

The American Child[#]

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EDUCATION FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN

MANY suggestions have been made for bringing migrant children into the schools or for bringing the schools to migrant children—but not nearly enough has been done. It is encouraging to note, therefore, recent steps taken in New York State by public and private agencies which in a small but effective way demonstrate how migrant children can be given greater and more worthwhile educational experiences than are generally available to them.

Migrants in New York State

Every year about 20,000 migrants come up to New York State, most of them from Florida. Their northward trek begins in the spring and they return home in the fall. The President's Commission on Migratory Labor found that few of the school districts in Florida make any serious efforts to get the migrant children into school for the six or seven months they are at home. It is not surprising therefore, to find that these migrant children, compared to others their age, are retarded educationally, from two to five years, and equally important, have not had sufficient opportunities for cooperative work and play which, in the good school setting, can do so much to foster democratic attitudes and wholesome growth.

Migrant Labor 4-H Clubs

In order to meet, in part, some of the special needs of these children, a novel program was initiated in New York in the summer of 1950. A 4-H Club was set up at the largest migrant labor camp in the state at King Ferry where more than 1,000 migrants live each year. This Club—the King Ferry Champions—was created through the combined efforts of the camp manager and county agents who were assisted by Professor Howard E. Thomas, a rural sociologist at Cornell. Because the program was so successful in its initial year, it was continued in the summer of 1951 at King Ferry and what was equally heartening was the acceptance of the idea by a neighboring community which set up a similar program this summer.

The projects carried on at the 4-H Clubs teach the children new skills in farming, sewing, swine caring and home beautification. The 80 children who have participated in these programs look forward eagerly to their return to N. Y. State next year when they can once again have an opportunity to carry on the projects they worked on this summer. Extension workers and 4-H Club leaders are no less enthusiastic about the results of this program. They hope the idea will spread widely over the country and that 4-H programs in migrant camps will become an important medium not only to teach useful skills, but also to promote understanding between migrant youth and the young people

who permanently reside in the community.

Summer School for Migrants

Another educational program for migrant youth in New York which achieved signal success was a summer school operated experimentally in Pooleville under the private sponsorship of two agencies with programs for migrants—the Utica Area Migrant Committee and the Division of Home Missions of the National Council of Churches.

Twenty-one children ranging in age from six to thirteen, attended the school which was staffed by three professionally trained and experienced teachers and directed by Miss Eleanor Seaton of Rhode Island. Classes were held from 8:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday. The children worked on activity units, developed and improved their skills in the three R's, engaged in supervised recreational activities and were given nutritious lunches each day. Attendance was voluntary, and the low rate of absenteeism demonstrated how much the children enjoyed the school. Local church groups contributed food and fruit juices. Transportation was provided by the owner of the Pooleville labor camp. School supplies and text books as well as invaluable advice came from the State Education Department. There was no charge to the migrants for sending their children to the school.

The success achieved by this summer school has demonstrated that even though children of migrants may be in a community only for a short time, there are real opportunities to provide education for them. The complete job, however, is beyond the means of any private group and it is hoped that the State, with its far greater resources, will embark on a similar but much wider program next year to reach many more migrant children.



Summer School for Migrant Children in New York