

Pamphlet

Unemployment Leaflet No. 3

## MUTUAL SERVICE CLUBS FOR WOMEN

Since the beginning of 1933, some women's clubs of a new type have come into existence in various parts of the country. They are known in many places as Mutual Service Clubs, a name which gives a very good idea of their character and purpose. These clubs are the counterpart of occupational and social centres for unemployed men, and most of their members are women and girls affected, directly or indirectly, by unemployment. Their chief aim is to help these members to overcome some of the special difficulties with which they are faced at the present time.

The main advantages which such Clubs can offer are of three kinds. In the first place, they enable women and girls to co-operate in meeting urgent personal needs. Just as unemployed men all over the country have found practical ways of helping themselves and their families by boot-repairing, woodwork, and allotment cultivation, so, in women's clubs, dress-making, knitting, millinery, upholstery, rug-making, etc., are being practised and clothing and household equipment are being made and repaired at a minimum of cost. The material needed for these crafts is being bought as cheaply as possible, in large quantities, and paid for by members in small instalments. Manufacturers' waste of various kinds is also being collected and used in many ingenious ways.

A second important advantage which a club can offer to its members lies in providing them with a pleasant meeting place and with oppor-

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tunities for friendly social intercourse. Quite simple premises are easily made homely and attractive, and the new friendships that quickly grow up in cheerful surroundings can do much to break down the sense of loneliness and depression resulting from long periods of unemployment.

In the third place, a club can make available for its members a wide range of new interests and hobbies and can help them to discover new ways of using their leisure profitably. Much of the work in handicraft classes is being done by people whose chief interest is not merely in the finishing of a useful article as quickly as possible, but in the acquiring of new skill and the making of something beautiful. Many clubs have formed drawing, designing and sketching classes; others have their own choirs, dramatic groups and country dance teams; talks on a variety of subjects—travel, current events, elementary science, civics, etc.—are included in most club programmes and are usually very popular. These and similar activities are of obvious value in relieving mental strain and in making life, even under difficult circumstances, seem a great deal more worth while.

A few of the women who join Mutual Service clubs are also members of Church clubs, Women's Institutes or Townswomen's Guilds, but the great majority are not connected with any other organization. Most of the people who have had to face long periods of unemployment seem to avoid the normal social activities in which they previously shared, partly because they cannot pay their way as regards subscriptions or other incidental expenses, partly because they are self-conscious about their clothes. It has sometimes been argued that the starting of special clubs for unemployed men and women tends to segregate them from the rest of the community, but experience shows that these clubs are catering for people who are segregated already by their economic circumstances. The women who have become keen members of a Mutual Service club, taking full advantage of the opportunities which it offers, regain self-confidence and interest and are usually much more willing than before to join in the normal social life of their town or district.

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## A Voluntary Movement.

Like the centres which have been started for unemployed men, all Mutual Service clubs for women are entirely voluntary associations which are growing up spontaneously in various localities. People from all sections of the community are co-operating in the movement, supporting it, not only financially, but by personal service, by putting their special skill and experience at the disposal of Club members. To take only a few examples, dressmakers, professional and amateur, are teaching sewing, cutting out and remodelling of clothing; nurses and health visitors are lecturing on first aid, hygiene and home nursing; domestic science teachers are giving cookery demonstrations and talks on economical house-keeping; gymnasts are taking "keep fit" classes; people with musical skill of various kinds are organizing concerts and teaching community singing and country dancing. Help of this kind, given from simple motives of friendliness, is invaluable in building up the life of a club and enabling women to get to know each other as neighbours, with common problems and common interests.

The actual starting of a women's club need not be a difficult matter. In many cases, the work has been originated by a small group of people who have taken a room, usually as near as possible to an employment exchange, which they have opened at stated times to all women and girls who cared to join, on payment of a small subscription, probably a penny a week. No elaborate furniture or equipment is required: a few comfortable chairs, some books, pictures and lamp shades can soon make a place look homely, and attractive cotton materials for curtains and cushions can be bought very cheaply. If the landlord allows any painting to be done, a gay colour-scheme can often transform the most unprepossessing premises. A large, solid table for cutting out is a necessity if dress-making classes are to be held, and one or more sewing machines are usually needed before long, but these can sometimes be obtained as gifts or, if not, can be bought second-hand for a few pounds.

Many women's Clubs have enrolled their first members before actually finding premises and have held their opening meetings in any

room that happened to be available. The women who joined under these circumstances, and who were able to take an active part in preparing the premises when they were finally obtained, cleaning and painting the rooms, sewing curtains, covers, etc., have had the satisfaction of feeling that their Club is something which they themselves have helped to create, for which they are partly responsible and in which they can therefore take a personal pride.

Some very successful women's clubs have grown up, in rather a different way, from already existing institutions. Very often, for example, a girl's evening club has opened its premises in the day time, for members or their friends who happened to be unemployed; elsewhere a Co-operative Society or a Townswomen's Guild, or a Mother's Club connected with a Church has formed a special section for unemployed women and for women whose husbands are unemployed. The success of these efforts has necessarily depended on finding workers to organize the new activities, but where this help has been forthcoming the work has almost always been able to develop and extend on permanent lines.

Still more frequently, the members of a men's occupational club have realized the need of making some provision for their wives, and have given up part of their premises on certain afternoons and evenings in order that the women might hold a sewing class or a weekly "social." In this way, a women's section has come into being which, before long, has grown into an independent but associated club, often with its own advisory and organizing committees and its own permanent premises. Wherever men's and women's activities have been able to develop side by side, the members of the two groups have almost always found opportunities for co-operation and mutual service. The men have often volunteered to decorate the women's club room, to put up shelves and cupboards and to make some of their furniture. In return the women have undertaken to sew curtains, make rugs or do simple upholstery for the men's club, or have helped to keep the premises clean. Later on, joint activities have perhaps been started, the running of a canteen, the organizing of dances, concerts, dramatic entertainments, etc. This type of work can only develop gradually



Rug-making at the Challenge Mutual Service Club, Salford, and



the Nursery where children are looked after while their mothers are attending classes. This club is partly supported by a fund raised in Sussex to help unemployed men and women in distressed areas.

[Photos by the "Manchester Daily Herald"]



[Photo by the "Burnley Express"]

Jam-making at Burnley Mutual Service Club.



Members of the Walsall Women's Club busy on their allotments.



A Dress-making Class at Willington Quay, Northumberland.

and would not be suitable everywhere, but some of the tentative experiments now being made are laying the foundation on which future community centres will slowly be built up.

### Some Representative Clubs.

Because they have originated in these many different ways, the women's clubs in different places vary greatly in size, in organization and in the range of their activities. Such local differences are all to the good, for there is no one pattern that would be suitable everywhere, and a new movement of this kind should draw as widely as possible on the initiative and experience of people with first hand knowledge of the needs of women in their own immediate neighbourhood.

Amid so much variety, it is hardly possible to point to any individual club as typical, but a few examples will illustrate some of the more usual forms in which the work has developed.

#### 1. The Burnley Mutual Service Club.

The women's Mutual Service Club in Burnley, Lancashire, was one of the first of its kind in the country. It is an interesting example of a very useful piece of work, which was started on quite simple lines, has not involved any great expense, and has been able to depend entirely on the service of voluntary helpers. This club is under the auspices of a Mutual Service Council, a body composed of private individuals and representatives of various local organizations, which was formed in May 1933, to promote welfare work among unemployed women and girls and the wives of unemployed men. The club was opened in July 1933, in premises which previously belonged to a Temperance Hall, and which consist of a very large room with a smaller room adjoining. When it was first taken over, the building was in rather a poor state of repair, but a fund was raised locally to enable some necessary reconditioning to be done, and to cover the cost of cleaning and painting. The smaller room was redecorated throughout by the voluntary labour of unemployed men and was fitted with a gas stove and sink, and with shelves and cupboards for crockery.

Many useful gifts of furniture and equipment were received from private individuals and local firms, and the rooms were soon made gay with pictures and coloured posters. During the summer they were kept well supplied with flowers, of which some were sent nearly every week by unemployed allotment holders.

The club is open on five days a week, from 2 p.m. till 5 p.m. and has an active membership of about two hundred. Members pay a subscription of a penny a week and are given membership cards on which their payments are entered. A visitor, calling at the club any afternoon, would find the place a hive of activity. In addition to various small groups of women busy with handwork of different kinds, there would usually be a class or demonstration in progress at one end of the large room, or in the kitchen. On certain days, some of the members would be taking part in a "keep fit" class; at other times, they would be found preparing for a concert or rehearsing a play. At four o'clock each afternoon, tea is served at a charge of a halfpenny for one cup and a biscuit.

The weekly programme of classes includes practical dressmaking and remodelling, knitting, millinery, rug-making and cookery. Many other crafts have been demonstrated from time to time, and a remarkable variety of useful articles has been made from apparently useless scraps of material. The cookery classes always attract an interested audience and the dishes shown are such as can be made easily and cheaply, with the utensils and ingredients likely to be available in a working class household. Members can buy, at cost price, any food that is cooked in the course of a demonstration. Collective jam-making, for which the kitchen is available on two afternoons a week, has been another very popular and useful activity. The members are allowed the use of the stove and of the preserving pans, and each brings her own fruit, sugar and jars and makes whatever quantity of jam she needs for herself or her family.

The success of this club has been due partly to an enthusiastic group of helpers, who have given unlimited time and thought to the development of the work, partly to the co-operation and support which

they have received from the members. The principle of mutual service, which is emphasised in the title of the club, has been the keynote of all its activities. Among other things, it has led to the setting aside of a certain amount of time for "community work." All the articles made in this way are given to the Burnley Personal Service Council, which assists cases of special distress in the town. The members take a keen satisfaction in giving some of their time and skill for this purpose, and in being able to make a concrete return for the advantages which they have received from local supporters of their club.

Many of the members of the Burnley Club and, indeed, of most similar clubs throughout the country, are unmarried women and widows between the ages of thirty and sixty. The effects of unemployment are particularly serious for these older women. In many cases they are living alone, in lodgings, facing conditions of extreme difficulty or even hardship, and with little hope of any improved prospects in the near future, because their places in factories, offices and shops are being filled by much younger girls.

A few clubs, where the premises are suitable, have opened canteens, which are of special service to members who live alone, and who find difficulty in catering economically when buying and cooking food in small quantities. The Fellowship and Service Club, which was opened in Manchester in September, 1933, and which is organized in much the same way as the club at Burnley, was among the first to open a canteen and to serve hot dinners. An excellent two-course meal is available here every day, at a charge of fourpence a head, which covers the cost of food and of crockery renewals. The gas bill is paid from the general funds of the club, and the service needed for cooking, washing-up, etc., is given by members and by a rota of voluntary helpers.

At the Challenge Club, in Salford, where dinners are also provided and where the numbers catered for average as many as forty a day, it has been found possible to reduce the charge from fourpence to threepence a head and still to cover the full cost of food. The following

sample menus give some idea of the type of meal which is served at this price :—

Monday	Stewed steak, carrots, potatoes. Ginger pudding.
Tuesday	Meat and Suet roll, cabbage, boiled potatoes. Rice pudding and jam.
Wednesday	Lancashire hot pot, haricot beans. Banana trifle.
Thursday	Mince with rice, tomatoes, mashed potatoes. Lemon pudding.
Friday	Stuffed cod, peas, fried potatoes. Apple sponge.

## 2. Clubs with Wider Membership.

In some towns where unemployment among women of all ages is especially severe, clubs have been started on a rather more ambitious scale, with larger premises than in Burnley, and usually with a salaried organizer. Special efforts are made to cater for girls from school-leaving age upwards, as well as for older women, and the programme of activities is planned so as to provide a wide range of choice for people with varying needs and interests.

One of the most successful of these larger clubs was opened in Blackburn in February, 1934. The premises, a pleasant Georgian house, with a garden, are exceptionally convenient and are kept open on five days a week from 2 p.m. till 10 p.m. and for certain hours on Sundays. In addition to a very active group of voluntary workers, a full-time organizer has been appointed by the Y.W.C.A., under whose auspices the club was started. The activities include dress-making, millinery, upholstery, handloom-weaving, cookery, first-aid,

literature, refresher courses in shorthand and typing, country dancing, ball-room dancing, and dramatics. The afternoon classes attract a majority of older members and married women, and most of the younger girls prefer to come in the evenings, but any deliberate segregating of groups of people according to age or any other condition is carefully avoided. Concerts, dances and socials of various kinds are held periodically, and club outings are arranged, so as to give all members a chance to meet and get to know each other.

The provision of opportunities for physical education and recreation is one of the most valuable services which a club can offer to its younger members, and the demand for these opportunities is steadily growing. Simple gymnastic or "keep fit" classes are now a regular feature of most club programmes, and are leading to requests for talks on health, diet, personal hygiene and kindred subjects. In Whitehaven, a large section of the club goes hiking every Saturday; in Walsall, an enterprising club leader has started a very successful women's gardening and allotment scheme; swimming classes have been popular almost everywhere during the summer months. A few women's clubs have already organized camp holidays, held sometimes under canvas, but more often in an empty house or other large building, and these have proved so successful that the practice is likely to spread rapidly in the near future.

The girls and women who have become keen members of a club during a period of unemployment usually want to retain some connection with it after they get back into work, and so, in districts where trade has slightly improved in recent months, the clubs are finding that they must admit employed as well as unemployed members. Many of those which do not normally open in the evenings are arranging to hold at least one evening session weekly for the benefit of members who cannot come in the day time. This is an essentially healthy development bringing into the club a new atmosphere of hopefulness and vitality. It enables employed and unemployed people to meet on equal terms, and so prevents those who are still out of work from feeling cut off from the rest of the community.

### 3. Clubs for the Wives of Unemployed Men.

Although most of the clubs that have been started in industrial towns in Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the Midlands were chiefly intended to cater for unemployed women and girls, the majority of them are open on the same terms to the wives of unemployed men. These married women, who are facing the day to day problems of running a house and providing for a family on the resources of unemployment benefit or other forms of public assistance, obviously need all the help that membership of a club can give them. They may not be able to attend very often, but they can usually manage to come to one or two sessions a week. Dress-making and handicraft classes, cookery demonstrations, etc., have a direct bearing on some of their urgent practical difficulties, but what they seem to value most is the mental change and relaxation of an occasional few hours spent away from home.

In districts where women have never been engaged in industry, and where unemployment is almost entirely confined to men, it has been necessary to make special provision for married women, and a great many small clubs have recently been opened for this purpose in mining towns and villages up and down the country, and in the depressed shipbuilding towns on the Clyde and Tyneside. As a rule, such clubs do not open every day but meet on certain afternoons or evenings, for classes and social activities of various kinds.

The women's club at Willington Quay, near Newcastle-on-Tyne, is representative of some of the best of these married women's groups. It was opened in the spring of 1934 as a section of the men's occupational club, but with a separate advisory committee which raises and administers its own funds. This committee is composed partly of club members and partly of representatives of local organizations—the churches, the women's branch of the British Legion, the Women's Co-operative Guild, the Nursing Association and the Girl Guides. A large and very pleasant room in the premises owned by the men's club has been set aside for the use of the women's section and has been

decorated and painted by the men who are also making trestle-tables, cupboards and other equipment. The members pay a subscription of a penny a week each and the income thus obtained helps to pay the rent of the club room.

The club started with the formation of a sewing and a cookery class which met once a week but the membership grew so quickly that further classes had to be arranged on other afternoons and evenings. Most of these classes are taken by professional teachers, provided by the Northumberland County Education Committee, their work being supplemented where necessary by voluntary helpers. Material for the dressmaking classes is obtained in various ways. Some women bring a length of material of their own to be cut out or an old garment to be altered or repaired. Sometimes gifts of second-hand clothing are received, and if any of these garments are suitable for remodelling members are allowed to buy them at jumble-sale prices and are helped to make them into something useful for themselves or their children. There are no textile mills or warehouses in the neighbourhood, but a good deal of material for dresses, coats and underclothing has been bought from local retailers, who have generously quoted special rates. Additional consignments of fents and other remnants are obtained periodically from manufacturers in Yorkshire. It is an invariable rule of the club that all material must be paid for at cost price, before the finished articles are taken home, but payments may be made by small weekly instalments whilst the work is in progress.

At the cookery classes, economical dishes are demonstrated and hints given on food values and the arranging of family menus. The members exchange their own recipes and household hints, and occasionally hold competitions, either in the planning of a nourishing meal for a given number of persons at a stated price, or in the cooking of a special dish.

The Club has not limited its activities to cookery and dress-making. Other types of handwork and particularly thrift crafts, are almost equally popular. Members of all ages take part in country dancing and community singing, and a "keep fit" class has recently been formed under a trained teacher. Short talks followed by discussions

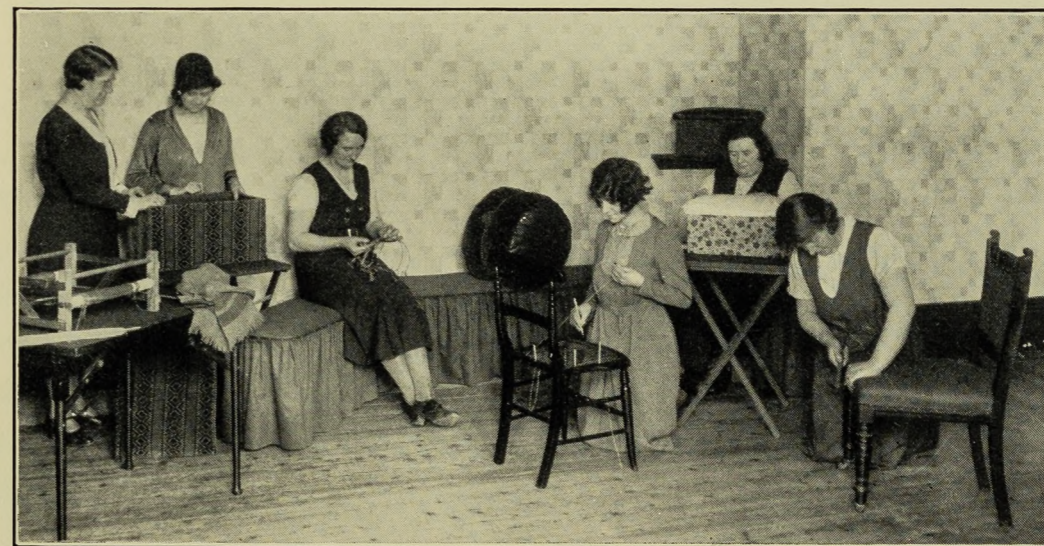
are sometimes held, before or after a practical class, the subjects ranging from health, child-welfare and housecraft to topical events, books, music, and descriptions of travel. Members who have children under school-age usually bring them to the club and, at first, this created a rather serious problem. Recently however, special arrangements have been made for children to be looked after while classes are in progress, this service being undertaken by a rota of club members and other voluntary helpers.

Married women's clubs have not always developed as quickly as at Willington Quay. Some of them, particularly in the more remote mining areas, are still quite small and informal groups which have not yet evolved far beyond the stage of a "make and mend class." Often, the difficulty of obtaining suitable premises has been a hindrance to the work and, elsewhere, a shortage of teachers has prevented the starting of any wide range of activities. On the other hand, the problem of finding or paying teachers is now being met in many places by the co-operation of local Education Committees. More and more frequently, these authorities are recognizing the classes held in women's clubs as part of their general schemes for adult education, and are providing teachers, not only for dress-making and other forms of handwork, but also for cookery and "keep fit" classes. Help in the supplying of instructors and demonstrators in thrift crafts is being given in many places by the National Federation of Women's Institutes, who have recently set up a joint committee, with the Rural Industries Bureau, to help forward the teaching of handicrafts in men's and women's clubs. Anyone requiring information about craft instruction should apply to the Secretary of the Occupational Centres Handicrafts Committee, 26, Eccleston Street, London, S.W.1.

### A Demonstration Centre.

The development of women's clubs all over the country has been greatly stimulated by the opening of a demonstration centre at The Beeches, Bournville, Birmingham. The Beeches is a large and

### The Y.W.C.A. Club for Women and Girls in Blackburn



A "Keep-Fit" Class in the club garden, a Dress-making Class and a Class in Upholstery.

[Photos by the "Blackburn Times"]



## The Beeches Educational Centre for Women



A view of the house from the orchard.



The Craft-room.

attractive house, belonging to a body of Trustees of whom Mrs. George Cadbury is Chairman. It was originally built as a holiday home, and has accommodation for twenty guests, with several large rooms which are very suitable for use as classrooms and common-rooms. In the autumn of 1933, this property was made available for use as a residential centre, to which women and girls who are members of Mutual Service clubs in England, Wales and Scotland can come for periods of a fortnight at a time to get special instruction and help in matters connected with their clubs. The programme of courses has been drawn up by a local committee, in consultation with the National Council of Social Service, and covers a wide variety of subjects. Special provision has been made for the teaching and demonstration of handicrafts, in order that the students may learn and practise various useful crafts which they can afterwards help to develop among their fellow club members. Talks and discussions are arranged, as an introduction to various subjects which could suitably be included in a club programme, and visits are paid to local factories, schools and municipal buildings. In the evenings there is opportunity for various recreational activities, country dancing, play-reading, games and community singing.

The women who attend these courses come as representatives of their clubs determined to derive as much practical help as possible from their fortnight's visit. They take back with them new ideas and suggestions, which should tend to improve the standard of work in handicrafts and make club programmes more interesting and varied. What is even more important, however, is the fact that people from many different areas have come in contact with each other and have exchanged ideas and experiences. In comparing notes about what various clubs are doing or what they may do in the future, these women have realized that they are co-operating in a movement which extends far beyond their particular town or district. They have been able to form a clearer picture of the functions and possibilities of a Mutual Service Club, and most of them are feeling that they would like their club to grow into something permanent which will continue to be of value to them, even after employment has again become normal.

The inclusive charges for residence and instruction at The Beeches vary from three shillings a week, for married women whose husbands are out of work, to six shillings a week for women who are themselves in receipt of unemployment benefit. In order that clubs situated at a distance from Birmingham may not be prevented by heavy railway fares from sending their members to The Beeches, the organizing committee has undertaken to meet travelling expenses above a minimum of five shillings a head, where these cannot be raised locally.

Further details and dates of courses may be obtained from the Warden, The Beeches, Selly Oak Road, Bournville, Birmingham.

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For further information about women's clubs application should be made to:—

The National Council of Social Service :

Headquarters : 26, Bedford Square, London, W.C.1.

Area Offices :

Wales : The Law Courts, Cardiff.

Midlands : 16, Lench Street, Birmingham.

North : 46, Park Square, Leeds.

*or*

The Scottish Council for Community Service during Unemployment, 103, Waterloo Street, Glasgow, C.2;

*or*

The London Council for Voluntary Occupation during Unemployment, 614, Cecil Chambers, 86, Strand, W.C.2.

# PUBLICATIONS

The following leaflets on the work of Mutual Service Clubs and Occupation Centres have been issued by The National Council of Social Service.

- No. 1. VOLUNTARY OCCUPATION DURING UNEMPLOYMENT.  
A short account of the character and purpose of occupational clubs.
- No. 2. UNEMPLOYMENT IN MARKET TOWNS AND VILLAGES.
- No. 4. HANDWORK IN OCCUPATION CENTRES.  
With suggestions as to equipment and suitable activities.
- No. 5. PHYSICAL FITNESS.  
Suggestions for organizing physical recreation.
- No. 6. INSURANCE.  
Giving particulars of a comprehensive insurance policy covering the legal liabilities of local committees organizing occupation centres, physical recreation classes, etc., and providing an accident policy for those taking part in these activities.
- No. 7. MODEL ACCOUNTS.  
A simple system for use in Mutual Service and occupational clubs.  
Price 6d.

## UNEMPLOYMENT AND OPPORTUNITY.

An illustrated pamphlet with a foreword by the Right Hon. George Lansbury, P.C., M.P., J.P. Price 6d., post free 7½d.

## PHYSICAL RECREATION.

Notes on games organizations, rules for team games and a set of six Tables of Exercises. With a foreword by the Right Hon. The Lord Eustace Percy, P.C., M.P. Price 1/-, post free. Special price for quantities.

## CAMPING.

A handbook for the organizers of camps with suggestions about equipment, catering and the planning of activities. Price 6d., post free 7½d.

## UNEMPLOYMENT : THE "MEANWHILE" PROBLEM.

A reprint of an article by the Master of Balliol from the "Contemporary Review" of June, 1933.

## FOLLOWING THE PRINCE'S LEAD.

A reprint of an article by Mr. A. C. Richmond from "The Listener" of February 14th, 1934.

## VOLUNTARY SERVICE AND UNEMPLOYMENT.

A summary of progress in 1933.