The following material is suggested for use in Sunday feature supplements. A selection of photographs is available from the Press Section, Rm. 216, Walker-Johnson Building. See list of captions on last page.

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CHILD WELFARE A $25,000,000 PROJECT FOR WPA

Half the babies born in the United States each year are born into families of the depressed one-third of the Nation whom President Roosevelt described as "ill-fed, ill-clad and ill-housed." This undoubtedly has something to do with the fact that some 120,000 of them die each year before they are a year old; that of those who survive, a ponderable proportion are permanently crippled by disease and undernourishment, and that the mortality among women in pregnancy and childbirth is higher in this country than for any of the leading twenty-five nations of the world save Chile and Lithuania.

These bleak statistics are vouched for by the Children’s Bureau of the United States Department of Labor. They constitute one of the principal concerns of sociologists and welfare workers the country over. And to make the case still more difficult, it is everywhere recognized that easily two-thirds of this tragic casualty is preventable. The lives of a majority of these mothers and babies could be saved, their health preserved, were it not for ignorance and poverty.

Since the problems of child welfare multiply in proportion to the destitution of the family, it is inevitable that the Works Progress Administration...
should find itself deeply involved in the work of caring for the children of the unemployed. Families broken by joblessness or years of ever-deepening poverty are unable to give their children the things they need for healthy growth. Milk, fresh vegetables, healthy surroundings and sometimes adequate sunshine cost money, even in a democracy.

Various phases of the problem of child welfare have been attacked by the WPA under half a dozen different programs. During the year ending June 30, 1938, approximately $25,000,000 was spent and assistance of one kind or another rendered nearly 10,000,000 individuals in the pursuit of these activities. For the most part the work was supplementary to programs already initiated by established agencies, but necessarily curtailed during recent years. In this category are the public health nursing projects, clinics for mothers and babies, orthopedic hospitals, school lunch projects and nursery schools. Of strictly WPA origins is the program of furnishing trained housekeeping aides to relief homes where the mother is ill or otherwise unable to carry on her duties.

Illustrative of this type of project is a report from Newark, where the housekeeping aide program has been in operation for more than a year. The father of a family of six deserted his pregnant wife and children, leaving them penniless in a two-room tenement apartment. The mother went on direct relief, receiving $4.30 a week for the complete support of herself and family. When her confinement began, her health was such that she had to be taken to a hospital. Her oldest daughter, eight, was left to take care of the home and other children, the youngest of whom was less than two years old.

A housekeeping aide was dispatched at the request of the local welfare authorities as soon as the situation was discovered. The six children already had spent two miserable nights alone and had consumed most of their food. The apartment was a shambles from neglect.
The aide was a middle-aged woman, herself a mother and also on relief until she had been given her WPA job. Her first act was to prepare the first cooked meal the children had had since their mother left. With the help of the oldest girl she then gave the apartment a thorough cleaning and did the two weeks' accumulation of laundry. Quite beyond the requirements of her job, she stayed around the clock for two days until a relative of the mother's in another part of the city could arrange to spend her nights with the children until the mother's return. Thereafter, the housekeeping aide came each morning in time to get the oldest child off to school and to tend the apartment and prepare meals for the others during the day. In her spare hours she mended their clothing and made fresh curtains for the windows. Not the least of her tasks was to devise menus for the six hungry mouths (her own meals she brought from home) on the slender relief stipend of $4.30 a week.

Alternating later week by week with another woman from the housekeeping aide project, this family was held together until the mother's return from the hospital with her new baby, and for several weeks thereafter until she was able to take up her duties again.

WPA housekeeping aides are neither trained nurses nor home economics experts. They are women from the relief rolls, usually married, who by instinct and temperament are good homemakers. They are selected and trained with more care, perhaps, than for any other non-professional project, since tact, skill and genuine human sympathy are essential qualifications for their work.

"An interesting by-product of this program," says Mrs. Ellen S. Woodward, assistant administrator in charge of women's and professional projects for the WPA, "has been that, although the women selected are of a type somewhat higher than the average found on relief rolls, in nearly every case they have become better mothers and homemakers as a result of the training and
experience received on the project.

"Thus, a three-fold objective is gained. Help of the most vital sort is given destitute, motherless families; the women who work as housekeeping aides are given employment at the only 'trade' they know, and these same women improve at their 'trade' of homemaking to the benefit of themselves and their own families.

"I can think of no other service that yields such great returns."

Nearly 25,000 women are employed on housekeeping aide projects throughout the country—in every state in the union, in fact, save five. There are more than 4,000 in Illinois, nearly 2,500 in California, and more than 1,000 each in Pennsylvania, Ohio, Arkansas and Oklahoma. New York City alone has 1,700. Last year they visited more than 500,000 homes.

Probably the most direct contribution WPA has made to child and maternal welfare is in the field of public health nursing. More than 10,000 qualified nurses and assistants have been taken from relief rolls and placed, usually, at the disposal of regularly constituted public health agencies. In such cases they help shoulder the enormous responsibilities of these agencies in fighting disease and insanitation.

In many localities where the regular facilities are inadequate, particularly with regard to children, the WPA has set up independent clinics and nursing projects. Almost without exception these new facilities have been created in the poorest and most backward sections where decent health and medical standards have never been known. Paradoxically, the greatest fecundity exists in those regions where the opportunities for healthy growth are poorest. The birth rate in Mississippi, for example, is approximately twice as great as that of Connecticut.
WPA nurses perform most of the services common to a public health program. They give immunizations against communicable diseases, conduct simple health examinations for school and pre-school children, hold general and maternal clinics, render bedside care in cases of extreme illness, and make regular visits to convalescent homes. More than 9,000,000 individual services of this sort were rendered during the past two years.

In thousands of relief homes where babies were born last year—homes where the hazards to survival were greatest—WPA nurses gave inestimable help. They instructed expectant mothers in their own care—diet, rest, cleanliness—as well as the care of their babies. They secured hospitalization or the services of doctors in difficult cases, and in a few emergencies actually made deliveries. Thousands of home visits were made for pre- and post-natal care, and in hundreds of clinics both mothers and babies were regularly examined and treated. Unquestionably, many of these heirs of the "depressed one-third" owe their safe conduct into the world to the WPA.

Malnutrition is the common foe of the children of the unemployed. The WPA last year provided nearly 128,000,000 hot lunches for school children whose families were unable to feed them properly. It was found that in literally thousands of cases this luncheon, prepared and served free of cost at the school, was the only full and satisfying meal the child had during the day. Many were critically underweight, undernourished and anemic at the beginning of the school year; for some the school lunch afforded the only milk in their diet.

Such projects are operating in all but three states and employ more than 15,000 people, mostly women. Supplies usually are furnished by some cooperating agency in the community such as the school board or Parent-Teacher Association. Frequently, gardening and canning projects operated by WPA provide a part of the food used.
Typical of the comments reaching Washington on the value of this program is the following excerpt from a letter written by the director of public health of Washington County, Mississippi:

"Sometime ago we checked two groups of undernourished school children. One group of approximately 300 were given hot lunches and milk, the other group of approximately 150 received no milk and no lunches other than that supplied from the home. The group receiving the lunch and milk made twice as great a gain per child as did the other group.

"We believe this is concrete evidence of the value of your program."

Crippled children are not always an evidence of malnutrition or poor health. Epidemics of poliomyelitis and similar disease strike with deadly impartiality at all social levels and in various parts of the country. It is indisputable, however, that poor feeding and environment make resistance to such ailments more difficult, and in consequence it is customary to find the greatest toll in the poorer districts of a stricken community.

But while "polio" is credited with between a fifth and a quarter of the victims of crippling diseases, there are others accounting for a majority of the cases which are more nearly related to poverty—rickets, osteomyelitis, rheumatic fever and tuberculosis of the bones and joints. Life-long handicaps—twisted, deformed bodies—are thus inflicted upon thousands of children each year. Authorities estimate the number of crippled children at approximately 370,000. Treatment often is inadequate or, indeed, lacking entirely because of the scarcity of facilities for care.
As an important part of its program of child welfare the WPA has built a number of orthopedic hospitals and equipped many more with therapeutic pools and baths. Many states have never made any effort to discover the number and whereabouts of the crippled children within their borders. Hence, a primary task in many localities is to locate crippled children as a necessary preliminary to giving them treatment. Surveys of this type have been made by the WPA in more than 20 states. Among the facts disclosed were that in some states as many as 70 per cent of the families with crippled children were financially unable to provide them with medical care. Many families were unaware that any help could be given. Nearly one-fifth of the crippled children found were not in school, and three-fourths of those in school were retarded.

Through the help of the WPA thousands of these young sufferers have been referred to the proper agency for treatment and so started on the road to recovery. For others, the handicaps of deformity have been alleviated through education and vocational rehabilitation. Many projects exist for the training of crippled children in their own homes. Not only are they coached in regular school subjects, but they are taught useful crafts which for some ultimately may be the means to an independent existence. In some communities the WPA has made possible regular training centers for crippled children, frequently by building and equipping additions to existing schools.

The national attack on the problems of child welfare is under the direction of the Children's Bureau of the Department of Labor. Its efficient and sympathetic management has brought measurable progress. More recently, the Social Security Act has made provisions for grants-in-aid to the states of more than $2,000,000 annually for purposes of child welfare.
The WPA has no formal status as a child welfare agency per se, but under a broad interpretation of its principal function of unemployment relief, it has been drawn inevitably into the field. Its millions of dollars and thousands of capable workers have done much to relieve suffering among the families of the depressed one-third; to save the lives and preserve the health of countless mothers and babies. It undoubtedly has advanced by many years the cause of child welfare in the United States.
The following photographs are available without cost. Please order by number.

11758) Two views of the Carrie Tingley Memorial Hospital, Hot Springs, New Mexico, built by the WPA.

11762) Two views of crippled children receiving instruction at Morris Memorial Hospital, Milton, W. Va., built by the WPA.

2801) Therapeutic pool built by WPA at James Whitcomb Riley Memorial Hospital, Indianapolis, Ind.

9303) WPA barber trimming patient's hair at Gillette State Hospital, St. Paul, Minn.

12357) Three views of the hot lunch program in Washington, D.C. schools.

13330) Hot lunch program, Savannah, Ga. (Close-up)

13381) Hot lunch program, Lawrence Co., Tenn. (Group)


353-C Housekeeping Aide in relief home, Minneapolis, Minn.

354-C Two views of a Housekeeping Aide taking care of a temporarily motherless home, Dayton, Ohio.


Y-1752) WPA nurse bathes baby in relief home. (no location given)

4445) Two views of WPA Child Health Clinic, Avoca, Pa. (near Scranton)

4446) Tests for defective hearing given by WPA nurses to group of school children, Holyoke, Mass.