

Clothing Depots



The WVS Clothing Department was established in 1939 to run Regional Clothing Depots which provided garments, shoes and boots for children. Clothing was donated, sent from overseas by the Canadian and American Red Cross, and handmade in working parties. Volunteers would run regional and sub-depots; sorting, and distributing clothing as part of WVS's Civil Defence role.¹

Clothing was also supplied to adult evacuees and the homeless from 1941 resulting in six and a half million garments being distributed between 1940 and 1943. The WVS also opened Clothing Exchanges from 1943 allowed parents to swap clothes for their growing children without using valuable coupons.² As a result millions more garments were given out during 1944, 1945.

Although Depots began to close in 1946 many people still needed assistance and WVS carried on its vital role in clothing setting up County, Centre and County Borough Clothing Depots. It was also a huge part of WVS Civil Defence work providing clothing to flood victims in 1947 and 1953.

Clothing Depots were for people who had no other way of clothing themselves and they had to be recommended by certain bodies or organisations. This included the NSPCC, Ministry of Pensions, Hospital Almoners and Prohibition Officers, Doctors and Social Services.³

Over the years clothing was also distributed to refugees from Hungary in 1956 and then Ugandan Asians in 1972. The demand for clothing continued to be high and by 1976 1.5 million garments were given out each year. In the late 1980s they were renamed Clothing Stores and distributed around 2 million garments a year.⁴ At that time stores could be found in Area, County, Scottish Regional, Metropolitan, District, Local and London Borough Offices.

¹ RVS A&HC, 16/1, Clothing Main Policy 1939-1941

² RVS A&HC, 16/3 Clothing Policy 1941 - 1944

³ RVS A&HC, 821, Notes for Guidance on the Care & Distribution of WRVS Processed Clothing, 1965

⁴ RVS A&HC, 682, Headquarters Annual Reports 1978 - 1986