a group was totally inappropriate. She was being specially looked after by one of the nurses in the corner of the room. Her appearance corresponded to the images of madness which horror films and the tales of Edgar Alan Poe have generalised. She was suffering from schizophrenia and epileptic fits and was fortunately still under the influence of the high powered drugs administered to her at the beginning of every day. What was particularly queasy about her was the sight of her skinny and hairy limbs which were immensely strong as well. Coupled with her sad and demential expression, it was



Miss Hoffmann and her assistants at work during a morning class