

VOICES FROM THE ARCHIVES

1866 - 1945

ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS OF HELPING CHILDREN

A journey of generosity and giving through the generations



Any organisation today needs to have feedback from 'users'. The 'users' of the Society are the ministers who administer the Society's grants. The beneficiaries are the children and their families who receive the grants. The nature of the feedback on the impact of grants on beneficiaries, however, has changed over the 150 years of the Society. Before 1900 most information was given by Ministers, Superintendents and Guardians rather than beneficiaries themselves. From 1900 to 1920 feedback from mothers of children becomes more prevalent among reports of Ministers and others. From the 1920's onwards it is mainly expressions of gratitude from beneficiaries.

This is likely to reflect the change from the idea of doing things for a person to working with that person as a participant. Feedback is a more modern preoccupation with outcomes a major focus of funders and funded alike. From the records, however, there is an opportunity to hear the authentic voices of administrators and recipients from the distant past and more modern times. It is by necessity an imperfect exercise as there was undoubtedly filtering of material to tell a story with a purpose to show how the Society has helped. Nevertheless it is a window onto the world of the beneficiary and administrator and gives voice to those who do not usually articulate their opinions in print. These are **their** voices:

BELFAST, December 19, 1867

"REV. AND DEAR SIR – I feel it to be my duty to write, thanking you for your so kind and tender care of me during the many past years that have seen me grow up from a helpless boy of nine years to be a young man in a prosperous situation, a total abstainer from strong drink and tobacco, and a member of a Christian congregation. I do feel thankful to my Heavenly Father, who, in His good providence, has raised up loving friends and sufficient funds, whereby great numbers of young persons have been reclaimed and are being snatched from wrath and misery, and led, dear sir, into the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ, by the blessed work of the Presbyterian Orphan Society. Wishing every blessing and happiness to you all its supporters, I am, rev. and dear sir, your ever grateful servant."

The letter was received by Rev. Wm Johnston and the sender was given anonymity.

(Young person, 19 December 1876)

HOLYWOOD, August 27, 1878

"DEAR MR. AND MRS. JOHNSTON – I write a few lines to express my gratitude for the great benefit my sisters and I have received from the Orphan Society for the last five years. We feel truly thankful for being placed under the care of kind Christian women, who have cared so tenderly for all our wants that we scarcely felt the want of a parent. And now I am living with a kind lady in Holywood, and am very happy, and hope, with God's blessing, to get on well and make myself useful. – I am yours gratefully,"

(Child, 27 August 1878)

"W.W., one of the first orphans on the list, has just been calling for his church certificate. He sails for America tomorrow. He took the first premium for attendance at the Sabbath-school, and was presented with a Bible besides for his uniform good conduct and worth. He asked me to thank the directors for their goodness to himself and his sister, who had been, from four and six years of age, cast solely on their care without father or mother."

"The aid to this widow and family has been a most needful blessing, and has been wisely used by a prudent and godly mother. She and her family have been preserved from the workhouse, and perhaps ruin, and are happy and thankful under the kindly aid your Society has given them"

(Minister, 1900)

"I would like, through you, to thank the Governors for their long-continued help. It is now almost eleven years since four of my children enrolled in the Society, and it has pleased God to spare me to see the last of them out to business."
(Widow, 1900)

"Mrs. S. is very grateful for the help received. I have never known your grants to have been more fruitful of lasting results. Mrs. S. could not have kept the home together here but for the grants of the Society."
(Superintendent, 1911)

"The money is very acceptable, as I find it difficult to keep my children fed and clothed. They are now growing up, and at the most expensive age, when they can earn little or nothing."
(Widow, 1922)

"May I express the gratitude I feel to you for the generous help I and my family have for over six years had from your Society...My daughter has had two additional years' allowance, which has enabled me to give her a two year's commercial course at Technical School. This leaves her in a position, I trust, to earn a modest living...I want you to know that I and my children are truly grateful to God and to your wonderful Society for all the help and comfort we have received."
(Mother, 1933)

"I write to thank you very much for the help given to me through the Presbyterian Orphan Society. Your grant has been a great help for many years and for the last two or three years it enabled me to obtain a sound education at a secondary school."
(Child, 1934)

"I am extremely grateful for the help I received, and I am more than grateful for the manner in which that help was conveyed to me. Your unfailing kindness and sympathetic understanding meant a great deal to me."
(Mother, 1934)

"Please convey my sincere thanks to the Governors for their kindness in increasing my grant from the Orphan Society. I do not know what I would have done if I had been left helpless with the four children. Now they are receiving a chance for life, and it is all due to the help I have received from The Presbyterian Orphan Society."
(Mother, 1944)



Credit: Belfast Central Mission