

Foreword

The study of children's development and wellbeing has a tradition in Newcastle upon Tyne which dates back to just after the Second World War.¹ The work reported in this book continues the tradition. It is a sustained enquiry carried out by a team of psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers in a representative group of schools in Newcastle upon Tyne and Gateshead between 1972 and 1979. A thousand junior schoolchildren, aged seven, and 3300 seniors, aged eleven, were screened and as a result 265 juniors and 309 seniors were studied in detail. The aims were to identify and characterize psychiatric and educational difficulties in these children and to compare different ways of helping the children overcome these difficulties. The whole intention was practical from the beginning.

The starting initiative was unusual. Aware of the country-wide alarm at the increase in unruly behaviour in the classroom, the present Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, then Secretary of State for Education and Science, asked her advisory committee for special education to look for the causes and to suggest remedies. Newcastle upon Tyne's record of research in social paediatrics and psychiatry, and more recent developments in child psychiatry, made the city an obvious choice for this new project, and so the committee invited the principal author and his colleagues to accept the task of research.

With their long involvement with children and families in the communities chosen for study, the authors naturally describe their approach and interpret their findings in terms of child development, educational progress, and family background. They begin with their

¹ Spence, J., Walton, W. S., Miller, F. J. W., and Court, S. D. M. (1954) *A Thousand Families in Newcastle upon Tyne*. The Nuffield Foundation, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

viii Help Starts Here

definition of psychiatric disorders in children, accepting that in different parts of the UK, between 7 and 25 per cent of children under 16 are affected by them, and review from previous studies the natural history of these disorders and the extent to which they may undergo spontaneous remission.

As a guide to the choice of management, they record in the introductory chapters a wide-ranging critique of previous methods, with an estimate of their validity. The methods finally selected were: a 'nurturant' approach, through the use of teacher-aides, behaviour modification, parent counselling-teacher consultation, and group therapy, through playgroups and discussion groups. The authors did not limit their approach to severe examples that were the cause of national concern, but considered the complete range from incipient to established disorders. This was because the development of these disorders is such that a mild, early disturbance can become a severe disability in later childhood.

To consider the conclusions they reach would be to destroy the mounting excitement of the reader as he or she follows the findings and arguments of the study.

Who then should be the readers? First, and foremost, teachers, in training and in the classroom, child psychologists and psychiatrists, paediatricians, educational administrators, politicians, and thoughtful men and women who are concerned with education in their communities.

Two comments on the conclusions are justified in this introduction. The findings show the rich potential of the ordinary school for preventive psychiatry, providing a unique opportunity to reach a large number of children in difficulty and distress. It is also necessary to realize that the treatment programmes were directed to the return of well-adjusted behaviour, as well as to improved academic achievement.

As we hold a book between its containing covers, we tend to consider it complete in itself. To speak adequately to the reader the book should be rooted in the tested experience of the past, explore the present with precision, and point reliably to the future. This report has all these qualities and should lead to new understanding and new practice. This will depend on those responsible accepting that the methods shown to be effective are professionally practicable, are educationally appropriate, and make good commonsense.

I hope this book will be widely read and boldly applied.

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE 1981

S. D. M. COURT