

As no doubt in other countries, residential child care in Ireland during the nineteenth Century tended to be for the training of waifs and strays, the orphaned and the destitute, and for the correction of the incorrigible and the lawless. The accent was on physical care and training, with the boys in one institution and the girls in another. The conditions tended to be spartan, the discipline strict and the routine rigid.

The 1908 Act which was hailed as a Childrens Charter did not really change the basic aims of the centres that existed up until then. These basic aims were to clothe, feed and educate economically deprived children, and in this they tended to fulfil their task. Subsequent to that time, Ireland was pre-occupied with itself and the establishment of its Nationhood. During the days prior to World War Two and the war itself, it was economically poor and struggling to survive. The lot of children in care did not change. Indeed, there are those present today who served on the staff coping with six hundred boys and at night being in sole charge of a dormitory of one hundred and thirty five boys! (3)

The change came with the Kennedy Report of 1970. Large institutions were broken down into self contained flats or abandoned for small Residential Homes. At the turn of the century there were eight thousand children in care, in the 1940's six thousand and now there are about one thousand three hundred. (4)

The Residential Homes and Hostels that now exist are beautifully appointed, furnished and well run. The majority of the staff amounting to about three hundred have had some form of training.

There are forty seven centres consisting of about seventy eight units or homes. These figures do not include centres for the mentally handicapped, the blind or the deaf. Forty one are owned and managed by Religious Orders who also comprise about