

# They Befriend Women In Jail

By BARBARA BURKLO  
Sentinel Women's Editor

"When I got in there, the thing that surprised me most was that these are normal girls with bigger problems than most who have taken the wrong turn somewhere.

"I've seen girls in there with the best upbringing, who have gotten in with the wrong crowd — and that's all it has taken."

Speaking is Mrs. Dan Forbush, as she describes her volunteer visits to the women and girls in County Jail.

She and the nine other volunteers in the Santa Cruz County Volunteer Services program "Friends in Contact" (formerly "Friends Outside"), are the only outsiders allowed to visit the women in their cell quarters.

Relatives and other visitors see them in a special room for that purpose.

The volunteers are locked in with the prisoners during their two hour visits each Tuesday and Thursday afternoon.

Two volunteers go each time, taking sewing or craft work with them.

There is an old treadle sewing machine in the quarters.

"We don't know why the girls are in there and we don't ask questions," Margie Forbush says.

"If they want to talk, we have good listening ears. If they don't want to do what we bring, we put it aside and just talk or play cards. We try to go in with an open mind."

Margie points out that the jail was built in 1936 to house 70 men and 6 women, and she has seen 18 women in their section at one time with mat-



Mrs. Dan Forbush, left, and Mrs. Richard Downs are among "Friends In Contact" who make regularly scheduled visits to women prisoners at County Jail. They bring books, craft work and sewing materials, but if the prisoners would rather just talk, they're glad to offer their listening ears.

tresses laid on the floor wall to wall.

Miss Marian McBee, a member of the volunteer Service, has been asked to serve on the Criminal Justice Committee which is planning the new jail.

The most dramatic innovation which the Friends in Contact has brought to the women prisoners is the brand new trusty program, formerly limited to the men prisoners.

It began December 7.

Margie and two others from Volunteer Services requested the program in an interview with Jail Captain Carl Wood.

"He told us he had wanted to do something like this for a long time, but there was no work for the women to do," she says.

"We said we would take a girl into our Volunteer Office and give her work addressing envelopes, filing, or whatever.

"He was very pleased, and agreed to have a matron take the girl from the jail to our office four mornings a week and bring her back in the afternoon.

"It worked out real well with our first girl — she was 18 and it was her first time in jail.

"She was thrilled to death to have the work and she worked there a month, until her sentence was up."

Girls or women who will be chosen to be trusties must have been sentenced for a specific time in jail, and, among other things, must have no escape record and cannot be on dope.

The second trusty began her duties at the Volunteer Office last week.

When questioned about the attitude of the other women prisoners toward a girl chosen

to be a trusty — whether there was resentment or jealousy, Margie says, "It's a surprising thing about these girls — they stick together — they're all for each other and support each other. Mainly, they are glad for the trusty."

Among details which had to be worked out before the trusty program got under way were arranging insurance and deputizing two Volunteer Office workers, one of whom always must be present while the trusty is working there.

"The program is on a trial basis at our office now," Mrs. Forbush says. "Later, we may expand it to other agencies."

The volunteers' acts of friendship have extended to a number of new areas.

"The jail provided sack dresses in a wild flower print for the girls to wear when they appeared in court, just when they wanted to look their best," she says.

"So we arranged with Captain Wood to obtain money through the county for fabric, and now the Salvation Army ladies are making 10 solid turquoise blue A-line dresses in different sizes for the girls to wear in court."

An anonymous donor gave enough money for one woman prisoner who had bad looking teeth to get them fixed. The woman is out of jail and holding down a job.

Another service is the clothes closet which the volunteers maintain at their office, where girls newly out of jail may choose attractive clothing to help them face the world.

One volunteer presently is compiling a list of hotels and other facilities with dependable reputations where newly released women can find refuge for a few days and pay reduced rates.

The area of meal tickets also is being explored.

Margie says Captain Wood has been extremely cooperative toward their efforts.

"There were lots of times when he could have said 'No' to our requests, but he said, 'We'll give it a try.'

"For instance, we gave the girls their first Christmas party December 23, and we were able to bring food in, which we never are allowed to do — and a little gift for each girl. They thought it was great."

Follow-up on the girls when they leave jail — helping with transportation, getting a job — these are being more strongly developed by the volunteers.

"It's important not to let them get back in their old groups — because 50 per cent are repeaters," Margie says.

"If they trust us, we can help them. We never promise them anything that we can't carry through."

Margie has been a volunteer in the jail visitation for three years. Her mother babysits with her little boy as her contribution to the work.

"It's so fulfilling to me — there are always ones who don't appreciate it. but the ones who do more than make up for it," the jail visitor says.

Working with her are Mrs. John Faulkner, Mrs. Richard Down, Mrs. John Tuck, Mrs. Paul Dragavon, Mrs. Randall Kane, Mrs. W. J. Roberts, Mrs. Thelma Spenker, Mrs. Richard Eisner and Mrs. Winsome Thayer.

Anyone interested in this valuable service is invited to call the Volunteer Services of Santa Cruz County, 423-0554.

## BABIES ARE A FAMILY MATTER



This Wednesday is Family Night at Community Hospital.

Fathers- and mothers-to-be are invited to attend from 8:00 to 9:00 p.m. for a tour of the new obstetrical facilities at the hospital, and a question and answer