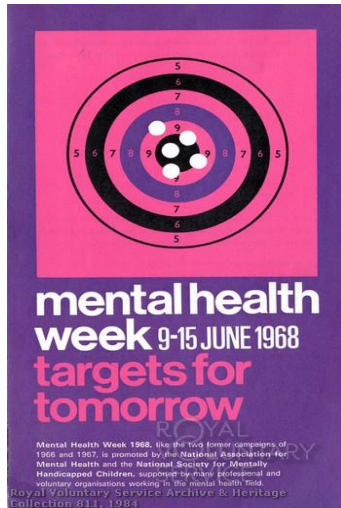


## Psychiatric Hospitals



Royal Voluntary Service has worked in psychiatric hospitals since the 1940s with the aim to provide patients with a link to the outside world; stop isolation and loneliness; build up confidence; prepare patients for leaving and educate the public about mental illness.<sup>1</sup>

In 1946 members of WVS based at Headquarters in London began investigations into what work they could do in psychiatric hospitals (at the time referred to as Hospitals for the mentally ill and mentally handicapped). Volunteers were requested for roles including: helping with meals; walks; occupational therapy; needle work; organising indoor and outdoor games, acting as escorts; providing entertainment and library services.<sup>2</sup>

In 1948 the Board of Control officially asked WVS to assist with staff shortages in psychiatric hospitals. WVS provided day centres and other facilities for those who were able to return home after staying in psychiatric hospitals. Some volunteers even invited patients into their homes, for tea parties, after taking them on days out or escorting them on visits to other hospitals.

WVS/WRVS also established purpose built social centres containing canteens and shops for patients and their visitors. The first of these centres was opened at St. Francis Hospital, Hillingdon by Princess Maria Duchess of Kent in November 1961. Patients could help WVS/WRVS with their work in the centres and spend money as they wished.<sup>3</sup>

Attitudes to mental health began to change in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the government began to focus on care in the community. Part of WRVS's role was to help in educating the public and opening occupational therapy clubs for people who had left hospital. WRVS took part in its first mental health week in 1968.<sup>4</sup> WRVS continued this work through the 1980s and 1990s.

The charity still provides services to psychiatric wards such as canteens, shops and visiting schemes.

<sup>1</sup> RVS A&HC, 808b, Notes on WRVS Health and Hospital Work, 1984

<sup>2</sup> RVS A&HC, 61/1, WVS/WRVS Help In Mental Hospitals 1946- 1959, Report from Lady Schuster to Lady Reading, Mental Hospitals, 25 Nov 1946

<sup>3</sup> Bentley-Bowman, K. 1977. Green Sleeves: The Story of the WVS/WRVS. Seeley, Service & Co. London

<sup>4</sup> RVS A&HC, 808b, Notes on WRVS Health and Hospital Work, 1984