

CHILD WELFARE IN LEBANON

Before the Lebanese war which started in 1975, private social organizations in this country attained relatively large proportions. This reflected a high degree of social consciousness among the population, especially among women, and a desire of each of the multiple Lebanese communities to participate in general development.

As early as 1936, the "Child Welfare Association" was created as a committee sponsored by the Lebanese Women's Council. In 1946, though it remained affiliated to that council, the Association assumed an independent entity. In 1963 the Lebanese government, in recognition of its services, issued a decree by which it was granted the status of a public welfare organization.

Convinced that the human element forms the most precious wealth of a country, the Association worked hard to awaken public opinion to the importance of preparing for children the right atmosphere for normal growth and adequate development.

Child Care Centers & Nursery schools

In 1937, the Association established a center whose function was to give semi-literate mothers fundamental instruction in child care. It included a nurse, a maid, a physician and 20 children who were taken care of while their working mothers were away. The members of the Association did not exceed 17 women. In 1972, the number of child care centers and nursery schools reached 32. Distributed in the various Lebanese districts, they took care of about 1200 children. The Association members counted no less than 400, actively involved in the projects of their respective committees.

For their finances they depended on government support, municipal council's help, private contributions, National Lottery gifts, and money collected on the Annual Day and the Annual Week of the Child.

Main Achievements

Besides services offered by its 32 child care centers, the Association was able between 1936 and 1975 to make the following achievements:

1. Creating courses in sewing and dress-making for young women and housekeepers.
2. Founding six centers for teaching reading and writing to children beyond school age.
3. Training a number of nursery school teachers in cooperation with the "Social Development Service".
4. Organizing annual contests for school children in various arts, and supervising the distribution of prizes to winners.
5. Ensuring permanent cooperation between private and public welfare organizations; carrying to the government authorities the demands and suggestions of the various central and regional societies; organizing annual conferences for the purpose of coordinating the various branches as well as other sister organizations.

Annual Day of the Child (March 22)

One important achievement of the C.W.A. (Child Welfare Association) was the establishment, in 1962, of the International Annual Day of the Child, recognized by the Lebanese government as a national day and sponsored by the president of the Republic.

The Annual Day was extended to the "Annual Week of the Child" (which sometimes lasted a whole month), during which programs were presented for the purpose of spreading awareness and arousing general interest in the needs of children. Between 1967 and 1971, seminars and conferences were organized for presenting and discussing children's conditions and needs in the fields of health, education and general welfare.

Two of the conferences sponsored by the C.W.A. deserve acknowledgement. The first, held in 1970, presented studies on the topic of the "Retarded and Handicapped Children" in Lebanon and ways to rehabilitate them. Several institutions already existed for this purpose but they could not accommodate more than 10% of the whole number. It is possible that one of the results of this conference was the creation, in 1973, of the "Rash'in Center for the Handicapped", mainly financed by the President's wife, Iris Frangieh, whose name was attached to the Center.

The other conference, held in 1971, presented studies made by individuals or by delegates of various welfare organizations, about the delinquency of children, its predisposing factors, prevention and treatment. The conference gave reports, statistics and proposed projects for the handling and rehabilitation of delinquents in Lebanon.

The above brief account is based on the yearly books published by the C.W.A., reporting on its activities, projects and future plans.

The War Years

During the 4-year war in Lebanon, most of the Association's former activities were suspended. New problems arose and new activities were imposed, such as first-aid to war victims, and medical and financial help for the displaced, the refugees, the wounded and the distressed.

The Association shared in numerous relief projects, both private and public. Its social centers were used to accommodate refugees, to give first-aid to casualties, to offer help in money or in kind to needy people, to whatever group they belonged.

Impact of the War on Children

In 1977, the C.W.A. organized a conference grouping delegates from various social organizations in Lebanon, to discuss the impact of the war on Lebanese children and adolescents.

This conference forms the subject of the next two articles.