

Services Welfare



WVS took on work for the Armed Forces when it became a member of the Council of Volunteer War Workers, in 1940, assuming responsibilities which benefited service men and their families. Most of WVS's War work for the Armed Forces was domestic and focused on: canteens; hostels; British Welcome Clubs; library services; camouflage net garnishing; sock mending; the collection of vegetables for mine sweeps and other vital services. They then developed these services further in 1944 by training WVS members to run clubs for Service Men overseas.¹

The NAAFI wanted WVS to run clubs for soldiers in their barracks and the first contingency was sent to the Algiers after the war ended. Women went to countries and continents such as: North Africa and Italy; The Middle East; Germany; Austria; The Far East; Japan; Korea; Cyprus; Kenya; Christmas Island; Singapore; Malaya and Hong Kong. They provided welfare, activities and trips out for service men and between 1944 and 1963 2,489 members were involved in overseas work.²

WRVS's role in Services Welfare began to change in the late 1980s and early 1990s, instead of being members who were paid small grants they were fully paid members of staff who were trained by the Services Welfare Department and sent to army bases at home and abroad for example: Germany the Falklands, Canada and Cyprus. Though the organisation of Services Welfare Overseas changed its role on the army bases remained the same providing welfare, clubs, entertainments, shopping services and hospital visits.³

Women carried on taking these roles and working as Service Welfare Officers for WRVS until 2013 when they were taken over by SSAFA.

¹ RVS A&HC, 735/1, Services Welfare 1938 - 1945 inc. Col. Unsworth Manuscript, Bentley-Bowman, K. 1977. *Green Sleeves: The Story of the WVS/WRVS*. Seeley, Service & Co. London

² RVS A&HC, 716/1, Misc Post War Memoranda. 1946 - 1966 On Services Welfare Overseas And At Home

³ RVS A&HC, Voices of Volunteering Jean Crossley-Ingham, WRVS/HQ/A&HC/VOV/INGJ, December 2014