



THE principal of Beck House, Mr. Rob Burt, has a challenging task ahead to prove institutional training has an important place in social welfare work.

"Stability in their personal life, in their schooling and in their association with other people is our aim. Possibly their last year could include some sort of vocational training.

"None of this can be achieved overnight," Mr Burt said.

To help Mr Burt and deputy principal, Mr Joe Bartel, is a staff which includes a matron, housemasters, cooks and three full-time teachers.

Uniform

One of the many decisions was whether the boys would wear an official uniform.

"I don't think they will. The ever-popular jeans might end up as an unofficial one," Mr Burt said.

Each boy will have his own cubicle in the dormitory so he can have some of his own things about him.

Questions like whether the boys are allowed to smoke, how to cope with temper tantrums, wilful damage, victimisation by peers, will all be looked at if and when they eventuate.

The home situation has to find answers in the same way as the staff will.

"One thing concerning us all is how we will fit into this community and allay community fears. Eskdale people will naturally be curious. I just hope the home can become an integral part of the settlement out here," Mr Burt said.

One means of communication with the Eskdale community has been the publication of the home's first newsletter. It has been

distributed in the district through the local store and school.

"Newsletter No 1" introduces the staff to the community and explains the aims and objects of the home. It greets its readers as "Dear friends and neighbours".

It explains the home will have a team of 23 working on three rosters, 24 hours each day, seven days a week.

Colourful

When the first boys arrived at Beck House late last month they found a buzzing community within the park-like grounds. Since the property was bought from the Hawke's Bay Children's Homes its walls have been covered with bright wallpaper, its kitchen sparkles and the dormitory cubicles have been painted in vivid colours.

The three classrooms at Beck House are each divided into formal and informal teaching areas. The head teacher, Mr Doug McKelvie, said the teaching would be scaled from infant grade to intermediate standards.

Mr McKelvie recently taught at Bay View primary school and worked with the activity centre in Napier.

The pupils already enrolled come from Wanganui, Invercargill, Christchurch, Hamilton and Auckland.

"Village"

Across the main building there is now a virtual village. It contains the school and staff homes.

This change of image for Beck House is not the first the institution has seen. France House, as it was, started as a two-storey building in 1924, but was devastated in the 1931 earthquake.

The original France House was built in 1924 surrounded by 50 acres of ground. Its purpose was to provide a haven for orphaned, neglected and destitute boys.

Opened on February 1, 1924, by Major-General Sir Andrew Russell, it housed 22 boys brought from the Hawke's Bay Children's Home in Priestly Terrace, Napier. It was then a two-storey brick building.

This building was totally destroyed in the 1931 earthquake; fortunately with no loss of life or injury.

By 1933, the original home had been replaced with a single-storey wooden building. This was officially opened in January that year by Lord Bledisloe.

Until it was sold to the Government in 1973, France House accommodated up to 30 boys, the largest number living there during the depression years.

The name France House was given to the home to mark the generosity of

Hawke's Bay benefactor, Mr Robert France, who set up a trust in 1887 to assist destitute orphaned children.

Although in his will of 1887 Mr France set aside \$4000 to buy a piece of land — "not exceeding 50 acres within the borough of Napier or Petane Road Board District in the provincial district of Hawke's Bay", this money did not buy France House, as many think.

Despite this, many of the directions in Mr France's will appear to have been applied at the home.

The orphans at France House were educated at "a public school or school convenient of access to the said home".

This was so — according to the will — that "the children could receive a sound moral and liberal education, including technical training and the teaching of the girls the principles of domestic economy". Boys were taught handicrafts, farm work, gardening and other industries.

The boys and girls could not be taught any particular religious creed while living at the home, "but were to be constantly reminded by the superintendents that the Bible is the word of God and they ought to read it, study it, and be entirely guided in life by its teaching".

Each child leaving the home was given a Bible as a gift from Robert France, along with a pamphlet written by him "containing his religious experience from the age of 14 to 20".

The heavy economic burden of running France House forced the trustees of the Hawke's Bay Children's Homes to sell the home to the Government in 1973. The price was never disclosed.

No stigma

The new principal, Mr Burt, hopes to show there is no stigma attached to the term "institution", that there will be no barriers either within the wall or outside, and that Beck House can prove the effectiveness of a living-together situation "with concern" as far as unhappy young people are concerned.

It seems appropriate that the former France House has been renamed Beck House. Mr John Beck was officer-in-charge of industrial and special schools for New Zealand from 1915 to 1925 and superintendent of child welfare homes from 1926 to 1938.

While Mr France in his day showed a liberal and forward-thinking attitude to young people, Mr Beck saw — and was involved in — the big changes in industrial and special schools run by the Department of Education and the instigation of child welfare homes from 1926.

Mr Beck's depth of concern for Hawke's Bay State wards and foster children is outlined in his memoirs.

He came to Napier in 1931 to find a city of smoking rubble.

"Our office had gone. Nothing was there except a heap of broken brick and masonry. On either side of the street numerous cars and other vehicles were partly buried.

"In one of the main thoroughfares I saw one living thing — a white hen, picking its way over the broken concrete," Mr Beck recalls.

A luxury

"For myself, a tent in the backyard of the child welfare officer's home, seemed a luxury.

After spending some time at the "receiving home" at Taradale, Mr Beck decided the best arrangement was to take the children back to Wellington.

"I did this the next morning, packing them somehow into my large Hudson. The journey, once we left the stricken area, was uneventful but those three days in Napier were dramatic and never to be forgotten," his memoirs record.