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"A STUDY OF THE CHANGE IN AVERAGE  
AGE AND DURATION OF STAY OF  
CHILDREN AT THE  
V.F.W. NATIONAL HOME  
EATON RAPIDS, MICHIGAN"  
by  
Albert J. Morris





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DURATION OF STAY OF CHILDREN AT THE  
V.F.W. NATIONAL HOME, EATON RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

by

Albert J. Morris

A PROJECT REPORT

Submitted to the School of Social Work  
Michigan State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree  
of  
MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

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1957

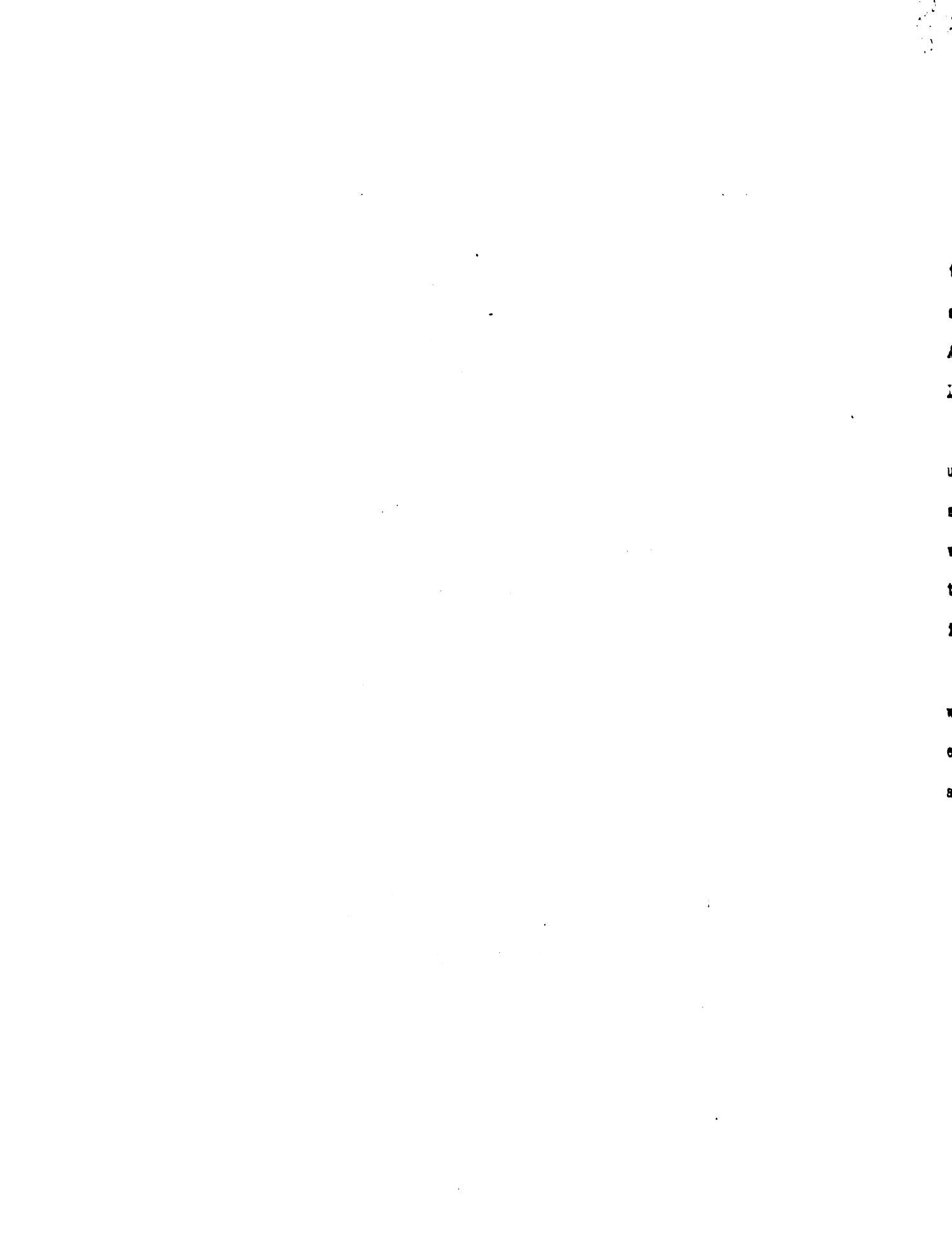
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The writer wishes to express his appreciation to Dr. Lucille Barber for her continuous and helpful suggestions during the course of this research project. Also, he wishes to thank Mrs. Myrtle Reul and Mr. Manfred Lilliefors for their valuable suggestions and assistance.

Needless to say, this study could not have been undertaken without the cooperation and consent of the staff of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home. The writer wishes to express his sincere appreciation for the cooperation and help received. He is especially indebted to Mr. Arthur Wolf, Director of Home Life.

Expression of appreciation would not be complete without mentioning the patience, understanding, and encouragement the writer received from his wife, family, and friends.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Why the Problem Was Selected

The Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home has been of interest to the writer for a number of reasons. Perhaps the paramount reason is the fact that the writer was a resident of the Home for eight and a half years, from February of 1940 to June of 1948. Secondly, the writer is especially interested in the child welfare field, therefore interested in how the institution is and can be used as a successful substitute care program. Last, but not of least importance is the fact that the Veterans of Foreign Wars Home staff has given the writer immeasurable help, not only financially but has maintained a continuous and sincere interest in the writer's endeavors. In addition, they have expressed a desire to learn whether or not the average age and average length of stay of children at the Home has decreased. The writer feels that doing a project such as this will not only stress his interest in the area but will also enable him to do something constructive for the organization that he feels has done a great deal for him.

### Statement of the Problem

At present, Veterans of Foreign Wars resident children are graduating from high school in smaller numbers, giving the impression that more children are leaving the Home before they graduate today than they did ten years ago. This suggests that possibly the average length of stay has decreased within the past ten years. Parallel with the possible decreased length of stay is the idea that if fewer children are remaining at the Home until they graduate, it would seem reasonable to believe that the average age of the children has also decreased within the past ten years. This study is an attempt to determine whether the average age and average length of stay in the Home has decreased, and if so, to evaluate the reasons why there has been a decrease in age and length of stay. An attempt will be made to relate these changes to eligibility requirements and, if possible, to compare what is taking place with the actual corporate function of the agency.

### Preliminary Hypothesis

The average age and average length of stay of children at the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home, Eaton Rapids, Michigan, has decreased because of increased Social Security and Veterans benefits.

### Definition of Terms

In order to clarify some terms, the writer has defined them in the following way:

To care of parents - children released to the care of one or both natural parents.

To care of relatives - children released to the care of one or more relatives other than father and/or mother.

Temporary care - short term care of two years or less.

Eligibility category - categories used are defined by the Veterans of Foreign Wars. See appendix for admission requirements.

Unable to Determine - a phrase used by the writer on the schedule when information could not be secured from records or interviews.

### The Setting

#### Location

The Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home is located twenty-three miles south of Lansing, Michigan, about twenty-five miles north of Jackson, Michigan, and four miles southeast of Eaton Rapids, Michigan, on Highway M188.

#### Origin

Plans for the founding of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Home were first given consideration by the organization's twenty-fifth National Encampment held at Atlantic City, New Jersey, in

September of 1924. An equity valued at \$25,000 in the form of a four hundred and seventy-two acre farm near Baton Rapids, Michigan, was presented to this Encampment by Mr. and Mrs. Corey J. Spencer, of Jackson, Michigan.

In October of 1925, a report from the National Council was submitted, giving a detailed description of this property which was known as the Grand River Stock Farm. Action taken by the National Council of Administration in the acceptance of this property was officially approved by the twenty-sixth National Encampment held at Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1925.

The purpose in creating the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home was to provide a Home for the widows and orphans of disabled and deceased veterans. When founded in 1925, it represented an "ideal stewardship voluntarily assumed by America's foreign service veterans."<sup>1</sup> When the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States pledged itself to this program of child welfare, it followed through on it's program of "honoring the dead by helping the living."<sup>2</sup>

#### Governing Body

The Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home is governed by a board of trustees consisting of ten members with the Commander-in-Chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the

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<sup>1</sup>Your V.F.W. National Home, 1947.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

National Auxiliary President serving as members ex-officio during their term of office. Two trustees are elected annually by the district in which they reside for terms of five years each. The United States is divided into districts and each of the ten trustees represents the district from which they were elected. The Board of Trustees elects its own officers and is also authorized to select an executive or management committee of three or four members, at least two-thirds of whom shall be officers or trustees of the Home and one-third may be members who are not officers or trustees.

#### Physical Facilities

The site occupied by the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home presently consists of six hundred and forty acres of farmland and campus, including about one hundred acres of orchards. In this village, there are now thirty-one two story brick homes for families of six to eight children and their housemother. These individual family sized homes have been limited in size to insure a "more family-like atmosphere."

In addition to the cottages, which are sponsored and built by the many state departments of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, there exists a day nursery, a well equipped and adequately staffed hospital, a spacious and modern community center and 15 acres of playground which is augmented by a divisional swimming pool. The Home has made available a guest lodge which

provides meals and lodging to visiting relatives of children, friends, and visitors at a moderate rate.

Although the children attend religious services of their choice in churches at Eaton Rapids, Michigan, the Home has been furnished with Memory Chapel, a house of worship for children of all faiths. To keep the children in good health and appearance, a grocery store, clothing store, and laundry are all familiar facilities at the Home. To help protect all of these physical facilities, a modern firehouse has recently been added and equipped with a new fire engine.

#### Operating Funds

The three sources of income for the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home are (1) the sale of buddy poppies, (2) the revenue derived from the sale of life memberships in the National Home and (3) through the annual sale of Christmas seals, the only direct appeal to the membership of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and the Ladies Auxiliary.

#### Eligibility Requirements

Children are admitted to the Home providing they meet the following requirements, keeping in mind that in all categories the father or mother must have been a member in good standing of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States, with a continuous membership for twelve months prior to his death or total disability: (1) A child of a father



who is dead or totally disabled. (2) A child of a mother who had foreign service. (3) A child whose mother has died and the father is unable to fully accept the financial responsibility of the child. The father is required to contribute regularly toward the care of such child. (4) A child of a man or woman who is a foreign service veteran, meeting certain conditions as described in the eligibility requirements.<sup>1</sup>

Preference is given to eligible children in the numerical order of the above listed categories. Therefore, in periods of shortage of facilities, children eligible under the first category will be accepted first, then those whose eligibility is determined under the second category and so on.

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix A for copy of eligibility requirements.

## CHAPTER II

### RELATED LITERATURE AND CURRENT OPINION

The child welfare field has continually been perplexed with the many problems confronted in the selection and use of substitute care for children whose parents are unable to adequately meet the needs of the child. These children number into the hundreds of thousands in the United States alone, which is reason enough for an evaluation of the different types of substitute care. This study is related only to one type of substitute care, institutional.

Many as they are, the number of children in this country receiving care in institutions of all kinds is not large when compared with the regiments of homeless children in Europe and Asia, but it is large enough to call for examination of the practices and policies of institutions that are providing care for America's disadvantaged children and for scrutiny of the chief needs of the children they serve.<sup>1</sup>

In order to understand the current philosophy of institutional care, it helps a great deal to review stages of development that institutional care of children have gone through.

In the United States, the first institutions that cared for children were sponsored by religious groups and naturally

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<sup>1</sup>Howard W. Hopkirk, Institutions Serving Children: Russel Sage Foundation, Little and Ives Company, 1944, New York, p. 1.

had a religious motive. These institutions were not solely established for the care of homeless children, but also provided for destitute adults. The Natchez Massacre and subsequent annihilation of the adults of the community was responsible for the first institution for children in the United States, which appeared in New Orleans in 1729. During this period, emotional needs of children were practically unknown. Many such "orphan asylums" were established and were thought to be the answer for care of the "orphan." There was no individual interest in the child and the institutions were crowded with children who were taken into custody from "destitution at home and outrage on the streets."<sup>1</sup>

Other institutions were originated with the purpose of training the child. This era of institutions as schools predominately served only the needs of special groups of children, such as the blind, the deaf, and the mentally retarded child. Part of this philosophy, along with that of the asylum, is present still today. This isolated care, without any type of integration was extremely damaging, since the residents, upon leaving, were often completely unable to adjust to conditions outside the institution. This overly protective environment was later recognized as being more harmful than good and it's presence today is usually combined with an integrated program.

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lois Pyles, Institutions for Child Care and Treatment, Child Welfare League of America, 1947, p. 8.

Recognition of the extreme importance of family life was an impetus for providing institutions with the idea of supplanting dormitories with small and more individualized cottages. This practical move from large dormitories was instituted with the idea that it would help to create a more homelike atmosphere.

The cottage plan has become very popular in the institutional field and is usually quite appealing to the institutional governing bodies as well as the lay public. Nevertheless, its appealing factors have also raised some problems. Many times the institutions have developed the cottage system without incorporating the other basic changes that help create a more homelike atmosphere. Institutions that have twenty to twenty-five children in a cottage are actually defeating the purpose of changing the dwelling units. A good example of how the cottage system should work in relation to its purpose is illustrated by the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home. This institution incorporated the cottage system. Each of the cottages house between six and eight children. The Home has never used the dormitory system.

Institutions have gone through these different stages of asylum, school, and "homes", and parts of each have been incorporated into our institutions of today. Some of these institutions have actually become a part of "modern social work."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mary Lois Pyles, Ibid., p. 9.

We can then begin to think today in terms of another stage, the institution as a social agency. Children in institutional care need special social services. Their placement has come about because of some social problem, whether it be divorce of parents, death of parents, institutionalization of parents or some other cause. This necessitates use of professional skills as offered by social workers as well as skills offered by the other professional people.

#### Current Opinion

Social workers have been concerned with foster homes versus institutions for a number of years. It is generally agreed that the determining factors of placement center around the specific needs of each child rather than the superiority of one type of substitute care over another. This is not to say that the merits of a particular foster home or institution should not be carefully scrutinized, but the decision of placement should be based on the individual ability of the foster home or institution to meet the needs of the particular child in mind. This idea has taken a long time to develop. In the "asylum" days, it was felt that all dependent and neglected children should be placed in institutions. This idea was prevalent for many years and is responsible for stereotyping the institution as a dull, drab, dingy building that housed children and practically worked them to death. Whether we like to admit it or not, these

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Children in institutional

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things are still associated with the word "institution" by many lay people. This idea is well illustrated by the movie "Joe's Kid", which is used by the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home as an educational film, describing what one man thought the Home was and what it actually is. However, more people are beginning to realize the role of the institution in the child placement field. Today it is recognized that both substitute care programs have their own place and should be used accordingly.

#### Age

In using institutions, age becomes a very important factor. In reviewing the literature, the general consensus seems to be that younger children should not have permanent residence in institutions. The term, younger child, seems to range from zero up to six years. Henrietta Gordon goes even higher than this. She states:

Social workers are generally of the opinion that no children under six years of age, and preferably none under eight, should be placed in institutions. Institutions with well planned service programs do not accept very young children, believing that during the earliest years infants and young children need the protective personal relationships of family life.<sup>1</sup>

Rene Spitz, in his articles on hospitalism and anaclitic depression vividly describes the effects on an infant

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<sup>1</sup>Henrietta L. Gordon, Casework Services for Children, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1956, p. 194.

that does not have a love object. He speaks of the love object being either the natural mother or a substitute person. His remarks regarding institutionalization of infants are self explanatory. He states:

Deprivation of infants, during the first year, of love objects for a prolonged period, should be strenuously avoided. Under no circumstances should they be deprived for over three months of the love objects, during the second half of their first year.<sup>1</sup>

Some people feel that temporary care of the young child is not particularly damaging but at the same time, nobody really seems to define the term, "temporary". Some speak of it in terms of days, some speak of months and a few suggest temporary care as meaning anything up to two years.

In a letter directed to the Child Welfare League of America, the writer requested information regarding current thinking in the area of average age and average length of stay of children in institutions. Henrietta Gordon, Director of Information and Publications, stated in her reply that between two and three years is about the maximum length of time that institutional care is helpful to children. She further states:

In our surveys and consultations, we advise an agency that if a child has been in an institution for two years, the situation should be reviewed in order to make sure that the institution has the

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<sup>1</sup>Rene A. Spitz, "Anaclitic Depression" in Psycho-analytic Study of the Child, International Universities Press, New York, Vol. 11, p. 333.



kind of service the child needs and that there are valid reasons for his stay being prolonged beyond two years.<sup>1</sup>

Most workers in the child welfare field think of the institution in terms of care for the adolescent. During this period, the adolescent is usually seeking companionship with his peers and at the same time he is exerting and developing what we call his independence. This is the time when he is usually having difficulty with parental controls. With the combination of these factors, group life in an institution becomes a practical and constructive thing and in many cases is extremely beneficial to the adolescent.

The question of whether or not families should be kept together, is closely aligned with the idea of whether or not boys and girls should live together in institutional housing. The current feelings in this area are well expressed by the Child Welfare League, which suggests:

The institution should accomodate both boys and girls, so that brother and sister groups may be kept together and so that all the children may have the advantages of associations including both the sexes. The exceptions to this are, of course, those institutions organized to give special training to the adolescent, and others caring for children who particularly need to be segregated for the time being. Admission requirements with reference to age should be sufficiently flexible to facilitate keeping

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<sup>1</sup>Personal letter written by Henrietta Gordon to the writer on April 16, 1957. See Appendix B.

the children of the same family together.<sup>1</sup>

Mary Lois Pyles, in her pamphlet Institutions for Child Care and Treatment, specifies the types of children who need institutional care. These include:

- a. Those in no emotional state to take on foster parents. Some children have been so hurt by rejecting parents and disrupting family experiences that they cannot be receptive and responsive to foster parents and family living....because adolescence is a period of becoming independent of close parental ties, institutional care may be helpful to some children of this age who must live away from their own homes.
- b. Children of school age who have love and security from parents who cannot maintain a home for them.
- c. Children whose parents cannot accept foster parents.
- d. Those who are so untrained that they cannot fit into a private family.
- e. Socially retarded children who may find opportunity for self-expression, broadening of personality and the gaining of success and recognition through some of the activities which can be provided in the institution.
- f. Children who need special facilities for diagnostic observation and study and consistent coordinated treatment.<sup>2</sup>

In essence, she states that institutions are not good

<sup>1</sup>Howard W. Hopkirk, op. cit., p. 47 (citing Standards of Foster Care for Children in Institutions, Child Welfare Publication, 1947, p. 9.)

<sup>2</sup>Mary Lois Pyles, op. cit., p. 15-16.

for most children under school age, total orphans because of their need for a family and family life, and any child who needs extensive individualized care.

There is the general feeling that most institutions are gradually working toward temporary care of the child and although there is strong and loyal support for the organizations behind the institutions, the staffs are more generally backing short term care as the ultimate in the institutional program.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The writer used case records augmented by a card catalogue maintained by the Home which summarized information on the cases. Personal interviews were also used to supplement written information.

After realizing the large number of children who had left the Home since 1925, the writer decided that in order to get a reasonable number of cases, a sampling would have to be made. In order for the sampling to be as near typical as possible, it was decided that certain war years could not be included. If they were included, the validity of the study could be contested on the grounds that the age and length of stay at time of discharge would not be valid due to the many unusual circumstances of the war years. Again it was decided that the first year of the comparative analysis should be at least ten years after the Home came into existence. It was further decided that the first year of the comparison should be after the depression and before Social Security benefits came into existence.

Lack of knowledge of facilities and lack of facilities in general at the Home, could well have limited the number

of applications for younger children. Actually, the day nursery was not built until 1945, which in itself points out that the emphasis on care of the younger child was not realistic until that time. The use of this added facility would naturally lower the average age but at the same time, the writer had question as to whether or not this would affect the length of stay.

In order for a comparative analysis to be made at ten year spans, the years of 1936, 1946, and 1956 were chosen as the sample years to be used. The writer is uncertain as to the reliability of using the year of 1936 as the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home had been in existence only a little over ten years, but to make a comparative analysis of years of equal separation, it was necessary to do this. The figures that were compiled by the writer have been augmented by statistics that were available at the National Home. Statistics for the year of 1955 had been compiled in regard to average length of stay, which will give an even clearer picture of the statistical breakdown of the years of 1936, 1946, and 1956. Other statistics that were available were those concerning average age. These figures were for the year of 1955 and July of 1956. This breaks down the last two years in terms of average age for each six months, which should make the comparison much more meaningful and will make it as current as is possible.

After a selection was made of years to use, the writer attempted to determine what factors were in evidence that would help decide what date should be used in determining the average age during these years. It was decided that the average age of those in residence on December 31, of the three selected years, would be in conjunction with figures used for average age that had been compiled by the Home. Length of stay was figured by including all who had left the National Home during these three sample years.

The schedule used consisted of six major questions which covered relevant areas of material needed for the study. These were birthdate, date of admission, date of discharge or release, circumstances at discharge, eligibility categories for which they were admitted, and for those released to their parents or relatives, conditions under which they were released. The first three parts of the schedule seem to be self-explanatory. The question of "Circumstances at Discharge" was broken down into eight minor parts. These were: (1) Released to Parents (2) Graduated (3) Went into the Armed Services (4) Deceased (5) Released to Relatives (6) Married (7) Other (8) Information not Available. If either released to parents or released to relatives, it was necessary to delve further into the case material to determine why the parent or relative was able to take the responsibility of the child's care at this time and not able to at the time of admittance of the child. The writer felt

that this would clarify whether or not any decrease in the average age and average length of stay was due to increased social security and veterans benefits.

The question regarding eligibility category was used to determine whether or not a change in eligibility requirements was partly responsible for changing either the average length of stay or whether or not it had any affect at all.

A trial schedule was used as a testing device which enabled the writer to determine whether or not all the needed information would appear on the completed schedule. The trial schedule satisfactorily proved that the schedule would be sufficient for all the information that would be needed in completing the study.<sup>1</sup>

A great deal of the information that was gathered came from case records and a card catalogue pertaining to the case records. This catalogue had information such as birthdate, date of admission, date of discharge or release, and other information taken from the case records. This information was supplemented by personal contacts with housemothers, the managing director, the director of family life, the assistant director, and one of the past managing directors.

To secure current information and attitudes toward institutional care of children, the writer requested informa-

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix C for a copy of the schedule used.

tion from the Child Welfare League of America. Particular emphasis was placed on average age and average length of stay. The writer requested information concerning other studies and literature available. A copy of the letter sent and the reply can be found in the appendix.

The material secured was subject to statistical analysis. This analysis was done mostly through tables and comparison of relative figures of the sample years that were used.



## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Decrease in Average Age

On December 31, 1936, there were 145 residents of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home. Considering all the children who were residing at the National Home on this date, their average age was figured to be 11.8 years. Broken down into age groups, as is done in Table 2, there were no children under one year of age residing at the National Home at that time. This same fact is evident in the years 1946 and 1956.

On December 31, 1946, there were 144 residents of the National Home. The average at this point was increased by two-tenths of a percent, in that the average age was 12.0 years. Although there is a slight increase in average age, its significance is of little value in looking at the entire picture.

In 1956, there was a noticeable increase in those residing at the National Home. In comparison to the 145 and 144 in 1936 and 1946 respectively, the number in 1956 jumped to 172. The actual high for that year was 175. At this time, the average age dropped to 10.4 years of age.

This was not a sudden drop. Within the past few years the drop has been noticeable to the staff of the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home and is quite clearly brought out by this study.

On December 31, 1955, the average age had dropped from 12.0 years in 1946 to 11.1 years. Again, as of July of 1956, the average age took another drop from 11.1 years at the end of 1955 to 10.5 years. Then, as pointed out above, the average age in 1956 again was decreased to 10.4 years of age.

TABLE 1

AVERAGE AGE OF CHILDREN IN THE VETERANS OF  
FOREIGN WARS NATIONAL HOME  
December 31, 1936, 1946, 1955, 1956

| Year                    | Average Age in Years |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1936 .....              | 11.8                 |
| 1946 .....              | 12.0                 |
| 1955 <sup>1</sup> ..... | 11.1                 |
| 1956 .....              | 10.4                 |

<sup>1</sup>Figure taken from National Home statistics.

The actual comparison realistically describes that although 1936 and 1946 were relatively equal in average age and total residents of the National Home, in 1956 there was a significant change in that the average age decreased by approximately one and a half years and the total number of

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children in residence increased by 23 or an increase of 10.3 percent. The possible reasons why there is a decrease in average age of children at the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

TABLE 2

AGE OF CHILDREN AT THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN  
WAR NATIONAL HOME  
December 31, 1936, 1946, and 1956

| Age              | Number |      |      | Percent of Total |       |       |
|------------------|--------|------|------|------------------|-------|-------|
|                  | 1936   | 1946 | 1956 | 1936             | 1946  | 1956  |
| Under 1          | 0      | 0    | 0    | 0.0              | 0.0   | 0.0   |
| 1 through 3 ...  | 4      | 7    | 10   | 2.8              | 4.9   | 5.8   |
| 4 through 6 ...  | 8      | 13   | 25   | 5.5              | 9.1   | 14.5  |
| 7 through 9 ...  | 27     | 23   | 49   | 18.7             | 15.9  | 22.5  |
| 10 through 12 .. | 41     | 31   | 43   | 28.2             | 21.6  | 25.0  |
| 13 through 15 .. | 46     | 40   | 23   | 31.7             | 27.7  | 13.4  |
| 16 through 18 .. | 19     | 30   | 20   | 13.1             | 20.8  | 11.6  |
| 19 or over.....  | 0      | 0    | 2    | 0.0              | 0.0   | 1.2   |
| Total .....      | 145    | 144  | 172  | 100.0            | 100.0 | 100.0 |

At the end of 1936, there were only four children residing at the National Home who were in the age group of one through three. In 1946, it had almost doubled and in 1956, there were ten in this age group. The number in 1956 was more than three times as high as it was in 1936. In general terms, children under seven comprised 6.3 percent of



those residing at the National Home in 1936 whereas in 1946 it was 13.8 percent and in 1956 a total of 20.3 percent were within the age range of zero through six. These findings are contrary to the general feelings within the child welfare field. That is, the idea that children under six or seven years of age should not be placed in an institution, generally speaking, is the voiced attitude of the child welfare workers. These prevalent ideas are based on the assumption that infants and young children need the protective personal relationships of family life which are almost impossible to get in an institution.<sup>1</sup> This is not saying that the institution cannot meet the needs of some younger children on a temporary basis, but that discretion should be used on the basis of the needs of the child rather than the ideas of superiority of one child care agency against another. The age factor is well exemplified in the following quotation:

The most important limitation of institutional care imposed by age of the children to be admitted is that relating to little children. Babies and children of two and three years should not be cared for in institutions, except as a temporary measure and then only if the quality of care given equals the medical safeguards of a high grade children's hospital. Even with the best medical set-up it is not possible for the institution to give the little child the vital experience of continuous loving care by an individual to whom the care of the child fills a need.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Henrietta Gordon, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>2</sup>Howard W. Hopkirk, op. cit., p. 9.

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There has been a trend during and after the war years toward increasing referrals to institutions of very young children. Taking this into consideration and also the fact that the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States is totally composed of service veterans, this increased care of younger children is not as surprising as it would be in a non-veteran sponsored program.

Table 2 points out that this institution handled more teenage youngsters in proportion to total population in 1936 and 1946 than it did in 1956. In respective order, the percentages read 41.3, 48.6, and 26.1. However, in 1936 and 1946, there were no children in the age group of 19 or over. In 1956, services seem to have been extended to include those in this age group of 19 or over who had not yet graduated from high school.

#### Length of Stay

In 1936, the average length of stay of those residing at the National Home was 5.3 years. However, in 1950, the average age dropped seven-tenths of a year to make the average length of stay 4.8 years. In 1956 there was still another drop of eight-tenths of a year to bring the average length of stay to 4.0 in that year. This change of nearly a year and a half less in length of stay is an important change in the program of the Home.



TABLE 3

AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY OF CHILDREN  
WHO LEFT THE NATIONAL HOME DURING  
1936, 1946, 1950, 1956

| Year                    | Average Length of<br>Stay in Years |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1936 .....              | 5.3                                |
| 1946 .....              | 5.5                                |
| 1950 <sup>1</sup> ..... | 4.8                                |
| 1956 .....              | 4.0                                |

<sup>1</sup>Taken from National Home statistics.

Total number of children leaving the National Home during these sample years was quite different. In 1936, 19 children left care for various reasons, which will be described later. Of these, none had been in care under one year. Only seven were under four years in length of stay, whereas in the comparative year of 1956, the entire average was 4.0 years. However, in 1936, there were no children who left the Home whose average length of stay exceeded 12 plus years. This was not true in the other comparative years.

The year of 1946 showed 16 as the total number of children released. Table 4 shows that seven of the 16 were in care less than four years. Going a little further 12 of the 16 were released after being in care less than seven years. These figures indicate that children's length of stay had decreased over the year 1936 but one-fourth of the

children were in care for more than seven years and one child had been in care for at least 16 years.

In 1950, 27 children were released from the National Home. Although eight of these were in residence for more than seven years, 19 were in care for less than seven years.

TABLE 4

LENGTH OF STAY OF CHILDREN AT THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS NATIONAL HOME IN THREE CONSECUTIVE YEARS

| Years             | 1936 | 1946 | 1956 |
|-------------------|------|------|------|
| Under 1 .....     | 0    | 2    | 12   |
| 1 through 3 ....  | 7    | 5    | 5    |
| 4 through 6 ....  | 4    | 5    | 2    |
| 7 through 9 ....  | 7    | 1    | 4    |
| 10 through 12 ... | 1    | 2    | 2    |
| 13 through 15 ... | 0    | 0    | 2    |
| 16 through 18 ... | 0    | 1    | 0    |
| 19 or over .....  | 0    | 0    | 0    |
| Total             | 19   | 16   | 27   |

Of these, 12 were in care for less than a year.

Table 5 breaks down the releases into age at time of admission as related to length of stay.

These figures seem to have tremendous significance. Of the 19 in care for less than seven years, nine were under

seven years of age at admittance. Six of these lines were in temporary care for less than two years. Four of the children, or 44 percent were in residence less than a year. However, there were still three children who were admitted under seven years of age who were in residence for 10 years or more.

TABLE 5

AGE AT ADMISSION AS RELATED TO LENGTH OF STAY OF CHILDREN AT THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS HOME, DECEMBER 31, 1956

| Age in<br>Years at<br>Admission | Length of Stay in Years |          |          |          |          |          |               |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|
|                                 | Under<br>One            | 1        | 2        | 3-5      | 6-8      | 9-11     | 12 or<br>Over |
| Under 1                         | 1                       | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0             |
| 1 through 2 .....               | 2                       | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0             |
| 3 through 4 .....               | 1                       | 2        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        | 1             |
| 5 through 8 .....               | 5                       | 1        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 1        | 1             |
| 9 through 12.....               | 1                       | 0        | 1        | 1        | 5        | 0        | 0             |
| 13 through 16.....              | 2                       | 0        | 1        | 0        | 0        | 0        | 0             |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>12</b>               | <b>3</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>1</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>2</b> | <b>2</b>      |

These holdovers from the past do not represent current practice. In 1956, 27 children were released from care. In this year, 17 of these children represented less than 19 years of care which would have dropped the average length of stay to approximately one year. Eight of the remaining ten children

accounted for approximately three-fourths of the years of care given in this group. That is, eight children represented 78 years of care out of a total of 108 years of care. These children who had been accepted for permanent care, were responsible for raising the average length of stay to the point where it does not represent current practice. Current practice more clearly represents standards recommended by present day child welfare practices.

This trend toward temporary care of the younger child is responsible for the drop in average length of stay. This helps to explain why more younger children were in residence in 1956. (See Table 2) Many of the 20.3 percent of the children that were within the age range of birth through six years received temporary care. This is directly related to the philosophy of child welfare practice which advises that if a child under six is placed in an institution, he should be maintained in the institution only until permanent plans or plans for foster care are made.<sup>1</sup>

#### Eligibility Requirements

Prior to 1952, all children were admitted to the Home under the first eligibility category where the father was either deceased or totally disabled. In 1936, four of the children who were discharged were accepted for care on a temporary basis only as their father was not a full pledged

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<sup>1</sup>Personal letter written by Henrietta Gordon to the writer on April 16, 1952. See Appendix B.

member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. The other 15 that were discharged in that year were all admitted under eligibility category number one, where the child's father was deceased or totally disabled. The same was true of the 16 children discharged in 1946. The discharge figures for 1955 were quite different. In that year, 15 children were admitted under category number one. One child was eligible under category number two, where his mother was a foreign service veteran. Nine children gained admittance through category number three, in which the child's mother had died and the father was unable to accept the financial responsibility of the child. Also, admission information was not available on two children who left the Home in 1955.

TABLE 6

ELIGIBILITY OF CHILDREN AT THE VETERANS  
OF FOREIGN WARS NATIONAL HOME  
AS OF DECEMBER 23, 1955

| Circumstances                 | Number of<br>Children | Percent<br>of Total |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Father deceased.....          | 68                    | 37.6                |
| Mother deceased.....          | 33                    | 21.9                |
| Father disabled.....          | 30                    | 17.3                |
| Mother out of<br>picture..... | 20                    | 11.6                |
| Total orphans.....            | 20                    | 11.6                |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>173</b>            | <b>100.0</b>        |

Sources: Table prepared by V.F.W. Home.

As a comparison with the three selected years, Table 6 breaks down the number of children at the Home as of October 23, 1956, into the circumstances of eligibility. These were the latest figures available. As would be expected, because of the eligibility priorities, more children were eligible for admittance to the Home on the grounds that the father was deceased.<sup>1</sup> This group, comprised of 65 of the total 173, consisted of 37.6 percent of the total number of children at the Home on this date. These children would be eligible under category number one. Those who were admitted where the father was disabled would also be classified in eligibility category number one. Of this group, there were 30 or 17.3 percent of those residing at the Home at that time. Also included in category number one would be the children who were total orphans, being eligible on the grounds of the mother's or father's death. Possibly some of these children would also be eligible under categories two, three, and four, if certain conditions existed as described in the eligibility requirements. There were twenty children who were considered as total orphans; a classification that comprised 11.6 percent of the total. Actually, considering the father deceased, father disabled and total orphans, those eligible for category number one includes 115 of the 173 who resided at the Home on this date. This group is 66.5 percent of the total population. The other 33.5 percent would be



distributed among the other eligibility categories. These figures were not broken down further, so it would be impossible to determine the number or percentage that would fit the other individual categories.

Table 7 breaks down, by years, the circumstances at discharge, that is, under what conditions the children were released from the Home.

There doesn't seem to be a significant difference in any of the years, with "to care of parents" being the major reason or circumstance at discharge in all three years.

TABLE 7

REASONS FOR RELEASE OF CHILDREN FROM  
THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS NATIONAL HOME  
IN 1936, 1946, 1956

| Reason for Release        | 1936      | 1946      | 1956      |
|---------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| To care of parents .....  | 11        | 9         | 13        |
| Graduated .....           | 5         | 2         | 3         |
| To service .....          | 0         | 1         | 3         |
| To care of relatives .... | 1         | 3         | 4         |
| Married .....             | 0         | 1         | 1         |
| Deceased .....            | 0         | 0         | 3         |
| Information not available | 2         | 0         | 0         |
| <b>Total</b>              | <b>19</b> | <b>16</b> | <b>27</b> |

Since many of the reasons, such as graduated, to





service, and so on, are quite self-explanatory, the writer found it necessary only to delve deeper when the reasons for the discharge were "to care of parents" or "to care of relatives". Information for all three years was about the same although in 1956, "unable to determine" was marked for only two of the cases, whereas in 1936 and 1946, it was five and nine respectively.

In 1956, there were seventeen children that were released either to the care of parents or relatives. These are broken down as follows:

- (1) Older sister took over support - 1 child.
- (2) Mother remarried - 3 children.
- (3) Sponsoring Veterans of Foreign Wars Post and friends helped arrange for a job and apartment after the mother and children had resided at the Home a short time - 4 children (two families).
- (4) Step-father remarried and took over the care of the child.- 1 child.
- (5) Decision by the Board that the family was ineligible - referred to Catholic Family Service Agency - 3 children.
- (6) Mother and father reunited - 3 children.
- (7) Unable to determine - 2 children.

The above reasons do not bring to the foreground any mention of Social Security or increased veterans benefits.

Perhaps these benefits were made available for the two families that were helped by the sponsoring post or for the one child whose sister took over his care. Whether this was true, the writer was unable to determine either by use of the case record or by interviews with staff members.

In 1936, there were 14 residents who were released during the year to their parents or relatives. The reasons didn't seem to indicate any significant difference from those in 1956. There were two children who left and the mother began receiving Mothers Aid. Three children were released when their father remarried and four children were released, after being in temporary care, when their father received some type of bonus. It was not determined whether the bonus was service connected or not. The findings for 1936 also indicated that there were five children released during the year where no information was available. The writer was unable to determine what enabled the parents to remove the children at this time when they previously were unable to care for them.

Results for the year 1946 were very similar to the other sample years. Of the sixteen releases, twelve were released to a parent or relative. In one case, the mother secured employment and started receiving Social Security benefits for the child. In another instance, an older

sister was able to care for the child. A mother's remarriage enabled two children to return to their parent and, like the other years, the writer was unable to determine what improved economic conditions were to warrant the release of nine youngsters, or if it was a matter of improvement.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study is to determine whether the average age and average length of stay of children at the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home has changed and to evaluate the findings.

The hypothesis assumed that the average age and length of stay in the Home had decreased due to increased Social Security and veteran's benefits.

In evaluating the data, it was found that from 1945 to 1956, the average age had dropped from 12.0 years to 10.4 years, a decrease over a year and a half. This was not a sudden drop as the year 1955 had an average age of 11.1 years.

There was evidence that the average length of stay had also decreased. In 1946, the length of stay averaged 5.5 years, whereas in 1950 it was 4.8 years. It again dropped in 1956 to 4.0 years. Therefore, average length of stay decreased by almost a year and a half.

In the 1956 sample group more younger children were in care than in the other sample years. In the former group, care was extended to include those beyond their eighteenth

birthday who had not yet graduated from high school.

Again in 1956, a large number of the children discharged were in care for less than one year. When this was broken down to age in years at admission, it was discovered that all but two of the eight children who were admitted when they were four or under were in temporary care.

The data also revealed that there was a change in eligibility requirements which was partly responsible for the population increase in 1956 to 172, whereas in 1936 and 1946, the population was 144 and 145, respectively. This increase was also partially due to increased housing facilities.

When breaking down reasons for release, the data showed that in all sample years, "to care of parents" was the most frequent reason at discharge. Therefore, it could not be demonstrated that increased availability of Social Security or veteran's benefits influenced the number of parents who were able to care for their children in their own home.

In relation to this, the writer attempted to break down this information further to find out why the parent was able to assume responsibility for the care of the child at his release and was unable to at the time of the child's admission. As this information was not available in the case records, the writer was unable to determine whether

increased Social Security or veteran's benefits enabled more parents or relatives to resort to temporary care only, thus accounting for the reduced age and length of stay.

In comparing Table 4 and Table 6, it becomes apparent that the Home attempted to give only short time care to the very young child. This is in agreement with current thinking and current literature to a certain degree. The current attitude is that no children under six, and even under eight, should be placed in an institution. However, the feeling seems to be that if a very young child is placed in an institution, it should definitely be on a temporary basis.

It would appear that the staff at the Home does recognize the difficulties involved in accepting the younger child for care. Length of stay of the children indicates a continuing trend in the direction of good child welfare practices but without more information the writer was unable to further analyze this. Nevertheless, the data does point out that a few cases of children being in care for 13 and 15 years has raised the average length of stay to a point where it does not realistically represent current practice. Holdovers from former practice of long time care include eight children who represent 78 years of care out of a total of 108 years represented by the study group of 1956.

Without more information on the intake process, it was impossible to tell how the staff justified the care of children for periods beyond two years. Perhaps the evaluations were made, but there was no indication in the case records of the basis on which this was done.

The writer was unable to tell whether or not Social Security or veteran's benefits was responsible for the change in average age and average length of stay. However, this study seems to imply that there has been a change in philosophy of intake. The data that was analyzed for the year of 1956 seems to point this out, as there is a noticeable change - decrease in average age and average length of stay.

The writer feels that another study would be needed in order to draw more definite conclusions concerning intake procedures and planning at discharge of children. Perhaps another study could be focused on contacting those who were discharged to determine whether or not Social Security and veteran's benefits were factors in the increasing tendency to ask for more temporary care at the Home. In this study the use of case records and personal interviews did not reveal this information.



**APPENDIX**



# ELIGIBILITY OF CHILDREN TO V.F.W. NATIONAL HOME

Eaton Rapids, Michigan

Children shall be eligible to admittance to the Home, provided they meet all the physical and mental standards of the Home, in the following categories:—

**FIRST, A child of a father who is dead or totally disabled** and who, at the time of death or commencement of total disability, and continuously throughout the twelve month period prior thereto had been, a member in good standing of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States; provided however, that in the case of either death or total disability which results from external accident the aforesaid requirement of twelve-month continuous membership may be waived if the father was such member in good standing at the time of the accident.

**SECOND, A child of a mother who had foreign service**—as prescribed in the eligibility requirements of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States—in the armed forces of the United States and who at the time of her death or commencement of total disability was, and continuously throughout the twelve-month period prior thereto had been, a member in good standing of the Ladies Auxiliary to the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States; provided however, that a child shall be eligible under this category only if the father shall be dead, totally disabled, or otherwise unable properly to support such child and if such father, if able, shall contribute regularly to the Home an appropriate amount—as determined by the Board of Trustees or Management Committee—toward the care and upbringing of the child; the Home may refuse to retain—and may deliver to the father or other proper authority—the child (or children) if such contributions are not regularly and punctually paid and maintained.

**THIRD, A child whose mother has died** and the following conditions are fulfilled:

- (a) the father was at the time of the mother's death, and continuously throughout the twelve-month period prior thereto, a member in good standing of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.
- (b) the father is unable properly to support such child.
- (c) to the extent the father is able, he shall contribute regularly an appropriate amount—as determined by the Board of Trustees or Management Committee—toward the care and upbringing of the child; the Home may refuse to retain—and deliver to the father or other proper authority—the child (or children) if such contributions are not regularly and punctually paid and maintained.

**FOURTH, A child of a man or woman who is a foreign service veteran**, who fulfills all the following conditions:

- (a) who is engaged in—or has had—campaign service in the armed forces of the United States; and
- (b) who dies or becomes totally disabled while serving in the armed forces of the United States; and
- (c) at the time of the foreign service veteran's death or commencement of total disability, the veteran's father is a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States or the veteran's mother is a member of the Ladies Auxiliary thereto.

If the death or total disability is that of the mother, the child shall not be eligible if, and so long as, its father shall be alive provided that if the father shall be totally disabled or unable to properly support such child, the child may be accepted as eligible and the father shall make regular contributions to the Home—in the amount determined to be appropriate by the Board of Trustees or Management Committee; the Home may refuse to retain—and may deliver to the father or proper authority,—the child (or children) if such contributions are not regularly and punctually paid.

Preference shall be given to eligible children in the numerical order of categories above listed; consequently in periods of shortage of facilities at the Home children eligible under the first category shall first be accepted, then those under the second, etc.

## APPENDIX B

April 16, 1957

Mr. Albert Morris  
School of Social Work  
Michigan State University  
East Lansing, Michigan

Dear Mr. Morris:

This is in reply to your inquiry about age and duration of stay of children in institutions. As you know, the League has been advocating that no child under six years of age and preferably none under eight, should be cared for in an institution, and this is the trend in the country.

It has been our position that between two and three years is about the maximum length of time during which institutional care is helpful to children. In our surveys and consultations we advise an agency that if a child has been in an institution for two years, the situation should be reviewed in order to make sure that the institution has the kind of service the child needs, and that there are valid reasons for his stay being prolonged beyond two years. If a child has been in institutional care for three years and is not yet ready for some other service, there is good reason to question whether the institutional program is able to give the child the care and treatment he needs.

To be sure, there are exceptions to every rule. Exception, of course, would be based on the fact that there has been an evaluation of the progress that a child is making, and good reason to feel not only that he has made progress but that he will continue to benefit, if he needs to stay longer.

In March 1954 the Children's Bureau of Memphis reported in CHILD WELFARE on "The Relationship Between Casework Service and Discharge Plans for Children." Reporting on 73 children of 48 families, it was shown that the median length of stay was 13.4 months. Thirty-five were in boarding care for less than one year. Fifty-two were in boarding care for less than two years. Six of the eight children in care for four years or more had originally been accepted for care until they were grown. By intensive casework, the length of stay was shortened. Of the 73 children, 64 showed improvement;

nine did not. Fifty-seven of the children, members of 33 families, were discharged to parents or relatives; 45 of them were discharged to parents. Eleven children were moved into adoption, and five children required continued community support.

I hope that you will find this helpful.

Sincerely,

(Mrs.) Henrietta L. Gordon  
Director of Information and  
Publications

HGG:T

APPENDIX C

SCHEDULE

Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_

Eligibility Category \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Admission \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Discharge \_\_\_\_\_

Circumstances at Discharge:

- 1. To care of parents \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Graduated \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. To Service \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Deceased \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. To Relatives \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Married \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. Information not available \_\_\_\_\_

If to care of parents, or relatives, explain:

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

April 4, 1957

Child Welfare League of America  
345 East 46th Street  
New York 17, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

I am writing my research project on a study of the change in average age and duration of stay of children at the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Home for Children, Eaton Rapids, Michigan. I have searched the literature carefully, and while I find considerable material on the change in use of institutions for child care over the years, no reference is made to its effect on the age of children in institutions or the duration of their stay in institution care. I had originally hoped to relate my findings to other plans of child care such as social security benefits and veteran's child care programs.

Does the Child Welfare League of America have any published material or unpublished data which would relate to the age and duration of stay of children in institutional care today? To changes in age and duration of stay? Is there any information concerning the relationship of these factors and other non-institutional programs of child care?

I would appreciate very much any information which you can give me or to which you can direct me bearing on this subject.

Very truly yours,

Albert Morris  
Graduate Student  
School of Social Work

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