

## THE CHILDREN'S YEAR CAMPAIGN.

ANNA E. RUDE, M. D.,  
*Federal Children's Bureau, Hygiene Division, Washington, D. C.*

Read before Public Health Administration Section, American Public Health Association, at Chicago, Ill.,  
December 11, 1918.

Miss Rude presents a ringing appeal for standardization and co-operation in child saving. She demonstrates that this work is fundamental in any well-conceived public health planning. She has a story of accomplishments which is backed by facts and figures.

**T**HE National Children's Year Campaign represents the combined wartime program of the Woman's Committee of the National Council of Defense and the Federal Children's Bureau. Although the scope of the campaign, as originally outlined, embraces the general well-being of all children, special emphasis is placed upon the reduction of infant mortality and the welfare of children of preschool age.

The primary aim of the Children's Year program is the reduction of infant mortality in the United States, by trying to save 100,000 lives (one third of the annual preventable deaths) during the second year of the war, but the real and great purpose of the work is educational, the teaching of parents—mothers especially—in such wise that not only will the future claim fewer victims of preventable disease, but also will find fewer avoidable abnormalities and fewer remediable defects amongst the children of the nation.

Although various measures for the protection of mothers and children have been instituted and carried on in this country for some years past, the movement has not met with the serious recognition which our participation in the great world struggle necessitates, if Americans are to become and continue a vigorous people. Up to the present time it has evidently been difficult for

the American people to think in large numbers, for, during some years past, the fact that the nation has lost annually 300,000 lives under five years of age has failed to arouse that sense of active responsibility which is essential if this unwarrantable loss of life is to be appreciably reduced. Our apathy is even more tellingly obvious when statistics definitely show us that at least one half this 300,000 dies from preventable disease. It has taken the experience of such countries as France and England and our own entrance into the war, to bring us face to face with national protective health problems.

### CHILDREN'S YEAR.

April 6, 1918, the beginning of the second year of the war, opened the Children's Year campaign. The necessity for such a campaign was recognized by the President in his letter to the secretary of labor in which he said:

“Next to the duty of doing everything possible for the soldiers at the front, there could be, it seems to me, no more patriotic duty than that of protecting the children, who constitute one third of our population.

“The success of the efforts made in England in behalf of the children is evidenced by the fact that the infant death-rate in England for the second year of the war was the lowest in her

history. Attention is now being given to education and labor conditions for children by the legislatures of both France and England, showing that the conviction among the Allies is that the protection of childhood is essential to winning the war.

"I am very glad that the same processes are being set afoot in this country, and I heartily approve the plan of the Children's Bureau and the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense for making the second year of the war one of united activity on behalf of children, and in that sense a children's year.

"I trust that the year will not only see the goal reached of saving one hundred thousand lives of infants and young children, but that the work may so successfully develop as to set up certain irreducible minimum standards for the health, education and work of the American child."

In addition to expressing his approval President Wilson set aside \$150,000 of his special fund to be used by the Children's Bureau for the carrying out of the Children's Year program.

During the year three distinct drives have been inaugurated. The present, or "Back-to-School" drive is to be undertaken by a school welfare committee, appointed through the Women's Committees of the Council of Defense, for each of the 281,000 schoolhouses in the country.

The object of this drive is to return to school the children who have been attracted by wartime wages, or through patriotic appeals, to enter and remain in industry. Now with the cessation of war, an added problem presents itself, with the natural demobilization in industries and the return of men from service, children who have been employed during the war emergency will now be out of employment. It is particularly

desirable that these children should return to school. Scholarship funds to keep needy children in school after the legal age for working is reached, have been established in a number of cities. The purpose of these scholarships in elementary and high schools is to keep children out of industry and give them at least two years additional training beyond the compulsory school age in order that they may become more useful citizens. Although this drive has just been launched, twenty-two different states are actively participating and many other states are formulating plans.

During the midsummer vacation the second part of the campaign, or "Recreation Drive," was undertaken in many localities with a view to increasing physical vigor among children. Such games were promoted as would increase physical adeptness and skill, train the eye, and develop the ability to respond instantly. The value of providing *successful* recreation under competent leadership or supervision was one of the principal aims of this undertaking and is largely responsible for extensive permanent recreational work.

As a means of popular education appeal, possible in even the most remote regions, the opening of the Children's Year campaign began with a nation-wide weighing and measuring test, undertaken through the vast machinery of the 17,000 committees of the Women's Committee of Council of National Defense which embodied most of the women's organizations of the country. Only through such extensive organization was it possible to attain the greatest results with a minimum of effort.

When it is realized that more than 6,500,000 weighing and measuring cards have been sent out for children under six years, it will be understood that the appeal has met with an unprecedented and over-

whelming response. Concretely, it can reasonably be assumed that at least 13,000,000 parents, not to estimate interested relatives and friends, have had their attention definitely drawn to the general physical condition of the child, since the relation of weight to height and age can be interpreted as a rough index of the child's nutrition. The recorded results of this weighing and measuring test give the largest mass of material ever gathered on the measurements of young children.

While many elements of inaccuracy may undoubtedly be found in these cards, tabulations are to be made on the basis of 100,000 cards from records of children who were given a complete physical examination by a physician. These figures will enable comparisons to be made for the preschool age children between weights and heights and the weight-height ratios of children in different sections of the country as well as those living in large and small urban and rural communities, and for children of selected foreign parentage. Other valuable data will probably evolve also from these records, since the leading anthropologists consider the fund of material manifold in possibilities.

If the realization of the importance of the child's nutrition were the only result of this weighing and measuring campaign, the effort would have been well worth while. Fortunately, much more has been accomplished in localities where, through good organization, the campaign received the support of physicians, and complete physical examinations were made, drawing attention to defects and remedies for the same.

In a mid-western city of about 70,000 population, largely foreign, the chairman of the Children's Year committee writes that the immediate results of coöperation in Children's Year have been three child welfare nurses; a milk inspector; publi-

cation of milk reports with bacterial count, sediment, etc.; an agreement between dairymen and farmers by which all milk sold in the town will be produced within a radius of ten miles and properly taken care of until it reaches the city; a summer hospital for babies; a milk depot; an organization of ten volunteer nurses to look up babies in the congested foreign district and to instruct the mothers how to care for their children; the cleaning up of streets and alleys of the congested districts, and four infant welfare stations, to be established in order to carry on the work permanently. Surely such results as these are quite beyond one's most sanguine hopes.

It is impossible to estimate the number of medical examinations made, but reports from various states have been most gratifying. One of the large but less populous states reports 41,000 weighed and measured with 32,000 complete physical examinations by physicians in only one half its counties, with many counties still at work. The Children's Year program as outlined in this same state provided for three weighing and measuring drives during the year, with the aim not only of reaching a larger number of children, but also as a demonstration of the value of periodic physical examination. As the result of the tabulations of remediable defects from this one campaign, 17 permanent health centers have been established, several counties have each a public health nurse, and lately the state has established a Division of Child Hygiene under the state board of health.

In another more populous state, most competently organized, every county in the state but four (102 in all) has had child welfare chairmen, with 360,000 children weighed and measured. There are 1,111 committees, indicating active

groups interested in various phases of child welfare work.

The states have varied widely in their child welfare campaign undertakings, but there is not a state in the Union which has not had some part in the Children's Year weighing and measuring program.

The outline of the work in these three states serves to illustrate the varying scope of the work undertaken in different localities, after the initial weighing and measuring had been completed. From several Southern cities where the milk supply seemed a paramount factor in the reduction of infant mortality, came reports of the establishment of milk depots where milk was supplied and sold at cost after a canvass of the town had been made to determine how many children were not getting milk.

One state which was very late in beginning its campaign has just sent in the following report: "2,423 children in a town were weighed and measured. The births of 1,172 of these had not been registered, so a blank birth certificate will be attached to each child's record card and sent to the parent in an effort to complete the birth records." Many localities have already made birth registration tests as part of the Children's Year campaign. The necessity for complete birth registration has been emphasized through the recent draftees who have been confronted with demands for proof of age and citizenship. Is there any reason why, with concentrated effort on the part of already organized committees, that the birth registration area should not be enlarged to comprise all the 48 states in this Union, instead of only 20 states as at present? One important point in this connection is the desirability of unifying efforts, while working for complete registration, communities should at the same time plan for such legislation as will require and enforce *early* registration of all

births whether attended by doctors or midwives. When we realize that one third of all deaths under one year of age occur during the first week of life, the necessity for the early reporting of all births is evident. One of the most potent means of combating this enormous loss is through the care and education given by the public health nurse; *early* reporting of births makes possible early attention to both mother and child by the public health nurse.

While as a whole the general infant mortality rate of the country has been lowered, census figures for the registration area show that the number of deaths under one month have not been reduced in the past eight years. Since the majority of these deaths are definitely due to natal or antenatal causes it is necessary to look to facilities for better education of mothers concerning motherhood before there can be any hope of reducing the infant mortality rate. Particularly is this true of rural districts which harbor three fifths of the child population of the country. Organization along public health lines will have to be effected if appreciable inroads are to be made in either morbidity or mortality.

Publicity by means of posters, dodgers, stickers, slides, and motion picture films of Children's Year has been widespread throughout the country largely depending for success upon the activity and ingenuity of local chairmen.

An interesting innovation in propaganda has developed in the portable welfare center and dental clinic.

Michigan has a "Children's Year Special," an interurban car, which was sent out on a six weeks' trip with a trained nurse in charge. Local committees and local physicians cooperate in each town. The expense of the car is donated by the railroad company. In Cleveland a thoroughly equipped motorized health

center visited outlying districts with a doctor and a nurse and examined children. Connecticut has also utilized a mobile health center and covered its three most rural counties, where Children's Year work could not have been undertaken without assistance from the outside.

A number of committees have sent in a report, that as the result of their Children's Year work, the town had had its first dental clinic, and one state has appointed a state dental examiner who is to travel through rural localities where regular dentists are not accessible, spending from two weeks to a month in a town, reaching children through district schools.

The results of the weighing and measuring test in revealing the extent of malnourishment among children has initiated many nutritional clinics. Some towns have systematically undertaken the feeding of all undernourished children. In some counties all schools have become interested in hot lunches for school children. Domestic science teachers have volunteered to meet the rural teachers once a month, and plan menus. One county reports that home demonstration agents have planned diets for preschool age children, and are working in close coöperation with school nurses. Coöperation through the far-reaching and effective machinery of the Agricultural Department, with its agent in every county, seems to hold new possibilities not limited entirely to the teaching of food values, but to include the simple laws of child hygiene as well. Most pressing is the need of dietetic instruction for mothers. Frequently the cause of malnutrition does not lie in the quantity of food provided, but rather in its low nutritive value. An intelligent understanding of a well-balanced dietary containing elements necessary to supply the needs of growing children must replace dense ignorance of comparative food

values on the part of mothers, if the malnutrition which is a distinct menace and handicap to the normal physical and mental development of the child is ever to be controlled or prevented.

Municipalities have in some instances undertaken the perpetuity of work begun under its Children's Year committee, either by appropriations or employing superintendents or an increase in school nurses under boards of education.

Since the beginning of the Children's Year campaign six states have established divisions or bureaus of child hygiene under state departments of health, making a total of eleven states now having such divisions. A number of other states are working definitely toward the establishment of bureaus of child hygiene as the logical result of the Children's Year campaign, which is generously accredited as having served to crystallize sentiment on the need of state child conservation departments.

During the year, the necessity for health education among teachers has become more evident and courses on the care of mothers and children for use in colleges and normal schools are being prepared under the Federal Board of Vocational Education. Undoubtedly the revelation of our recent draft rejections, showing that at least one half the defects were such as might have been eliminated in childhood, has added impetus to the interest in the physical condition of our children; and the supplementary evidence of malnutrition and defects, as brought out by the weighing and measuring test, has helped focus public opinion upon physical fitness.

By far the greatest and most lasting benefits to be derived from the present consciousness of the physical condition of the country's children will be the establishment of permanent follow-up work, to provide the means by which

physical handicaps may be given proper attention. The establishment of children's health centers and the maintaining of county public health nurses are fundamental in contemplating permanent work. A children's health center could well be utilized, not only as a place where any baby or child could be given a physical examination, defects noted, and recommendations made, but as a teaching center for mothers on the care of children. A prenatal clinic would be the natural outgrowth of such a center. Home demonstration agents could well combine in using the health center for community work.

The public health nurse is to be considered one of the most simple, direct, and easily demonstrated means of health protection and while the demand for public health nurses far exceeds the supply at the present time, it is hoped that the reaction will be such as will result in supplying the demand of public health workers. Several states have already met the situation through the National Organization for Public Health Nursing and have undertaken steps to prepare nurses for these special demands by providing one or two state supervisors of nursing under state boards of health or in some communities through state anti-tuberculosis associations.

Existing societies caring for mothers during pregnancy, for the prevention of infant mortality, for the study of child welfare and child hygiene, or for the control of child labor, as well as state and municipal health control are all dealing with the health of the child. Since all preventive measures utilized for the reduction of maternal mortality and the high rate of mortality during childhood

are concerned with *education* of the people and with *prevention* as the only solution, it is a significant fact that all the work of these various organizations looking to the general welfare of the young of the race is contributory in part to every other line of preventive work looking to the general health of childhood—every line of preventive work automatically reacts by contact. Maximum results in child conservation can only be hoped for through effective organization and coöperation of all public health activities.

A preëminently important development growing out of Children's Year activities is the realization of the necessity for standardization of all welfare methods. The establishment of standards of prenatal, obstetrical and postnatal care, infant care, examination and supervision through the preschool period, with health teachings and standardized periodic physical examinations throughout school life, establishes a chain which would eventually guarantee efficient comprehensive health guidance. Standardized welfare methods are in themselves educational and productive of a consciousness of the need for better community health, especially as it affects child life.

There is no possible way in which to estimate the far-reaching results of the Children's Year campaign. That it has been a popular educational movement resulting in an awakened responsibility for the welfare of children, quite justifies all effort, but the great possibilities resulting from this campaign will be negligible unless through standardization and coöperation we undertake with continued and renewed energy the work of saving potential citizens.