

*Observations of a peripatetic
reporter on the care of . . .*

CUBAN CHILDREN AWAY FROM HOME

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“CHILDREN ARE ALIKE everywhere. The only differences are in the rules made by adults.”

This remark was made recently by a 15-year-old Cuban girl now living with an American family in Albuquerque, N. Mex. It aptly describes the source of some of the joys and difficulties being experienced by the hundreds of persons in communities throughout this country who as foster parents or members of the staffs of children's agencies, institutions, or boarding schools are participating in the Federal Government's program for the care of “unaccompanied” Cuban children—young people usually between the ages of 6 and 19 who in the last 2 years have come to this country from Cuba without their parents and with no relative here to care for them.

Sent out of Cuba by their parents to escape Communist indoctrination, these young refugees—nearly 8,000 in all—have for the most part demonstrated the remarkable ability of young personalities well-grounded in close family ties to withstand extended emotional strain. They have, however, faced those who have been involved in their care with a renewed realization of the importance of three social work maxims: know the culture with which you are dealing; understand the basic needs of children in every culture; and appreciate the individuality in every child.

Coming from all classes of society, the children include the scions of sugar barons, merchants, doctors, lawyers, engineers, clerks, laborers, peasants, and fishermen; but the majority are the sons and

daughters of once “comfortably off” middle class families. Most of them are in their early teens, and nearly two-thirds are boys. They have delighted their caretakers with their politeness, irritated them with their noisy chatter, enraged them with their untidiness, impressed them with their respect for their parents' wishes, and won them with their charm.

With a few exceptions where placements have been made by public agencies, the care and supervision of these young emigrés are provided by local voluntary child-care agencies scattered in 93 communities from Miami, Fla., to Yakima, Wash., and licensed or approved by their State welfare departments. On October 31, 1962, these agencies had 4,010 Cuban children under their supervision, 1,453 in foster family homes, and 2,557 in local institutions for dependent and neglected children, small group homes, or private boarding schools. In addition, the agencies had returned some 4,000 other Cuban children formerly under their care to parents or other close relatives who had followed them to this country. For each child under care, the agencies receive a Federal payment on a per diem basis.

The Beginning

The provisions for unaccompanied children are part of the most comprehensive program yet devised in this country to meet a wave of incoming refugees and the first to involve the distribution of Federal financial assistance for maintenance outside of a refugee center. The program's base is in Miami, the chief port of entry, a city whose plight was one of

the precipitating factors in the initiation of the Federal aid.

Soon after Castro's assumption of power in Cuba the population of Miami began to swell with the daily influx of hundreds of Cubans, arriving as "visitors" or "students" but remaining as refugees. While some of the earliest refugees managed to bring some resources with them, as time passed controls in Cuba tightened and soon the emigrés could bring hardly more than the clothes they had on. Still they came, and it gradually became apparent that the community of Miami—an area of depressed employment—could not alone meet their needs.

Accordingly the Federal Government stepped in to help—first in November 1960, when President Eisenhower allocated \$1 million out of the contingency fund of the mutual security program for the purpose. This was spent for the establishment and maintenance of a refugee center in Miami as the hub of resettlement efforts being made by four long-experienced, voluntary refugee relief agencies—the National Catholic Welfare Conference, the International Rescue Committee, the Church World Service, and the United HIAS Service; for defraying transportation costs; and for the unpublicized beginnings of foster care for unaccompanied Cuban children. Later, in February 1961, President Kennedy ordered a program to be developed by the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare for meeting the minimum needs of the refugees for daily subsistence, resettlement, employment, education, and health, and for the care and protection of unaccompanied children.

Additional monies from the President's contingency fund supported the program until the 87th Congress, under authorization of a new Migration and Refugee Assistance Act passed in June 1962, appropriated \$70,110,000 to carry on the program for the 1963 fiscal year. Of this, \$13,800,000 is for the unaccompanied children's program.

The administration of the subsistence and foster-care phases of the refugee program is carried out by the Florida State Department of Public Welfare under contract with the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Bureau of Family Services and the Children's Bureau. The Florida department in turn has subcontracts with HIAS and three local voluntary children's agencies—the Catholic Welfare Bureau of the Diocese of Miami, the Children's Service Bureau, and the Jewish Family and Children's Service—for arranging for the placement of children.

The Catholic Welfare Bureau and the Children's Service Bureau, responsible respectively for Catholic and Protestant Cuban children, not only receive and place children in Miami but also find child-caring agencies elsewhere willing and able to take Cuban children into care. HIAS arranges for the out-of-town placements of Jewish Cuban children, and the Jewish Family and Children's Service provides for those who need placement in Miami.

The Placement Agencies

Much of the early stimulus for the program for unaccompanied children came from the then Reverend—now Monsignor—Bryan O. Walsh, director of the Catholic Welfare Bureau of Miami, which, because about 95 percent of the Cuban children are Catholic, has carried the burden of the placements. In the fall of 1960 after his agency had just suffered a 30-percent budget cut, Father Walsh met Pedro, a 15-year-old Cuban boy who for the whole month he had been in Miami had been spending each day with a different Cuban refugee family, none of whom could keep him. About the same time he began to hear stories of Cuban children in Miami who had been placed in the care of emigrating strangers at the Havana airport when their parents had been refused permission to leave. Sensing an oncoming flood of child-care problems with the breakdown of such haphazard parental placements, he called a meeting of the Family and Children's Division of the Miami Welfare Planning Council. As a result, the three Miami child-placing agencies offered their services in a suggested Government sponsored foster-care program for unaccompanied Cuban children.

They heard nothing until Christmas Eve 1960, when Father Walsh received a request from the U.S. State Department to make arrangements for the care of 200 Cuban children who were about to leave Havana. On December 26, the first official "unaccompanied children" arrived—10 teenage boys. Fortunately, the absence for the holidays of the student body of a local boarding school provided them and the 15 other boys who arrived in a few days with an immediate place to stay.

This was the beginning of an increasing influx of unaccompanied Cuban children to Miami—which by the summer of 1961 was running about 200 children a week—and of an ever-accelerating tempo in Father Walsh's efforts to find suitable living quarters and supervision for them—often on a moment's notice. He solved his first problem, presented by the students' return from their holidays, by moving into a donated,

unfurnished house with 10 Cuban boys and some army cots—taking the boys for meals to the academy across the street. (The other 15 Cuban children in the Christmas package of 1960 needed only to be dispatched to relatives in this country.)

Since then this first home for Cuban boys has expanded to a two-house home for 40 Cuban boys run by Cuban Jesuits. In addition, the Catholic Welfare Bureau has converted a summer retreat for priests, called Camp Matacumbe, to a receiving home and school, which now houses 350 teenage Cuban boys; borrowed a building at Kendall, the institutional grounds of the Dade County Welfare Department, for use as a receiving home, now housing 205 boys; converted 3 rows of garden apartments in Florida City to a receiving home and school for girls and younger boys, which now holds about 465 boys and girls; and converted a two-building group of apartments in Miami to a cottage-type institution, called St. Raphael's Home for Boys, now housing 74 boys.

In addition to these facilities the Catholic Welfare Bureau has from the beginning used foster-family placements, especially among Cuban couples, for both emergency and more permanent care of Cuban children; and with the help of the National Conference of Catholic Charities has formed a pool of 95 Catholic child-caring agencies and institutions in 36 States which have been willing to take Cuban children into care. Its Cuban refugee unit has a staff of 406 persons. By October 31, 1962, the agency had handled 6,837 children in the Federal unaccompanied children's program. Of these, 3,523 children were still in foster care.

Although faced with a much smaller group of Cuban children—375 in all by October 31, 1962—the Children's Service Bureau was at first also hard pressed in making arrangements for care. With no countrywide network of child-caring agencies with which to deal and with children (or their parents) insisting that denominational lines not be crossed in placement, the agency had to struggle on the one hand with placement offers from church groups lacking qualified child-placing staff, and, on the other, with difficulties in locating licensed or approved child-caring agencies ready to study and supervise homes offered for Cuban children. Last spring, however, after the Child Welfare League of America held a meeting to discuss the program, offers of participation from denominationally sponsored or non-sectarian child-caring agencies stepped up. By October 31, 1962, the agency had been able to send some 190 children to other communities for care, 142 of

whom were still in care. The agency still had 77 children in care in Miami—10 in a small Methodist home, the rest in foster homes.

The United HIAS Service, which in its long experience with refugee children since the early days of Hitler has built up close relationships with Jewish child-caring agencies throughout the country, had by October 31, 1962, sent 117 children out of Miami for foster care under the program, nearly all of whom were placed with foster families. At the end of last October, 54 of the children were still in foster care.

The Jewish Family and Children's Service has placed only a handful of Cuban children in regular foster care in Miami, but it has provided emergency care for nearly all the new arrivals eventually placed elsewhere by HIAS.

All of these agencies have also helped many unaccompanied children not in the foster-care program to reach the homes of relatives who have promised to care for them.

The Child Welfare Division of the Florida State Department of Public Welfare, while concerned chiefly with the administrative and fiscal phases of the unaccompanied children's program, also carries a direct caseload of some 90 children in foster family care and in small group homes in Miami. While these include some "boat boys"—teenagers who came from Cuba on their own initiative in fishermen's boats or other small craft—they are for the most

A group of Cuban boys with Msgr. Bryan O. Walsh, director of the Catholic Welfare Bureau, at St. Raphael's Home, one of the facilities for the care of Cuban children in Miami.



part children who had been sent by their parents to the care of relatives, friends, or comparative strangers who were unable to give them a good home. They include, for example, an emotionally upset 10-year-old girl left in a boarding school by a man who disappeared; a 15-year-old boy sent to a hostile grandmother; a 12-year-old boy sent to an unrelated widow who feared he might have a bad effect on her teenage daughters.

Because of such evidences of unfortunate situations for children resulting from hasty parental plans, the Florida child welfare division is making home studies of all the "guardian cases" in the Cuban refugee program's financial assistance load in Miami—cases in which Cuban families receive a monthly payment (\$28–\$36) for an unrelated child placed in their care by his parents.

The efforts of the receiving agencies to get the children out of the crowded conditions in Miami were for a long while somewhat hampered by the reluctance of many of the youngsters to leave an area where they felt close to home and had many friends. Even after the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion many of the young people seemed so sure that they were in this country for only a short stay that they not only saw no point in leaving Miami but took little interest in learning English. This attitude—clung to by some of the children even after being sent to foster homes where nobody spoke Spanish—has now generally given way to a wish to learn English as rapidly as possible "so that I will be able to help my parents when they get here."

While most of the young people learn English quickly when in school with American children, nearly all the Cuban children in Miami have been somewhat handicapped in this by the fact that they are with Cubans most of the time—whether with their own parents or in foster family homes, where there are often several other Cuban children and even Spanish-speaking foster parents, or in the large group homes, where all the children and most of the staff speak Spanish. Even in the public schools the children are apt to speak Spanish except while reciting since some public schools in Miami have enrollments which are 60 to 80 percent Cuban.

Refugees With a Difference

Many of the agencies across the country which have taken Cuban children into care are participating in an unaccompanied children's program for the first time. Others are old hands at transplanting uprooted children from other countries. But even

those with considerable experience of this nature have found themselves in for many new experiences.

On the plus side has been the fact that the children, on the whole, have seemed more emotionally stable than many of their forerunners. They have not been through blitzkrieg like the British children brought here in 1940, or seen the horrors of a concentration camp, as had so many of the displaced children of post-War Europe, or fought against tanks with hand grenades as had the Hungarian teenage refugees of 1957. While the fathers or brothers of some of the Cuban children had been killed or imprisoned as a result of the revolution, the great majority of the children apparently lived well-sheltered lives up to the point of actual separation from their parents. Most of them apparently were well prepared for "being sent to school in the United States"—not a new practice among well-to-do Cuban families. Moreover, they have continued to be in constant touch with their parents by phone and mail and have expected to see them shortly.

The first thing nearly every unaccompanied child has done on his arrival in Miami is to inquire about getting his parents a visa waiver—a visa substitute issued by the U.S. State Department after the January 1961 removal of all United States consular services from Cuba. Until the recent Cuban crisis, visa waivers, signed by sponsoring agencies, could be mailed to Cuba for "students" 6 to 18, and visa waivers for adults could be mailed to them after being signed by a first degree relative in this country. Thus, families desiring to leave Cuba could send their children out as "students" and come themselves on visa waivers initiated by their children. Waiting periods between children's and parents' arrivals have varied from 3 months to 2 years—much of the delays having to do with the parents' difficulties in getting dollars to pay for their transportation and in getting permission from the Cuban police to leave the country.

Because refugees to the United States have had to turn over all their possessions to the Castro government before leaving, a few parents have apparently preferred to stay in Cuba in the hope of riding out the storm. Others have been unable to leave, either because of loyalty to their own aged parents who cannot be moved, the refusal of the Cuban government to release them, imprisonment, or other difficulties.

The provision of foster care for Cuban children has from the beginning been regarded by all concerned as a temporary measure to last only until

parents and children can be reunited. The absent parents remain the children's guardians, and in many instances continue to supervise their behavior by phone and mail. The older children tend to consult their parents by telephone before making any major decisions or accepting any plans made for them by agency or school—reversing the charges so that the bill can be paid with pesos in Cuba.

This deference to parents has been the cause of both joy and consternation to the agencies caring for Cuban children. While struck with the children's unquestioning obedience to their parents, they have on occasion found some of the parents' instructions to their children rather trying—as when a once-pampered daughter was told she did not need to help her foster mother with the dishes, or when a girl with a severe toothache refused to go to the dentist because her mother told her the cavity in her tooth would close if she took calcium pills. One agency had to call on a priest to write a long letter about children's needs to a mother who kept instructing her little 10-year-old boy to “pray for Cuba instead of playing.”

The closeness of Cuban children to their families, however, is regarded by many social workers in the program as the chief asset in the emotional strength which has enabled the great majority of children to take such a precarious separation from their parents with apparent calmness. While some of them have been found crying at night by their foster parents, relatively few have been reported as showing symptoms of severe emotional disturbance—and these have usually been children who came from homes where the customary Cuban closeness between parents and children did not prevail.

“We expected all kinds of problems and they just didn't happen,” says a child welfare worker who has supervised the placement of 91 Cuban children. “These children just aren't like the deprived children we see in our regular foster-care program.”

Cultural Difficulties

There have, of course, been some minor difficulties due to cultural differences. Diet has been one of the most common, arising from the Cuban child's apparent dislike of everything except meat, black beans, and sugar. Being expected to eat vegetables has been the cause of many a complaint to parents. One mother wrote anxiously to an institution for an explanation of her daughter's charge: “Here they feed us only spinaches.” On the other hand, another mother, reunited with her son in Florida, wrote to



These young Cubans are waiting at the Miami airport with their agency escort (right) for the plane which will take them to another community in this country for foster care.

his former foster mother, who had weaned him from “stomach pills” to vegetables, for her “recipe for a balanced diet.”

The greatest source of trouble has come from the fact that many of the youngsters had been waited on by servants all their lives. Some children have been genuinely shocked when asked to take out the garbage or even to pick up their clothes, and in a number of instances a battle of wills has ensued. Some foster parents have even given up and asked for the removal of teenagers who refused to do the kind of chores their own children were accustomed to doing. Often when the Cuban child has found the same things expected of him in his second foster home he has finally realized that asking young people to help around the house is an American custom and not a form of deliberate exploitation.

At the same time, caseworkers have spent considerable time in helping foster parents and houseparents to see that the Cuban child's failure to be helpful does not always derive from unwillingness, but often from simply not knowing how to do what is expected of him. One teenage girl, for example, had never even seen a bed being made.

As time has passed many of the Cuban children have learned to do many things. A group of boarding school girls, for example, described by the superintendent as “rather trying” when they first came to the school in the summer of 1961, last spring gave an “appreciation” party for the staff, doing all the preparation and cleaning up themselves. And a 12-

year-old boy has written his parents in Cuba that he will help them learn to keep house when they come to the United States.

The concept of a foster family is unknown in Cuba, and therefore some of the Cuban children (and their parents) have had difficulty in understanding the role of the foster parents. Expecting placement in a boarding school, some teenagers have at first resisted the idea of living with an American family, and then apparently accepted it only as a kind of boarding arrangement. Thus while accustomed to obey adults in authority, some of them—especially the boys—have been slow in recognizing the authority of the foster parents. Difficulties in communication because of language differences have sometimes aggravated the problem. However, the younger children seem to settle quickly into their foster parents' home after the first frightening days of strangeness.

The difficulties are probably fewer than the satisfactions. Many foster parents have become extremely fond of the young Cubans in their care. They write to the children's parents in Cuba frequently, and in a number of instances have been instrumental in helping them find jobs after they arrive in the United States. Some foster parents have even taken the children's parents into their homes until they have become established.

School principals report that the Cuban children's behavior is on the whole excellent although they "talk a lot in class" and stay away "on the slightest pretext"—a hard rain, their Saint's day, or, in Miami, a "feeling" that their parents might be arriving. One foster mother of two teenage girls has come to the conclusion from the girls' description of the customs in the private school they used to attend that in Cuba "the students ran the schools." This conclusion would undoubtedly be concurred in by the high school principal in Albuquerque who was told by a group of polite, registering Cuban boys that they would "like to reserve the right to strike."

As with all programs involving aliens, the Cuban program has met with resistance in some communities. There are those where resentment has been expressed over "doing more for the Cuban children than we are doing for our own;" and some where school boards have raised objections to taking "these nonresidents" into the public schools.

However, in spite of some initial difficulties with their foster parents and a few among themselves (as in the group home where the boys have divided into two rival factions based on loyalties to their Miami "alma maters," Camp Kendall and Camp Mata-

cumbe), the Cuban youngsters have won friends wherever they have gone. It has not taken people long to discover that they are well-behaved in public, good-natured, law-abiding, and often very bright.

Foster Care Arrangements

The agencies have found a variety of ways to provide care for the Cuban children. Those which have taken responsibility for large numbers of children—and some have accepted from 100 to 300 children in all—have hired additional caseworkers and set up special units for the program.

Most of the agencies using group care have relied on existing facilities, but a few have opened up special homes for teenage boys using refugee couples as houseparents or, in some instances, members of religious orders who have fled from Cuba. For example, in Montana, 40 boys are living in what was once the governor's mansion, supervised by 2 refugee couples. And in Portland, Oreg., an agency has rented 6 houses in a residential area, each house serving as a home for 5 or 6 Cuban teenagers and a Cuban refugee couple employed as houseparents.

Some agencies have hesitated to place Cuban children in institutions for dependent and neglected children because of the emotional difficulties of so many of the institutions' regular charges; and in fact Cuban children have protested vehemently against being put into "an orphans' home." In Denver, Colo., a group of Cuban teenage girls who were placed in an institution with Mexican-Americans, where it was thought they would feel at home because the other girls spoke Spanish, for a long time would have nothing to do with the other girls. By now, however, some fast friendships have been formed across the nationality lines.

On the other hand, in a home for younger boys near New Orleans, La., operated by a group of warmth-radiating nuns, only two of nine Cuban boys seemed to have any difficulty in adjusting. One, a 6-year-old, unfortunately arrived with a skin infection which required him to be placed in isolation during his first week in the institution; but his constant crying ceased when he was allowed to be with the older boys. The other, aged 9, eventually changed his rebellious behavior after being "taken in hand" by the other Cuban boys.

The agency responsible for these boys has placed Cuban children in a total of four institutions, and has provided them as caseworker a Cuban lawyer—working under the supervision of a professional social worker—who through his frequent visits has

become a "father figure" for many of the children.

Some agencies which use group care make special efforts to find week-end and holiday foster parents to give the Cuban youngsters a touch of home life. In Joliet, Ill., for example, an agency which is supervising 63 Cuban girls in 2 private boarding schools has succeeded in getting every Cuban girl invited to somebody's home at some time. However, when the agency was ready to make a special drive to get them all invitations for the Christmas holidays, they refused to leave each other. "We are a family," the girls explained, "and we want to spend our holidays at home."

Many agencies through their experience in this program have found new sources of foster-family homes, a single notice in a church bulletin often being sufficient to bring in more applications than the agency has children. As usually happens, most of the applicants have asked for little children, although most of the children needing placement are in their teens. Some applicants, however, have asked for a teenage boy or girl as a "companion" for their own son or daughter, and others have preferred a teenage child to none. In some instances, agencies have been able to interest applicants for whom they had no Cuban child in taking another child needing care away from home.

Some agencies have been unwilling to participate in the program because foster-care resources in their community are insufficient for the needs of all the dependent and neglected children in the area. However, other agencies have found for the Cubans foster parents who, the agency workers say, would never have applied to them for other children. In St. Petersburg, Fla., for example, some extremely wealthy families have taken Cuban children into their homes as have some families in more moderate circumstances. The main difficulty there seems to be that the children get together frequently by telephone to compare notes as to who has what, with some resultant jealousy.

Since Cuban children will almost invariably accept authority from a respected Cuban adult, agencies have sometimes asked a Cuban man or woman in the refugee community to talk to a child who is giving trouble to his American foster parents—a method that has often proved effective.

Cuban foster parents, in use in Miami, have had the advantage of understanding their charges' Cuban ways. They have also found the appeal "we are all in this together" a quick way of overcoming resistance to chores.

Other Spanish-speaking foster parents have been found in sections of the country where many people speak Spanish, such as the Southwest. However, agencies report that non-Spanish speaking foster parents who are warm and accepting can make the children feel just as much at home, except perhaps in the first few days of care. "We felt so sorry for them and so helpless when they first came," said one such foster mother recently of a Cuban sister and brother she has in her home. "But our own children found language no barrier to a welcome and pretty soon we were all having a hilarious time communicating with expressive noises and gestures."

Agency executives say they have learned many things from their participation in the Cuban program. For example, a few have found it possible to place Negro-Cuban and Chinese-Cuban children in white American families. Others have been impressed with the efficacy of the small group homes set up for the care of Cuban teenage boys and are planning to adopt this pattern of care for teenage boys of their own communities who need care away from home. One agency has been spurred by its experience in the Cuban program to build up a program of foster-family care for the dependent and neglected children it has always placed in an institution.

Standards and Cost

The agencies caring for Cuban children must be approved or licensed by their State welfare departments, must comply with their States' laws for licensing foster homes, and must make social case-work services available to the child. The Florida State Department of Public Welfare checks with the State welfare departments on the qualifications of the agencies for receiving children.

For the care they provide the agencies receive a payment of \$5 a day for each child in a foster family and \$6 a day for each child in group care. An additional 50 cents daily per child goes to the Miami receiving agencies which keep reports on the status of the child and handle all the direct transactions with the agencies. Transportation costs in this country are borne by the Federal Government.

The per diem payments are expected to cover the costs of the child's board and care, clothing, medical care (except for unusual expenses), school supplies, incidentals, casework service, and the agency's administrative expenses. Providing all this under the current rates has proved to be impossible in some high