



MEALS

on

WHEELS

WHAT IT IS — HOW IT BEGAN — WHAT IT IS NOW

WHAT IT CAN BECOME!

By Doris Taylor 

MEALS ON WHEELS just could not be anything else but an outstanding success.

There were two special reasons—it was founded on sound, basic principles which had general public appeal; it was intended to meet a need that everyone recognised but had done little or nothing about.

This booklet tells of the beginning of the scheme, its growth and place in the community today. But one thing it does not tell—the wonderful thoughts, spirit, and organising genius of the founder and organiser and director of Meals on Wheels, Miss Doris Taylor.

The News has been proud always to be associated with such a grand scheme.

Murray W. James

Chief of Staff and Associate Editor
News Ltd. Adelaide.

August 19, 1955.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

Any profits from the sale of this booklet are for the Meals on Wheels fund.

As at July 1955, the Offices of the Central Executive are:—

President, Mr. D. A. Dunstan, M.P.
Vice-Presidents, Mr. F. L. Weiss, Mrs. D. Glen.
Hon. General Secretary, Mrs. F. L. Weiss, UA 6489.
Hon. Assistant Secretary, Miss G. Carter.
Hon. Treasurer, Mr. E. H. Burgess.
Hon. Organiser, Miss Doris Taylor, F 5335.

Port Adelaide Kitchen is situated in Langham Place, Portland and Officers of their District Committee are: Phone No. J 2625.

President, Mr. P. W. Whicker.
Vice-Presidents, Mr. E. P. Nazer and Mr. A. B. Penfold.
Hon. Secretary, Mr. R. Trembath.
Hon. Treasurer, Mr. J. Marshall.

Norwood Kitchen is situated in the courtyard of the Norwood Town Hall and the Officers of their District Committee are:

President, Mr. F. W. White.
Vice-Presidents, Mr. B. F. Mildren and Mr. Whitmarsh.
Hon. Secretary, Miss C. McEwen.
Hon. Treasurer, Mrs. S. Booth.

Kitchen Secretaries to be contacted concerning Voluntary Helpers are:

Port Adelaide, Mrs. H. D. Guscott, Phone J 2486.
Norwood, Mrs. J. Thyer, Phone F 3119.

Donations—Any donations can be sent directly to News Ltd., the respective Committee Secretaries or to the Organiser.

All Donations of £1 or over are allowable for Income Tax.

WHAT IT IS

Meals on Wheels is a scheme whereby one hot meal per day is taken to the home of aged and infirm people. It is a Social Service provided by the community.

IT IS NOT A CHARITY—It is a Social experiment. An attempt to solve the problem of the care of the aged under modern conditions. It is, I hope, the beginning and centre of a Home Service Scheme, a scheme which could meet all the needs of the aged and enable them to live their lives as a part of the community with the maximum of independence, freedom, and comfort possible to old age.

HOW IT BEGAN

Because I had worked for years through Party-political channels trying to help find solutions to the problems of all sections of the community I came to realise that in many cases a new way of dealing with the various groups had been found and was to some extent, being followed. No new plan for the aged had even been thought of and the need for it was growing greater and more urgent every day.

The general idea of those trying to cope with it seemed to be that more Institutions—Old Folk's Homes—must be built for them.

The idea of Homes for the aged seems quite wrong to me. Any community that segregates any part or group of its people is unhealthy, unbalanced. The community needs its aged people as much as they need, and want, to remain a part of the community.

The most precious things left to old-age are freedom of action and the personal possessions which have become dear to them through the years and the memories they bring back of their loved ones.

There are other reasons which make "homes" an inadequate, and for the many, an impossible solution. The ratio of the aged group to the working-aged group is growing every year. Every year there are more old people and fewer young ones to do the productive and general work of the community and to care for the aged. The wages, hours, and conditions obtainable in industry are such that the staffing of "Homes" and Institutions of all kinds grows harder and costlier every year. They must compete for the manpower and womanpower available. So, each year, "Homes" become less and less the answer.

This means that for the pensioners first, because their need is greatest, but also for the aged of all but the highest income group, some way must be found to meet their needs so that they can live in their own home whether that home be one poor room or a comfortable house.

I believe that the existing Church Homes for old folk would fill the need for, and be most valuable as infirmaries for the chronically sick and the senile aged. In these Homes they would get the love they need just as much as they need physical care. If this was found to be possible then we would have, with a scheme which provides for those who with a little help can manage alone, solved the problem of existence for the aged.

Finding that medical men have discovered that the aged deteriorate even more rapidly mentally than physically when undernourished, finding to my horror that hundreds of old people were committed to Parkside Mental Hospital because of some mental instability and that after some weeks of nourishing meals became quite sane. Finding that many of them were then doomed to end their days in an overcrowded mental hospital amid all the distressing sights and sounds of such a place, because their place in the community was no longer open to them. Their rooms had been let, their people reluctant to or incapable of taking them back, they had nowhere else to go.

I knew then, that for me there could be no peace nor rest unless I, at least tried to evolve an alternative for them, something that would save them from hospitals, mental hospitals, semi-starvation and misery.

Having read of various Meals on Wheels schemes in England and South Melbourne chiefly, I set about working out how it could be done here with our longer distances between houses and our sparser population. Having evolved a plan which has since proved workable, my next step was to check up on how great the need really was. I read reports, contacted social workers, women police, doctors, and clergymen. All were in agreement that the need was great and growing rapidly greater. They thought my scheme good but said they thought it impossible of realisation.

I rang the Chief of Staff of our evening newspaper. He was very interested and very encouraging and said that if I would try, they would give me every assistance possible. They have done everything he promised with a warmth of personal friendliness that is beyond belief.

With this scheme in mind I joined the South Australian Pensioners' League so that I could work for and among the people my scheme was designed to help first and most.

At one of their meetings I told them I had a scheme which I thought would benefit them when they were older and more feeble and could be of immediate benefit to those already needing help. They were invited to attend a meeting in the Rechabite Hall, Parade, Norwood in the afternoon of October 6, 1953, and so on a pouring wet day ninety-six pensioners met to hear the first story of Meals on Wheels.

The News had sent a feature writer, Mr. Cyril Burley, to see what it was all about—and so it was launched at a cost of 15/- out of my own pocket for the hall and the support of the Social Committees of the Pensioners' League. These old people out of their own funds paid the initial expenses involved in letting the scheme be known and inviting the support of co-operation of individuals and organisations. The amount was a little less than five pounds but to them goes the credit of helping first from the little that they had.

One of the first things to be done was to call together representatives of all Social Welfare organisations and interested citizens so that a Provisional Committee could be elected to set up the administrative machinery.

On December 3, 1953, in the Willard Hall, Wakefield St., representatives of eighteen organisations unanimously carried the following resolution:

“That this meeting of Representatives of Welfare Organisations give its approval and support to the immediate establishment of a Meals on Wheels organisation and desires that a Provisional Committee be at once elected.”

The Provisional Committee was duly elected and carried on with the drafting of a Constitution for adopting at a General Meeting which was to be called for the election of a Permanent Committee.

Application for recognition by the Federal Government for purposes of Income Tax, preliminary arrangements for Articles of Incorporation, permission to raise funds under the State Charitable Purposes

Act, application for exemption from Sales Tax were some of the many things prepared for the day when the Permanent Committee came into being and Meals on Wheels became an integrated organization. This was done at a meeting held in Willard Hall on July 29, 1954.

In the meantime The News had opened a subscription list, nearly a thousand firms and people had been written to and asked for support and the search for a place for the first kitchen started. There was also a hectic search for the vacuum containers which are the pivotal point in this scheme in South Australia. The vacuum containers seemed impossible to find but were finally located in England and a cabled order brought them to Port Adelaide three days before the kitchen opened there.

Port Adelaide was the first place in which any faith in the scheme was exhibited at this stage, and even there it was with no lively expectation of success, but rather, as giving a chance to a forlorn hope, that action was taken.

The Mayor invited me to lay my scheme before the Council on the evening of November 26, 1953. The Secretary of the S.A. Pensioners League and the Honorary Secretary were invited to attend also. Having outlined my scheme, the two League Officers said that they thought the scheme was necessary and would be beneficial to the old people living in the district.

The Council decided to assist and set up a committee of three to investigate the possibility of making available a room, building, or piece of land on which a kitchen could be built. They finally made available a block of land in Langham Place, Portland, and on it today stands the kitchen, a Nissen Hut (37 ft. x 15 ft.) with one thousand pounds worth of equipment and a glazed brick washroom and toilet. The kitchen, the equipment and everything, including the six foot Cyclone fence was donated either directly or through subscriptions.

Because of the urgency of the need the first heroic volunteers carried on before the sink was connected, the kitchen uncompleted and with insufficient equipment.

The first meals went out to eight patients on August 9, 1954.

WHAT IT IS NOW

At this stage I should tell you how the kitchens are worked—

Voluntary workers cook the food and volunteers with their own cars distribute the meals. The kitchen helpers, drivers, and distributors

are rostered and help one or more days each week. The cook-supervisor for the day arranges the menu and cooks the food on a large commercial gas stove. It is then dished up into vacuum containers, most of which hold a gallon of soup, or a comparable amount of other food. These containers are attractive in appearance, light and portable and will keep the meal hot for a long period.

In one container there is soup, in another meat, one with potatoes, one each with two other vegetables and one or two for dessert depending on what it is. The containers are carried out and placed in the car, the driver and two women who will serve the meals then go to the homes of those to whom the meal is to be served. The meals are provided five days a week.

On arrival, the containers are carried in to where the old people wait with tray or table set. The driver unscrews the lid of each container in turn and the two women serve the hot, delicious meals straight on to the plates. The driver has of course been screwing the lids on again as each container has been used, and so with a few cheery words they go on their way.

Most of the people served are under the care of the District Nurses who are delighted with the improvement in the health of the recipients of these three-course well-cooked meals which are provided for 2/- each.

It is impossible to praise too highly the work that is being done by every one of the voluntary workers both in Port Adelaide and in Norwood.

The Port Adelaide Kitchen.

The position today then is that the kitchen in Port Adelaide has been functioning just a year and has supplied approximately 6,000 meals, has a voluntary staff of 12 drivers, 8 emergency drivers, four cook-supervisors (one does two days duty) and 32 helpers and distributors.

It has its own District Committee of which the Mayor is Chairman and has approximately £300 in the bank. It has a very fine group of people working in it and for it.

The Norwood Kitchen started on March 28, 1955 in a building made available by the Kensington and Norwood Council. It has nearly £800 worth of equipment which, as at Port Adelaide, was either donated outright or by subscription.

The Kitchen today, August 8, 1955, has been functioning for 4½ months, has served nearly 1,000 meals, has a voluntary staff of ten drivers, five emergency drivers, five cook-supervisors, and thirty-four helpers and distributors. It also has a District Committee with the Mayor as the Chairman. It has approximately £70 in the bank and another group of wonderful people working in it and for it.

The News is still carrying on the subscription list and there is approximately £1,000 in the general fund for the extension of the scheme.

The Hindmarsh Kitchen—Negotiations are now proceeding with the Hindmarsh Council. At the invitation of the Mayor I laid the scheme before the Council, they appointed a committee of three to investigate and on July 27 I inspected possible sites. We are now awaiting Council decision as to the outcome.

Auxiliary—Meals on Wheels is an auxiliary of the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Patients living in areas where kitchens have been established, who have no one to care for them while they are convalescing, are referred to us.

Doctors in these areas contact us for help for patients who have no one to care for them and while not sick enough to be sent to hospital are unable to do their own shopping and cooking.

WHAT IT CAN BECOME

Meals on Wheels has proved a workable, economical and efficient method of meeting the needs of the aged as far as food is concerned. There is need now for a rapid extension to areas where numbers are urgently in need of the help the scheme can give.

There is need also for its ultimate expansion into a Home Service for the Aged with the Meals as the basic and most essential service, but other services are needed such as laundry, cleaning, and mending.

THE WHOLE PLAN WHICH I HOPE TO SEE REALISED IS THIS:

1. First, that the Federal Government shall provide the basic machinery, the buildings, equipment, and where necessary key paid staff, first for a Commonwealth-wide Meals on Wheels scheme, ultimately for a complete Home Service for the Aged.
2. That these services should be made available to all aged people at cost of materials used to those on the lowest incomes and with a sliding scale of prices according to income level.

3. That the community should be responsible for a voluntary contribution of services in administrative and actual work.
4. That the scheme should cover all but the helpless chronically sick and the completely senile and my hope is that the Churches shall come to see that their particular function is to care for this group. With Government support for staff they could, I believe, swing into this most vital place in the care of the aged. They already have the buildings. They have devoted people ready to give the love and service that money cannot buy.

IN CONCLUSION I would like to tell you that this is economically sound for the following reasons:—

1. Hospitals would be relieved because of the number of patients who could be sent home earlier. They could in a number of cases manage quite well with a daily visit from the District Nurse and the provision of a hot meal. Easier still when a complete Home Service is functioning.
2. Fewer beds would be taken up by old people in both medical and mental hospitals. Many are in both today simply because they were unable to feed themselves adequately.
3. Numbers of people of all ages would not need to go to hospital at all. A combination of Doctor, District Nurse and Meals on Wheels—later we hope—Home Service, could cope with all but the most serious illnesses.

FINALLY, the knowledge that organised help is available, that they need never again depend on chance help or grudging help, or be left to suffer with no help at all, will bring comfort to the hearts and minds of every aged and infirm person

Norwood, South Australia,
August 8, 1955