

FEATURE ARTICLE
by Mrs. Shirley Ampt.

Victorian Lutheran Children's Home

I WAS A STRANGER,
AND YOU WELCOMED ME

The year 1945 marked the end of the Second World War and the Western world celebrated. What did peace mean for the millions of displaced people who had fled their homes, or who were suddenly released from concentration camps and forced labour in industries? What could the future hold for these people who could never return to their homeland?

To many of them, Australia offered new hope to establish themselves as free citizens and to start a new life. In the years following 1948, the first wave of European migrants landed in Australia, unable to speak the language, without a home, and without money. All they had was hope.



A typical group of children at the Home

Against this setting the Lutheran Children's Home was established in October, 1950, at Canterbury Road, Surrey Hills, Melbourne, to care for the children of working migrant mothers. Many of them were widows, trying to rehabilitate themselves in a new country. Over the first 4 years, 160 children of Latvian, Estonian, German, White Russian, Czechoslovakian, Hungarian and Polish backgrounds were accommodated.

Almost 5 years after the establishment of the first Home, the present Home at 52 Sackville Street, Kew, was purchased and officially opened on May 8, 1955. This property, valued today at over \$50,000, provides a happy home for some 30 children. It no longer provides particularly for migrant children, but includes at present 4 private placements and 26 State wards whose guardianship has been taken over by the State, usually for reasons of parental separation or neglect.

WALK ANOTHER MILE

A dedicated staff of 7 live-in child care workers is in charge of Matron K. Hodgson, "mother" to this family of 30 children who range in age from 22 months to 15 years. In the 8-10 year old group there are 10 children.

Even with staff rosters, this labour of love is not restricted to an 8-hour day or 40-hour week, but like all mothers, they are always "on duty" when required. This complete care programme covers material needs (food, clothing, and special care in time of sickness), spiritual needs (devotions and Christian example), social needs (learning to live together), and secular needs (kindergarten, primary and secondary school). In addition it involves maintaining contact with a parent or parents of children, and making arrangements with sponsor families and holiday hosts.



Mr. M. P. Cellert, of Kew, supplied these fine studies of the Lutheran Children's Home, Melbourne.

Our staff of child care workers are aged from 18-30 years. Experience has proved that this age group can best cope with the noise and ceaseless activity of such a large family. Children with such diversified ages and backgrounds require the child care worker to have unlimited patience, a sense of humour, a high degree of unselfishness, and a sincere Christian love for this work.

YOU TOOK ME IN

Holiday hosts, sponsor families and sponsor guilds, have an important role in the total care programme of the Home. No matter how well the staff care for these children, a family group of 30 children is still at best an "institutional" home. For some children this kind of atmosphere best meets their needs, but for the great majority it is no substitute for the private family home.

We must remember that the children in our care are individuals who will one day become adults, and whose lives will reflect the care we have given during their formative years of development. The children need to experience normal family living and this is possible only away from the Children's Home. The individual care, affection and attention, given by a holiday host on a regular basis or by a sponsor family, builds up a feeling of security for the child. It gives him a sense of belonging and establishes a firmer relationship for him within the community.



Children seated at small tables in the dining-room

Some holiday hosts may feel a little anxious about the prospect of taking a child who has been brought up in our Home, and previously in a sub-standard background. They may think such a child will be "different" from other children. Generally, this is not so. Our children attend kindergarten, school and Sunday-school, and have contact with the homes of their school-mates. Overall, they are similar to other children of their age, though perhaps with a more obvious need for affection, encouragement and attention.

However, in some instances, it is too late for the child to adjust successfully to a normal "small" family and they can feel secure only in their "large" home environment.

LIVING AT THE HOME

The beautiful old mansion-type home of 2 storeys, approximately 100 years old, constructed of solid brick and stone, with marble fireplaces in most rooms and set in spacious garden surroundings, is the background of this "home-living". Downstairs comprises



Manger scene at Christmas — decor the work of the Staff

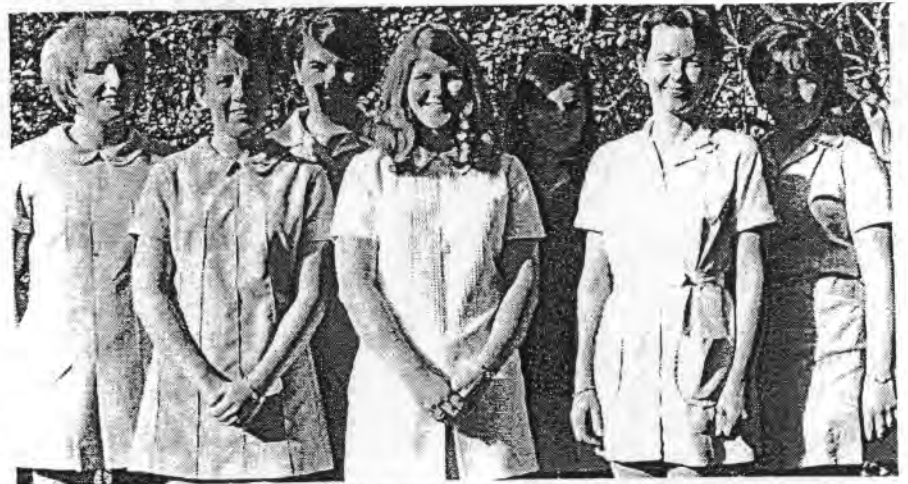


Home group in choir gowos — red necks, white capes

2 boys' bedrooms, 1 boys' bathroom, 1 staff bedroom, kitchen, dining room and the office. Upstairs - 4 girls' bedrooms, babies' bedroom, 3 staff bedrooms, 2 children's bathrooms (big and small girls) and a staff bathroom. An addition to the Home in 1965 now includes the staff lounge room, 3 bedrooms for staff and 2 bathrooms. Adjoining this extension is the recreation hall now completed with wall-board lining, curtains, and gas heating. It is here that the children read, watch T.V., and play games in the winter months. Storage for toys is provided in cupboard seating along two walls in the hall - these seats in stained pine-wood were built by Doncaster Men's Fellowship. Two University students visit the Home each Tuesday night. They tell stories, organize games, supervise the boys' baths, and physical education activities. Mr. Graeme Johnstone, of Box Hill, supervises physical education and games and occasionally swimming for all children on a Friday night. The older girls are hoping for a "mother" who will have them in her home on a Saturday morning for individual instruction in house-keeping, including some cooking. Offers of help would be appreciated.



The children enjoy the play activities.



Staff, left to right C. Ryan, O. Maas, E. Hansen, Matron K. Hodgson, B. Hansen, C. Boehm, J. Stafford



Members of the Edwards family with Matron K. Hodgson

Under the guidance of the Home Chaplain, the Rev. E. B. Helbig, devotions are held each night by 2 staff members. Pastor Helbig attends each Thursday evening. On the first Thursday of the month devotions are conducted by other pastors of the Metropolitan Zone - T. M. J. Wiebusch, D. O. Paech, S. M. Simpfendorfer, J. A. Pietsch and Vicar Brian Kuchel. The children are usually divided into 2 groups for Bible story, discussion and prayer. Occasionally a film strip may be used to add variety to the devotional programme.

The Garden Party, usually held in October, provides a day of fun for the children and visitors alike. Goods for the stalls are provided by the Women's Guilds of Victoria. The women of the Children's Home Auxiliary and members of nearby metropolitan Guilds staff the stalls, and the Auxiliary members attend to the catering for the afternoon tea.

Perhaps the highlight for the year is the children's Christmas programme. It is a moving exper-

ience to watch the children portraying the Christmas story, and to delight in the individual concert items which follow. Staff and children spend approximately 8 hours per week at rehearsals, usually beginning at the end of October.

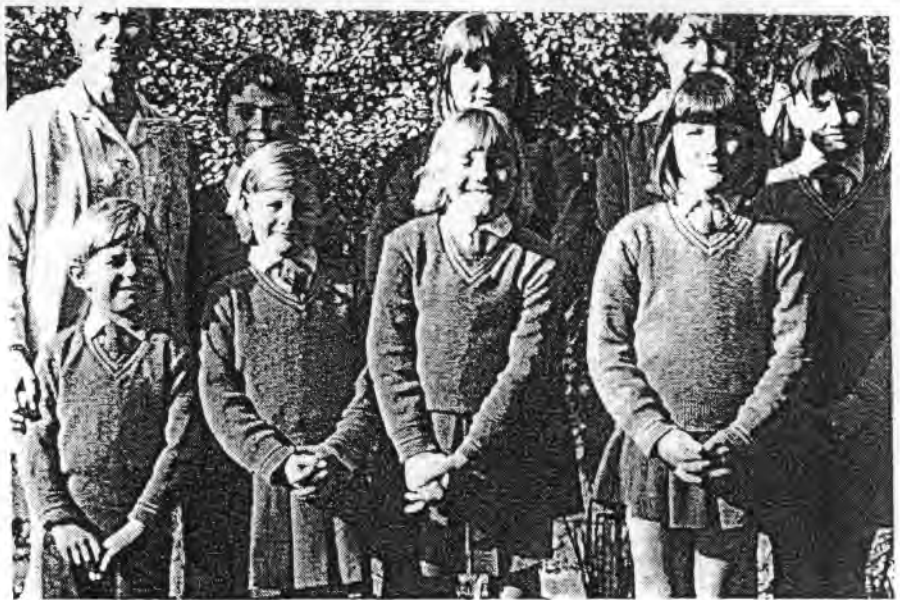
THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

The operation of our children's Home presents all the problems and opportunities of any 10 families in our community, with one notable exception - the problems seem greater because they are all together and always present. The opportunities for the children seem to be less, because the number of interested sponsor families, particularly from the metropolitan area, are so few.

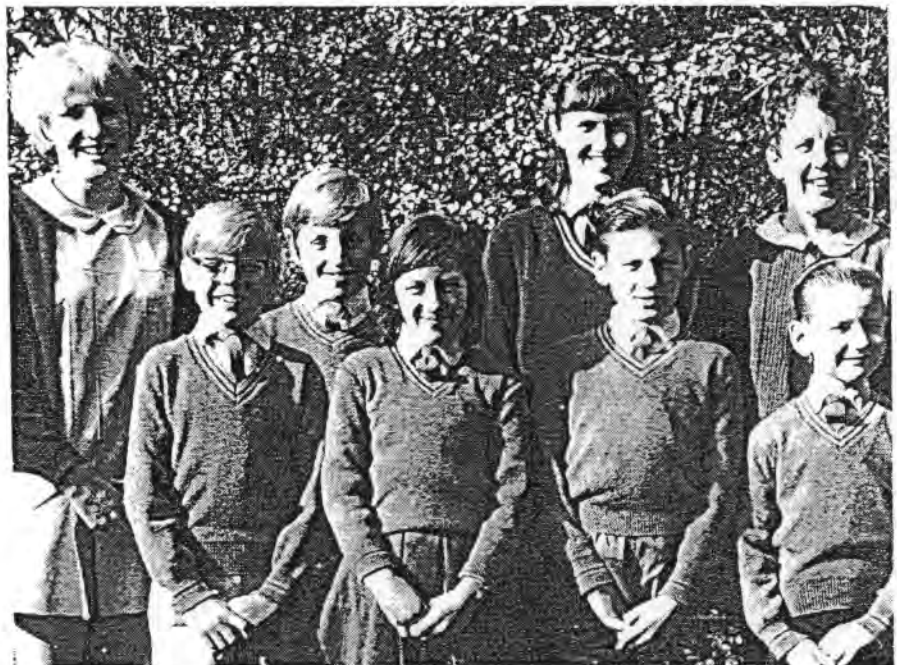
Problems for immediate attention are: Who will provide daily transport to South Melbourne for a 10 year old boy to attend a special remedial teaching school? How do we provide quiet study areas for teenage children? How does a young female staff provide example, counselling and discipline for teenage boys? Who will provide the guidance and a Christian home for these children if they must leave the home at age 12 years for boys, and late teen years for girls?

Sometimes it appears that those outside the Lutheran Church are more interested in the children in our Home than our own members. The Kew Young Liberals have shown a continuing interest in our children over the years. They have recently completed the lining of a shed at the rear of the Home which will be used by the children as a Hobbies Room. Another group of businessmen and their families from Essendon have made our Home their charity project for the current 12 months. They have already provided play equipment including slippery slides, swings, two wading pools and some small tables and chairs, and have hired a bus and entertained the children at the Zoo.

Are you helping? Our children, staff, and the Children's Home Committee need your practical support as well as your prayers. Jesus asked: "Which proved neighbour...?" The lawyer answered: "The one who showed mercy..." Jesus said: "Go and do likewise". Luke 10. 36, 37.



Auntie Coral, cook, with some of her well-led youngsters



*Staff members C. Ryan, left, and Deputy Matron O. Mass, right, with another group of children
Happy faces reflect the atmosphere of the Home*

