

Welfare office for Swiss girls

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NEWS FROM THE COLONY

WELFARE OFFICE FOR SWISS GIRLS IN GREAT BRITAIN

The Annual General Meeting of the Welfare Office for Swiss Girls in Great Britain was held on the 3rd May 1965, at the Swiss Hostel for Girls, 9 Belsize Grove, London N.W.3.

The President opened the meeting, welcomed the guests and the members and extended a special word of welcome to Madame de Fischer, the Honorary President, at the same time thanking her for the support she had given the Welfare Office throughout the year.

In a brief report the President alluded to the main difficulties which had beset the Welfare Office during 1964. A complete change of Staff and the fact that the Welfare Office had had to move out of their room whilst the premises were being redecorated had given rise to a certain amount of inconvenience. The Staff were now however re-installed in their former office which had been partly refurnished and modernised in order to create a more congenial atmosphere.

As Miss Hubacher had taken up her duties only in August of last year it had been decided to combine the report of Activity of the Welfare Office with the annual report of the Committee. This report was presented and read by the Hon. Secretary.

The Committee had greatly regretted the loss of Miss Schneider's services. Miss Schneider had resigned from the Welfare Office at the end of July 1964 having married a month earlier. Her successor, Miss Hubacher, had been assisted for six months by Miss P. Grivet of Geneva, a student trainee, and was now being assisted by Mrs. Sharpe who had lent a helping hand to the Welfare Office over a period of years. Miss Hubacher had brought a fresh approach to the work and had made every effort to reduce the administrative side, concentrating on preventive action rather than on curative work. Changes in the general economic situation since the inception of the Welfare Office in its present form and in the regulations concerning the employment of "au pair" girls, as well as the attitude of the British authorities towards unmarried mothers, called for some modification of the general policy though the primary function of a Welfare Officer which was to help girls in need remained the same.

The Committee was aware that greater publicity should be given to the activity of the Welfare Office and the necessity for more extensive propaganda. Experience had shown that few Swiss girls who came to England knew, on arrival, of the existence of the Welfare Office. The complex matter of publicity had now been put into the competent hands of Frau Dr. Lutz, President of the Katholischer Mädchenschutzverein, herself a journalist and author of some excellent articles on the subject of Swiss girls in England recently published by "Pro", which had a circulation of over a million.

It was gratifying to note that in May 1964 Dame Joan Vickers had referred in Parliament to the Annual Report of the Welfare Office in her plea for raising the age limit of "au pair" girls coming to this country and that tribute had been paid by Dame Joan to the President, Mrs. Ellis, for the excellent services she rendered at Folkestone and Dover.

As in former years the funds for the maintenance of the Welfare Office were supplied by the Annual Federal

subsidy from Berne, the annual contributions from the Amies de la Jeune Fille in Switzerland, the Katholischer Mädchenschutzverein in Switzerland and the Swiss Benevolent Society. Various sections of the Schweiz. Verband Evangelischer Frauenhilfe had continued to send donations.

With regard to the activity of the Welfare Office, this could be divided into three main groups: I) General Information and Counsel, II) Counsel and help, III) Welfare Cases. Much time was still lost through persons who regarded the Welfare Office as an employment agency. With the co-operation of the British Vigilance Association or the International Travellers' Aid Association it had been possible to meet many more girls arriving in this country, some of whom had been escorted to another London terminus. It was an encouraging sign that in 1964 only 6 persons were refused permission to land. Here the assistance given by the President to girls in difficulties at the harbour was clearly evident.

Thanks to those organisations in Switzerland who had been able to impress on "au pair" girls the necessity of having some private means the number of girls wishing to change employment had not increased.

Of the twenty-seven cases of illness more than half were mental patients. All these could be sent back to Switzerland. The Committee have in the past prevailed on various organisations to use their influence to prevent girls suffering from ill health from coming to England and were grateful for their co-operation.

During 1964 the number of girls making contact with the Welfare Office was slightly higher than the figure for the preceding year.

The report concluded with an expression of appreciation of the services rendered to the Welfare Office by the various English authorities with whom they were in constant contact, and an expression of thanks to the Swiss Embassy, in particular to H.E. the Swiss Ambassador and Madame B. de Fischer for their active support, also to Monsieur Ansermoz and Consul Tosio, and to the following persons and institutions: Union Suisse des Amies de la Jeune Fille; Katholischer Mädchenschutzverein; Seraphisches Liebeswerk; the Schweiz. Verband Evang. Frauenhilfe; the Swiss Benevolent Society; the Editor of the "Swiss Observer"; the Swiss Clergy in London; Miss Preiswerk, Warden of the Swiss Hostel; the Auditors; the members of the Committee; the Welfare Officer and her assistant; and to the President, Mrs. Ellis, for devoting so much of her time to the Welfare Office and its cause.

E.K.

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The Committee of the Welfare Office for 1965 consists of the following members:

Hon. President: Madame B. de Fischer, President: Mrs. M. H. Ellis, Vice-Presidents: Mrs. A. Zumstein (representing Katholischer Mädchenschutzverein), Mr. J. Zimmermann (representing Swiss Benevolent Society), Hon. Secretary: Mrs. H. Knoll, Hon. Treasurer: Mrs. R. Thomas, Members: Mrs. A. Woods (representing Amies de la Jeune Fille), Miss R. Preiswerk (Swiss Hostel for Girls), Monsieur F. Ansermoz (Swiss Embassy), The Rev. Father J. Scherer (Swiss Catholic Mission), Pfarrer M. Dietler (Swiss Church), Pasteur F. Jacot (Swiss Church).