

# Volunteers Service Brainchild Of Women Who Care

In less than three years, the Volunteer Service of Santa Cruz County, Inc., has grown from a mere idea in the minds of a handful of community-minded people to a center of activity, helping over 400 county residents a month with a variety of six services.

Starting without funds or space, it now has a budget of \$25,000 a year, two paid workers and 350 volunteer workers.

The services offered by the agency include Each One Teach One, Friendly Visitors, Friends Outside, Buddy Program, School Volunteers and Transportation.

Miss Marian McBee, former psychiatric social worker, current president of the board of directors and one of the three founders of the service, recalls, "I was with the Economic Opportunities Commission in those days. In the summer of 1966, we had a meeting of representatives from the Red Cross, YWCA, AAUW and several other organizations in an effort to develop centralized training for volunteers. The results were disappointing, as there was no agency to assume responsibility."

Miss McBee and the other founders, Mrs. Margaret Schaeffer and Mrs. Kathryn Merriam, were not defeated by this poor beginning.

The idea of a volunteer service was not allowed to die. In March, 1967, representatives from seven organizations met again at the EOC office and agreed to undertake the development of a volunteer service to meet the needs of low income people in Santa Cruz.

"Space, telephone and office equipment were provided by the EOC, and the steering committee manned the office for a few hours each day," Miss McBee says. "We settled on the interim name, HELP, for the service."

Mrs. Schaeffer, an experienced professional social worker, remembers the early days of the service with affection.

"We started with a card table in a corner of the office. We didn't have any money. We didn't dare let news of our program be publicized for fear that we

wouldn't be able to handle requests for service. It was the EOC that gave us our first home, and Marian McBee was instrumental in getting us space and keeping us together during that first hard year.

"And the Community Council was of the greatest help. They gave us encouragement to go on. They provided this poor little orphan volunteer service with a parent!"

The service is now housed at 1110 Emeline Street.

"It was the AAUW program, 'Education—An Antidote to Poverty,' that first got me interested in this work," says Mrs. Merriam, who, for her many community services, was named "Woman of the Year" in 1968 by the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce.

The original HELP program began with the formation of a volunteer pool, and new programs developed.

Miss McBee recalls the progression of events in the new service. "Kathryn Merriam started work in the English language program and suggested this would be a good project for HELP. Volunteers with skills in homemaking started a sewing class for small girls. Transportation service became a clear need.

"Our Friendly Visiting service was an outgrowth from Margaret Schaeffer's work in FIND. Mary Kibble joined us very early in our program and gave us invaluable guidance in personnel placement, from her long experience as assistant director of personnel for the Red Cross.

"We did some work through Mary Comstock, who was then with the Youth Program.

"The Community Council was looking for a project, and we suggested that they take on the HELP program. The Council provided us with



Three local women are the sparks that started the warm glow of Community Volunteer Service, which has grown in three years from a tiny beginning to a burgeoning effort that serves hundreds of county residents each month. Mrs. Kathryn Merriam, top left, has lent her efforts to the Each One Teach One language program, while Mrs. Margaret Schaeffer, far left, spearheaded the Friendly Visitors service. Miss Marian McBee, left, has directed the entire service project.

funds contributed by Welcome Wagon, the Soroptimists and several other organizations. At that point, we changed our name to Community Volunteer Service.

Mrs. Merriam, who has worked closely with the Each One Teach One service, says, "One of our first teachers was Ann Strickland, who has had a long time interest in reading problems."

Describing early experiences, she says, "A switchboard that handled taxi calls asked us to help a cab driver who couldn't read street signs. The Department of Employment referred a girl to us who needed to read in order to get a better job. Dr. Allison, head of the Mental Health Department and organizer of the Suicide Prevention Program, prescribed our literacy program for some young men in Half Way House.

"Now, the State Department of Rehabilitation re-

fers some students to us, we have fulfilled requests from the student counselor at Santa Cruz High School to help foreign born children and several requests have come from one of the nursing homes here, which employs quite a few non-English speaking people."

Friendly Visitors was started in this way, relates Mrs. Schaeffer: "At about the time HELP got started, I went to work for Project FIND, (Friendless, Isolated, Needy and Deserted).

"This was a survey conducted by the National Council on Aging, with a grant from EOC, to study the needs of the aging in 12 counties across the country. Santa Cruz County was chosen as one of the 12, because of the large number of elderly people here.

"Basically, it was an information survey, but our people found so many old men and women sick in bed, with-

out food or medical attention. They were eligible for many services, such as surplus food, Medicare, Medical, Old Age Assistance, etc., but they were too helpless to apply for them.

"One of my responsibilities in FIND was to find volunteer services for old people, and it was out of this program that our Friendly Visitors program originated."

Welfare Director Raymond Ansell, aware of the federal reimbursement to localities developing volunteer services, in 1969 asked the organization if it could cover a county-wide area. Receiving an affirmative answer, he asked the board of directors to prepare a budget, which Miss McBee says, was done by pure guess work.

The contract with the Welfare Department now funds 80 per cent of the program with donations from individuals and private organizations making up the balance.

This makes it possible for the VSSCC to continue to serve the needs of people not on Welfare.

The Volunteer Service of Santa Cruz County was incorporated last August. Mrs. Donna Kern is the paid director and Mrs. Maybelle Saunders is the secretary.

While the Volunteer Service continues to grow, the need for public interest and support is still great.

"I cannot stress enough the continuing interest and support of the community," Miss McBee says. "The financial help they give the Volunteer Service and the very high quality of volunteer help we are getting make it possible for us to expand and strengthen our services to meet the needs of our growing community."

Anyone interested in aiding the Volunteer Service may call 423-0554.

—Donna Baughman