

WVS/WRVS Bulletin/Magazine

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WOMEN'S VOLUNTARY SERVICES' BULLETIN.

No. 1.

November, 1939.

Introductory.

The variety of tasks which the Women's Voluntary Services have been called upon to perform during the last two months, and the resourcefulness which these have called forth fully justify its motto of "Flexibility."

When War actually came, the Chairman must have felt like an inventor who presses a button and waits anxiously for his machine to move. The wheels gradually revolve and then the entire machine gathers momentum and whirls at high speed. September in the Women's Voluntary Services was like that - A.R.P., Evacuation, Transport, Hospital Services, all were set going at top speed. Everyone reached their stations with the utmost rapidity and waited breathlessly on events. As they waited, they realised that the great whole which they had helped during the preceding months to create was now a living moving entity, and that it would function with ever increasing smoothness and regularity as long as its services were needed, though perhaps not always in quite the way anticipated.

In urban districts recruiting for most Civil Defence Services soon stopped, as they were quickly filled up. The enrolment departments then had to deal with vast numbers of disappointed volunteers and the ever increasing tide of unemployed seeking jobs as a result of trade dislocation, and longing to be of use to the nation. At the London Headquarters alone during September 11,000 volunteers passed through (as many as 1,000 having been dealt with in a day). Centres are now being asked for advice and information of all kinds by all sorts of people and Local Authorities are coming to them to perform all sorts of tasks at a moment's notice. Co-operation with Social Service organisations has been developed as well as various ancillary work for the troops. Civil Defence is evidently a very elastic term and Women's Voluntary Services offices are finding themselves turned into depots where all the problems which are no one else's business can be dumped. But an infinite amount of valuable knowledge is being accumulated and each month, through this Bulletin, it is hoped to pool experiences and make known developments throughout the country. It will have to be telegraphic in form, but will endeavour to be comprehensive in content. The information available will be set out under the main activities undertaken by Women's Voluntary Services with special mention of any new developments in any Region as example of what is being done.

A.R.F.

On the outbreak of war all recruits for the A.R.F. Services reported immediately to their stations, and the majority are now carrying out regular duty. By far the largest proportion of W.V.S. recruits are for these services and there is constant increase in the demand from Local Authorities for W.V.S. assistance. New duties undertaken during the past two months include manning Air Raid warning sirens (Ashbourne, Derbyshire); forming a corps of Women Trench Wardens (Coventry); preparing and issuing Ration Books (Dunstable, Middlesbrough, Paignton); organising reception and feeding centres for possible homeless victims of Air Raids, (Hull, Preston, Southorpe); distribution of Babies' respirators (Southend and Darlington); organisation and staffing of Casualty Bureaux to deal with identification and records of civilian casualties.

Evacuation.

"The greatest exodus since Moses" has perhaps provided the most spectacular part of the work of the W.V.S. In the receiving areas, work began by co-operation in the Billeting Survey which was undertaken in February last. This was followed by much detailed work such as making thousands of palliasses (Huntingdonshire); planning sick-bay accommodation (Hertfordshire); preparing clothes (Woodhall Spa); joint meetings between W.V.S. in the evacuating areas and the receiving areas to discuss mutual problems (Shrewsbury).

When the actual order came, this carefully-prepared machinery was set in motion. Great difficulty was experienced, owing to the children being on holiday. Consequently a medical examination prior to dispatch, was not possible. Hence the prevalence of skin diseases and verminous conditions. The mothers with young children presented special problems, because of their unadaptability and loneliness. The pattern of welfare work among evacuees varies, but the principle remains the same. Examples of this are seen in club-work among mothers ('Penny' clubs in Scotland), clubs where mothers can read and write letters, gossip, hold jumble sales, (Penshurst - Wayland), clubs for expectant mothers (West Sussex) maternity homes (St. Ives), post-natal clubs (St. Neots), homes for children during their mothers' confinements (Huntingdonshire), nursery schools and centres (Bedford, Dorking), communal laundries (St. Ives), centres for communal feeding (Woodhall Spa, Brighton). For the children, the following extract from an L.C.C. child's essay might be taken as a text:-

"You don't have to be mischievous to have fun in the country, because you can go out into the woods and fields or go fishing or help the farmers."

There have been established Sunday clubs for visiting parents (Beaconsfield), clubs for Secondary School children (Huntingdon), sick bays for non-infectious illnesses and minor ailments (West Sussex).

Some children arrived literally in rags, sewn into pieces of calico (Findlay). Their town shoes were quite unsuited to country roads. To meet these defects, Clothing Depots have been set up in all areas. Clothes are washed, repaired and made into new garments, (i.e. boy's jersey from a bathing suit (Hythe, Wellingborough). These are sold whenever possible, the money often being used to buy boots and shoes, which are the severest strain on voluntary funds.

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The Under Fives.

After official evacuation, many requests were received in London for the evacuation of children under five, without their mothers. The first came during an air raid warning on the first day of war and particulars were taken in a shelter. At first all children were sent to existing day nurseries. Others were then sent to a large house, fully equipped and staffed through the help of the National Society of Day Nurseries. In these special circumstances the Government agreed to pay billeting allowances. Another emergency nursery has been set up by special arrangement with the Ministry in Northamptonshire, with staff, as well as children sent down by the W.V.S. There are three other small groups in suitable private houses. There are two villages with a day nursery in one, and a nursery school in the other, where the children are in billets supervised by the parent units. The scheme must still be regarded as being in the laboratory stage, but it seems likely that future evacuation will continue along these lines. Children under two will only be accepted as "poignant" cases. Transport for London children is undertaken by W.V.S. under L.C.C.

Transport.

In London 922 volunteer owner drivers were registered for evacuation and general transport work. The majority of these provided their own petrol.

At the request of 74 hospitals 400 cars were allotted to them for evacuation duties, and the Transport Department undertook evacuation for the Invalid Children's Aid Association, Charity Organisation and Citizens Advice Bureaux, applications being received from their various branches.

Cars were also supplied on demand to the Ministry of Information, Ministry of Health, Regional Headquarters and London Regional Offices, Borough of Westminster, P.L.A., Blood Transfusion Service, Central Midwives Board, etc. By the courtesy of the Mechanised Transport Training Corps a number of hospitals and private cases were provided with an ambulance.

Journeys were made to places as far distant as Redruth, Portmadoc, Berwick-on-Tweed and Lowestoft.

Furthermore the Department dealt with numerous calls for the removal of palliasses, sandbags, pillows, oil lamps, bales of straw and hessian, sewing machines, prams, invalid chairs, hospital equipment and laundry.

In addition to normal transport duties in the country special mention should be made of the work done by the Women's Voluntary Services in connection with the evacuation of hospitals. The great majority of the evacuation of sitting up cases from hospitals to their own homes throughout the country, was undertaken by this organisation.

It should also be noted that in all Rural Districts Women's Voluntary Services cars are on duty in many cases both night and day to convey maternity cases to hospitals as required. In West Sussex and Stockton-on-Tees special emergency squads have been organised.

Training of women ambulance drivers is still being carried out in Skyrack, Cannock, Gosport, Fareham and Havant. W.V.S. is entirely responsible for training in these places. In Glamorgan owing to pressure of work on the police W.V.S. were employed by the chief Constable to go on the public for speeding. In Brighton W.V.S. undertook milk delivery, on the East coast they have been driving shipwrecked mariners to hospital.

A Transport Officer of W.V.S. who was an instructor in the Red Cross Ambulance School has compiled an excellent set of lectures on mechanics suitable for ambulance or owner drivers. Copies can be obtained from the Transport Department, W.V.S. Headquarters.

Special tribute should be paid to the generosity of private motor drivers, prior to the petrol rationing scheme, for the way in which throughout the country they placed their cars at the disposal of the Women's Voluntary Services for work on behalf of the Local Authorities.

Casualty Services.

The position of the Civil Nursing Reserve varies throughout the country. In some places auxiliaries are being called up, in others they are still waiting. As many as possible are proceeding with training while others have joined the V.A.D. At the outbreak of war the L.C.C. handed over the training of the C.N.R. to the Women's Voluntary Services who are now arranging for both the lecture and hospital training of the London recruits. Nine of the large Voluntary Hospitals in London agreed to give combined courses in First Aid and Home Nursing while the B.R.C.S. and St. John Ambulance Brigade have given the W.V.S. every facility to enable Nursing Auxiliaries to attend lectures under their auspices.

The allocation of the Nursing Auxiliaries to hospital is done by the Sector Matrons through the College of Nursing and Miss Watt, Matron-in-Chief of the Ministry of Health.

It is hoped to improve the cut of the C.N.R. uniforms, the majority of which have hitherto been made in outsizes.

Hospital Supplies.

In May last the Central Hospital Supply Committee composed of representatives of the St. John Ambulance Brigade, the British Red Cross Society, the Personal Service League, and the Women's Voluntary Services drew up a joint scheme for the operation of Hospital Supply Depots throughout the country. Large numbers of women enrolled for this service with the Women's Voluntary Services, and a large number of Central Hospital Supply Depots were organised and affiliated under the direction of the Regional Officers of the C.H.S.S. There had been grave difficulty in obtaining and supplying materials for these Depots, but increasing quantities of supplies are now being made available through the Regional Offices, and a considerable amount of work has already been done through Depots for whom supplies have been provided by the Local Authorities. In addition many Depots have done special pieces of work other than hospital supplies. For example in Leicestershire black-out blinds were made for the Local Authority Officers; blankets for evacuees have been made; sheets, pillow cases, etc., for local hospitals.

The Women's Voluntary Services has recently arranged to co-operate with the Chairman of "Punch" in connection with a special fund which is being raised by subscribers to that paper. It is hoped by this means to release additional supplies.

In Region Five the Central Hospital Supply Service works through a system of Clearing Houses in the centre of a group of Boroughs.

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At the Clearing Houses, materials are received, stored in gas proof stores until cut out and forwarded to Depots for distribution to Work Parties.

After the garments are made up they are returned to the Depot, and thence to Clearing Houses, where they are stored till orders come through the Headquarters of the C.H.S.S., as to where they are to be sent.

There are in London to date, ten Clearing Houses of which the Mansion House is one, and upwards of 300 Work Parties. The materials are now coming through in larger quantities which is very satisfactory as workers are very numerous and very enthusiastic.

Canteens.

Communal feeding is one of the big developments arising from the evacuation. Communal kitchens have been set up everywhere. 2s. 6d. a week is being charged at Woodhall Spa for providing dinners and teas for mothers and babies. At Leigh (Staffs) a two course meal is served for 4d. In Lingfield (Surrey) 150 hot dinners are served every day at 1s. 4d. for five dinners.

Many canteens are being run for Civil Defence Services by W.V.S., e.g. for demolition squads, A.R.P. and firemen (Gravesend) and for police (Derby) 100 meals daily. London Regional Headquarters have canteens to feed the Schools for demolition squads. There is a canteen for the Navy at Inverness, for the Army at many Railway junctions (Crewe, York, Newcastle, York is in a disused railway carriage). In these cases it was not possible for the Y.M.C.A. to undertake the work.

There are two mobile canteens at Rochester for A.R.P. workers one each side of the river, made from converted buses. Lady Reading recently opened the last word in Mobile Canteens, for use in the Borough of Paddington. This is planned so that there should be no foot movement only hip exercise. Everything is to hand. A wet girl stands at each end and a dry one at a cash register in the middle. Mobile kitchens (Hastings) are also at work. The Food Advisory Council has met and the Communal Feeding Memorandum has been brought up to date.

Statistics Department.

Statistics Department report that a number of September returns came in too late to be included in the September figures, probably owing to pressure of work at the various centres concerned. The County Boroughs figures are large chiefly because we have now received figures from Birmingham, who had sent us no returns since July and who have enrolled some 1,500 since then.

Our September figures as presented on 10th October were very heavy in every service; the total for the month being 93,914. When we now add 20,304 for the returns which came in too late to be included, we have 114,218 as our total.

Even allowing for some late August enrolments which were included in the September figures we think we may safely say that over 110,000 women were enrolled by our W.V.S. Centres in September.