

Polish Kindergarten Pahiatua, 1944-5



Kindergarten group at Polish
refugee camp, Pahiatua

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A consequence of world war 2

The most newsworthy reminder of the plight of Europe's children in war was the arrival in 1944 of over 700 Polish war orphans who had managed to survive a mass relocation from Soviet labour camps to the Persian Gulf. The story of these children as they grew up and remained connected to one another has been told in various ways. Their situation did not attract research interest at the time but there was considerable media coverage of the arrival of the children, the welcome by Prime Minister Peter Fraser who had offered New Zealand as a temporary home, and their subsequent life and education at the Pahiatua camp. The changed political situation in Poland prevented their return. There was considerable effort by the government and Catholic communities to ensure that these children benefited from the best New Zealand could offer by way of education and health services. Little is known about the kindergarten set up at the camp for the younger aged children except that establishing regular schooling for the children was made a priority. Initially all schooling was in Polish because it was anticipated that the children would return to Poland.

Helen May, (2013, 2nd ed.) *The Discovery of Early Childhood*, NZCER Press, Wellington, pp. 394-5



Polish children arrive in
Wellington, October 1944

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Kindergarten children testing the
seesaw built by New Zealand
soldiers, 1945

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Further information

- Krstyna Skwarko (1974) *The Invited: The Story of 733 Polish Children Who Grew up in New Zealand*, Millwood, Wellington
- Polish Children's Reunion Committee (2004) *New Zealand's First Refugees: Pahiatua's Polish Children*, Polish Children's Reunion Committee, Wellington
- The Encyclopedia of NZ

<http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/1095/polish-orphans>

- Films:

<http://www.nzonscreen.com/title/the-story-of-seven-hundred-polish-children-1966>

<http://www.nzonscreen.com/title/nz-soldiers-and-polish-children-weekly-review-no-169-1944>