

**'The After-care Association for Poor Convalescents on Leaving Asylums for the Insane' by Mrs Robert Henniker, reprinted from A Threefold Cord**

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# The After-Care Association

## For Poor Convalescents on leaving Asylums for the Insane.

BY MRS. ROBERT HENNIKER.

When we recollect that this Association is the outcome of the beginning made in the reform in the treatment of the insane at the York "Retreat," now a hundred years ago, it would have been peculiarly fitting that a paper on the aims and objects of the "After-Care Association" should have been brought before the conference held last November in Leeds. Unfortunately time did not then allow of the adequate treatment of the question.

The gradual progress of that reform, with regard to the life of patients in the asylums cannot now be considered, the object of this paper being to lay briefly before you the need of such an association and the manner in which it carries out its work.

And first, as to the care and solicitude required for convalescents discharged from asylums: There are in the asylums for the insane about 43,000 women, who are supported by the rates, for, as the law now stands, the greater proportion of patients are sent to lunatic asylums through the agency of the Poor Law. Of these a large number are discharged yearly quite recovered, but many of them friendless, not knowing where to turn for shelter, nor how to exist until they can again earn their own living. There are shopwomen, domestic servants, employes of different kinds, widows, young and middle-aged women, capable of doing good work, could they only have a helping hand to give them a fresh start, and (almost more to be pitied than these) governesses, highly educated ladies, quite destitute, for whom the workhouse surroundings are very unsuitable. Some have friends willing to help to the best of their ability, but too poor to do much, either in supplying food, lodging, or clothes.

A further difficulty has also to be taken into account, namely, the fear of mental disease entertained by many people, which causes them to decline employing those who have suffered from any of its forms.

The following instances of cases received and assisted may here be appropriately quoted:—

L. K. (Fulham), received in September 1887. After being boarded out at L— placed in service. Still continues to do well

and writes to her associate. When out of place returns to L— at her own expense until fresh work found.

E. G. (orphan girl), boarded out in Sussex for some weeks in March, 1891. Placed in service, and still doing well.

E. W. (age 34), German. After being placed in a home at Tunbridge Wells, returned to mother in Germany, and was doing well when she last wrote.

J. P. Ladies' Hairdresser. Placed in a home for some weeks, and then returned to work.

M. A. C. superior young orphan girl from South Devon, sent to Canada under care of the Girls' Friendly Society, the After-Care Association paying passage.

A. C. poor young married woman, sent to convalescent home, and after a week's rest, returned to her husband and young children. Continues quite well.

Miss J. (governess), assisted in various ways to re-start in life. Is now doing well, and a short time ago made a donation to the funds of the After-Care Association.

The chief methods by which this association endeavours to meet the various needs of these convalescents are, (1) by boarding them out for a time in the country until they become once more accustomed to ordinary life; (2) by grants of money and clothing; (3) by finding for them suitable employment. In the carrying out of these ends the council has from time to time received considerable assistance from working associates who have visited the convalescents, have procured situations, arranged journeys, provided outfits, and in other ways seen to their welfare. Where an associate can be found able and willing to undertake so arduous and responsible a charge this boarding out works well, but the difficulty is to meet with suitable cottage homes and to secure a sufficient number of ladies of experience, with time at their disposal, to attend to these cases. The council, after much consideration, decided in February 1893 to open a small home in Surrey for the reception of 8 convalescents. It is a convenient house, prettily situated in a healthy neighbourhood, and under the care of a thoroughly competent and ex-

perienced matron. Twenty four cases have been received since the opening of the home, and out of this number twenty have been satisfactorily placed. It is not however intended to do away with boarding out, but the convenience of having a home to which a convalescent can be sent without delay, and which is under the direct supervision of a committee of the council, is very great. It will however entail a permanent extra charge of £55 per annum on the funds of the association, which is a serious item out of its present small income, and the council hope that increased subscriptions may be forthcoming towards this additional expense.

From the report of the council for 1892 it will be seen that the association has hitherto barely touched the fringe of the work it desires to do for convalescents, 73 cases only having come before the committee last year. Granted that the work can never be expected to become popular, and the difficulties encountered are much greater than in most charitable societies, yet there is scarcely any work more needed, and this association is the only one that attempts it. What then is wanted to ensure success to its efforts?

Firstly, the warm co-operation and support of the medical superintendents of the various asylums throughout the country. The association does not confine its operations to London alone but assists cases from all parts, and has indeed had a convalescent returned from an asylum in Roumania.

Secondly; To interest all poor law guardians and lady visitors to workhouses—inducing the guardians to watch for the discharge of recovered patients, and to report, where necessary, to the association.

These two points are of the *greatest* importance, as without close communication with medical superintendents and guardians it is most difficult for the association to become acquainted with those requiring the assistance it can give, and it would be well if some systematic plan could be arranged for reporting direct from asylums and boards of guardians such cases as are likely to be benefitted, as without such a plan many must go unbefriended from want of their cases being known, even if individual guardians watch them closely.

Thirdly. To secure Honorary Local County and District Secretaries who will undertake to organize meetings; to obtain

annual subscribers, associates, and donors; to establish working parties, for clothes are greatly needed, many convalescents having hardly any, and the providing of outfits being a heavy charge on the funds of the association; to look out for homes and persons willing to take convalescents for a few weeks' rest and change, on payment of 8/- to 10/6 per week; and, in various other ways to promote the work.

There are already 9 local secretaries, but none for Yorkshire, the nearest being at Manchester and Rochdale.

When it is remembered that there are in England and Wales 53 county asylums, 13 city and borough asylums, and 5 metropolitan licensed houses which take pauper cases, it will be seen how difficult it is for one secretary in London to do all the work—especially as it increases—without the assistance of district secretaries.

The council will willingly send a deputation to attend public meetings called for the purpose of organizing a branch of the association whenever required.

So far, the work has been on behalf of women alone, but such good results have followed that it has been strongly urged upon the association to enlarge its sphere of action and extend the after-care work to men also. In course of time this will most probably be done, if the support given to the initial movement proves that the association is felt to meet a real want.

In conclusion, it cannot be too strongly urged that "After-Care," must not be regarded as a passing whim or fad, but as an earnest endeavour to work out practically, usefully and economically, the aims and ideas of those members of the medical profession who have made a special study of the treatment of the insane, and whose world-wide experience entitles them to speak with the fullest authority on the subject.

The Association was Established for Women only, now it is willing to receive applications on behalf of male convalescents.

All communications to be made to the Secretary, H. THORNHILL ROXBY, Esq., Church House, Dean's Yard, Westminster, S.W., by whom contributions will be thankfully received, or they may be paid into the account of the "AFTER-CARE ASSOCIATION," Union Bank of London (Regent Street Branch), Argyll Place, London, W.