

any level created problems and it was becoming increasingly recognised that pre-school education was of great importance. The work of the kindergarten movement was particularly important and deserved the full support of Government and the community. She expressed the hope that the conference would be a very successful and happy one.

In introducing Mr G. F. Gair, Under-secretary to the Minister of Education, Miss Ingram said that the movement had now been in operation for just over eighty years and in the last ten years one-third of the kindergartens had been built. The Union was very proud that in 81% of kindergartens there were Maori children and during the last four years the number attending had gone up 106%. The Union appreciated what had been done by Government - improved salary scales, training college costs, improved training college staffing and liberalised grants.

Mr G. F. GAIR

Mr Gair said that he felt he had a special place at conference since he was an old boy of Roslyn Kindergarten.

When he first took up his present appointment one of the acts he was required to make was to authorise a small grant to enable the Union to produce a booklet publicising the history of the movement. The booklet, which was a result of the small grant, was a picture of the movement which showed how to get things done. It gave a picture of the eighty-one year tradition of the kindergarten movement in a country not much older than that and it was a tradition of which any movement could be justly proud. Its history exemplified a fine community effort.

Mr Gair said he was interested to know that one-third of the kindergartens now in existence had been built in the last ten years, a real indication of the momentum of the movement.

He outlined the structure of the Union, with first its associations giving a pattern of local control, planning and tending of local needs. But associations on their own would not be sufficient and they had been drawn together in a union of associations - a Union doing a fine job. But the Union and the associations were but part of the picture. There were also the local committees, each with its own kindergarten in its trust. No matter how good an organisation might be, it must suffer if there was not good and adequate staffing. Last, but not least, there were the parents and they were good parents who were concerned about the pre-school movement. They offered their measure of financial support and he was very aware of the fact that they had an important contribution to make. He would like to feel that they got as much out of kindergarten as they put in.

Mr Gair wished to pay appropriate tribute to departmental officers. All were aware, of course, of the money that was made available to the movement. Since 1947 pre-school services had increased roughly seven times, but Government grants had increased roughly fourteen times. In 1947 five per cent of three and four year old children were in some form of pre-school education at a cost of \$150,000. In 1957 this percentage had risen to 16% and the cost totalled \$800,000. In 1967 25 per cent of the children attended some form of pre-school service and Government grants then exceeded one and a half million dollars. This year about one child in three of all the children in New Zealand was receiving pre-school education and the cost to the Government was now over two million dollars. This was not the limit of Government assistance. There was the very important

area in the form of advice by pre-school advisers. There were also all the other administrative matters which must be attended to by departmental officers and this very important work behind the scenes must not be overlooked.

There was very long term work in consultation with the Union in making new policies to meet changing circumstances. At present they were in the process of setting up a committee of inquiry to review the whole complexity of pre-school education generally. There were new developments, such as setting up the new training centre in Wellington, and twenty new kindergartens being built this year. Arrangements were now made for the early acquisition of sites. Provision was also being made for relieving teachers for very short periods. It would be true to say that in every aspect of the kindergarten movement Government joined with associations to provide the service and to improve its quality.

In 1970 the provision of admirable accommodation was taken for granted. Mr Gair then gave a description of a kindergarten taken from a 1947 report. It was sometimes difficult to realise the very great progress that had been made, and it was not because the people who ran kindergartens in those days were not concerned to see that the best was obtained. Associations had come a long way since those early days and today all kindergartens were well housed and equipped. The staffing position had improved to the point where it was rare to find a position not filled by trained staff at the beginning of the year.

One of the main tasks for the Union was to ensure that the service was of the type best suited to the community and Mr Gair said he was pleased to see that the Play Centre movement had senior members present. This growing liaison was one of the most promising notes on which to enter the 70's.

Mr Gair said he was concerned that the service should be made available to the children most in need of it. The Government had recently made moves to provide additional money for kindergartens and play centres in areas where they were most needed, particularly in those areas where parents faced great difficulties. These young children needed more individual attention and staff to child ratio must be maintained.

Education could never be static. There was a committee of inquiry into this matter at present which might well shape the future of pre-school education. The Union was giving advice to this committee which would enable them to work to long term thinking and Mr Gair said he hoped for big thinking in pre-school education when the recommendations of this committee were to hand.

Mr Gair formally declared the 1970 conference of the Union officially open.

Miss Ingram thanked Mr Gair for his address and asked that he pass on to Mr Talboys the Union's thanks and appreciation for all that his department was going to assist. She invited Mr Kirkpatrick, President of the Play Centre Federation, to stand and introduce himself to the meeting.

In moving a vote of thanks Mrs Ryan expressed the appreciation of everyone present to Mr Gair for giving so much of his valuable time to officially open the 1970 conference and for his very interesting and worthwhile remarks. CARRIED BY ACCLAMATION.

The President announced the venues for the Regional Meetings to be held next morning and the meeting closed at 9.30 p.m.