THE SOCIETY FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN

(formerly the Society for Psychotic Children)

Chairman: M.G. Baron, B.A.,
Vice Chairman: Dr.I.Dalton, M.D., M.R.C.P.
Treasurer: H. Sainer, F.C.A.
Hon. Secretary: Mrs.H.G.Allison,M.A.
[redacted]

NEWSLETTER No. 1 November 1962

Membership of the Society is for parents whose children may have been diagnosed as psychotic, schizophrenic severely obsessional, aphasic or non-communicating, and doctors, teachers, social workers and others interested in the problems of these children -

THE FOUR MAIN AIMS.

A) To provide and promote day and residential centres for the treatment and education of autistic or psychotic children.

B) To help parents; particularly by arranging meetings between them where they can exchange information.

C) To encourage research into the problems of these children.

D) To stimulate more understanding among the lay and medical public of these children's problems; and to tell them what can - and must be done to help the children lead normal lives.

THE PRESENT PROJECTS.

A) The Society has drafted the outline of a model centre to be founded in London, where autistic children will be treated and educated. Specialists, teachers and parents are examining this draft and it will be revised in the light of advice and criticism. Copies are available to members on request.

This centre is for about twenty children: some residential to be drawn from anywhere in the British Isles, and some day pupils. Ultimately the Society would like to see such centres in every large city, and this one will serve as a model. It will work with a first-class diagnostic unit in a hospital which will also supply medical treatment. The centre's educational side - which will, of course, be experimental - will come either under the Ministry of Education or the Local Education Authority. The centre's most vital aspect, - the most valuable in the long run - would be the young children's day nursery. This would be based on the centre in Toronto which has been fully described in 'Children' magazine. Doctors, teachers and officials have received copies of this article. Some copies are still available.

Progress so far ......

Dr. Kenneth Soddy has endorsed the project entirely and wishes to found the diagnostic unit at University College Hospital.

The Chairman has discussed the project with [redacted], General Secretary of the National Association for Mental Health, who said that it was the sort of thing the N.A.M.H. are qualified to run, and, with the right sort of person to run it, might well attract funds. Our memorandum on the project is now being studied by the Clinical Services Committee of the N.A.M.H.

A School in St. Johns Wood.

B) The Society has contacted a Montessori trained teacher who now has a nursery school for normal children in St. John's Wood, with two well-equipped rooms and a garden for the children. Although she has had no experience with autistic childre, she is very anxious to teach them. Members of the committee have discussed this with her and introduced her to the problems of these children and what teaching them will involve. This day nursery would be from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; and the staff-child ratio would be 2-4 with an SRN in constant attendance. The support of the Local Authority for transport and fees cannot be expected until the school is established, although the Society understands that at least Middlesex County Education authority would view sympathetically any request for assistance with fees for Middlesex children if a special school were started, since children who might otherwise be excluded from the education system would then be retained. As this plan deserves every encouragement four specialists have been asked if they know of any children suitable for such a day nursery.

The possibility of another similar school in Kensington is also under discussion. If the Society can get either or both of these started the experience gained from them will be invaluable.

THE SOCIETY AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES.

The Society is finding out from parents how many children have been classified by local authorities under the Mental Health Act as ineducable. Dr. Lorna Wing has sent out a questionnaire to all members to find out exactly what happened in each case. One educational psychologist in Middlesex has stated that these children <u>should</u> come under a special category in the educational authority. The Society is strongly urging that this policy should be followed generally and consistently. At the moment the Health and Education authorities are jointly responsible for our children; when they do anything they are often at cross purposes This is the experience of most parents. When this was pointed out in a helpful interview with [redacted], Medical Officer of Health for Middlesex, he was most sympathetic and said that he thought that the nursery education even for an autistic child of two should be part of the Education Authority's responsibilities. The Society are sure that [redacted] is doing all he can to iron out this problem.

[redacted] that that early diagnosis was essential and he realised the current policy of putting autistic children into Special Care Units and Occupation Centres was unsuitable. His view is that once early diagnosis becomes general, the need for more facilities would be automatically demonstrated and then something might be done.

[redacted] is in close touch with Dr. Kenneth Soddy and this may result in some conclusive advice for parents and people running nursery schools on what should best be done with children when they reach the vital age when specialised education can help them fundamentally. This extremely useful interview ended with [redacted] giving valuable advice on the Society's main project; he also offered help in any planning difficulties and has agreed to distribute our leaflet (in preparation) for parents of children diagnosed as autistic through Child Guidance Clinics.

London

[redacted], Medical Officer of Health for London, has been sent the project and policy statement. The Society's Chairman has written to [redacted] and other officials concerned, about the Province of Natal Centre, it functions for only two hours on only four days in the week.

County Councillors Can Help.

The Society, are firmly convinced that once the sympathy of local councillors has been won parents will get help. A Middlesex County Councillor has been briefed to insist on co-operation between medical and health authorities both in the Mental Health and Education Committees. He was most impressed with the article on the Toronto Centre and wants several centres of this kind established in his county. At this centre children start aged between 3 and 4. There is one therapist to each child and, once a basic relationship has been achieved, the child is gradually introduced to the nursery plan, first individually and then into a group. Next he joins a nursery group for normal children. When he is six, he goes to a normal primary school kindergarten. The County Councillor is going to stress the importance of weighing up each case individually when the child gets beyond nursery age; of deciding whether, for example, a child should go to a small private school for normal children (assuming the parents can pay the fees) or go on to a class for older autistic children. At present, though, as far as the County Council are concerned, the emphasis must be on day education.

To give the background for parliamentary action on autistic children which he plans, Mr. Compton Carr, M.P. for Baron's Court, is going to raise the following questions in the London County Council:

(a) How many autistic or psychotic children are there in the London area.

(b) Whether the 9 point diagnostic guide is being drawn to the attention of the relevant county officials.

(c) Whether the 9 point diagnostic guide is in fact applied in ascertaining whether a child is autistic or psychotic.

(d) How many units specifically designed for the therapeutic treatment and education of autistic or psychotic children now exist in the London area, and how many children does each admit.

The Society now wants parents in each area to get a County Councillor to ask these questions. If parents will do this, please give your name to the Society's Secretary and she will send you copies of the questions and the diagnostic guide: Mr. Compton Carr stressed that this was the only way to impress the needs of autistic children on the authorities at both county and ministerial level.

QUESTIONS IN PARLIAMENT.

The Society has the valuable support of Mr. Compton Carr. As well as representing the case in the Commons, he has some very useful ideas on publicity and fund-raising. He was asked how the Society could best help the completion of the unit for adolescents at High Wick, and said that parents in the High Wick area - and indeed everywhere else - should write to their M.P's saying that they were having difficulty placing their children in suitable schools or in getting transport to such places. Letters of this kind were forwarded to the Minister who, if he received a great number, would be forcibly made aware of this specific problem. Parents are urged to write to their M.P. along these lines; if their child is in the "11 plus" age group, the delay of the High Wick adolescent unit should be specifically mentioned.

The Society will alert other sympathetic M.P.'s to these problems before the proposed debate, to support Mr. Compton Carr.

THE SOCIETY AND THE PRESS.

The Society has been promised articles in 'The Evening News', 'Guardian', one or two of the Mirror Group of magazines and 'She'. Writers on these papers have been interviewed and given all background material. There was a report on the Society in the October 11th issue of 'New Society' and Dr. Lorna Wing, one of the members of our Committee, is writing a piece for "Pulse" which circulates among all doctors.

HOW IS THE SOCIETY ORGANISED?

The Society has a constitution, officers and elected committee. There are general monthly meetings in central London and agendas go out to all members with summaries of the minutee of the last meeting; so, in effect, everyone gets a monthly newsletter - also all the leaflets and policy statements which the Society produces.

There are sub-committees for Welfare, Transport, Fund-raising and Appeals, Publicity and the detailed planning of our project, and a Medical sub-Committee of parents who are doctors. Various members outside the London area have been appointed Area Correspondents so that they can build up our membership locally and co-ordinate the Society's work as it grows.

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER ORGANISATIONS.

As a group representing specialised interests, the Society has applied for affiliation to the National Association for Mental Health. Affiliation to the National Society for Mentally Handicapped Children was carefully considered, but notadopted as their constitution would have limited our scope to that of a local society with small membership and restricted activities. However the Society hopes to have their support through association and that of the N.A.M.H. through affiliation. The Society is not a mere pressure group but an active and independent organisation working in a field which larger societies have neglected. In this way, the best interests of parents and children will be served and this view is shared by various experienced and independent people whose opinions have been asked.

Contact has been made and ideas exchanged with a new parents organisation in Denmark; other international links have been made and will be developed.

MEMBERSHIP.

At the moment, this numbers seventy from eleven counties and includes parents, doctors, teachers and social workers. The Society must expand and the strength of the society can be measured by how much it influences the authorities who may only be moved by sheer weight of numbers and a solid presentation of the problem. This means hard and inspired work. Any member, whether parent or not who wishes to take an active part in the Society's work and shape its future, please write to the Hon. Secretary.

MONEY

The subscription for all members is 10/-. The Society must also have money to get projects under way, advertise publish leaflets, carry out surveys and help children. As members are so widely spread, perhaps normal fund-raising schemes do not apply. The Society will get in touch with large and small philanthropic organisations. Greetings cards should be an annual source of income, and there will be a share in Mental Health Flag Day, 1963. Many proposals have been put forward and are under discussion: a postal appeal, a film premiere, dances, concerts, receptions, coffee mornings and so on. If members have any ideas, contact please the Hon. Treasurer. The Society has been extremely fortunate in getting a firm of Public Relations consultants to draw up a publicity programme for us without fee. But, in the last resort, success or failure depends on how much individual parents are prepared to do to give our children a better chance in the future.

- - - oOo - - -