

brotherhood action

Brotherhood of St Laurence

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HOME IMPROVEMENT SERVICE

Ninety years old Mrs Alicia Keenan was one of the first clients of the Brotherhood's new Home Improvement Service. She has lived for over thirty years in a neat weatherboard house in Geelong West, next door to her daughter and son-in-law. "My family are all very good to me. They help with the little things but they couldn't fix everything"

The Home Improvement Service is designed to help elderly people by making the necessary alterations so they can stay in their own homes as long as possible. Geelong West was chosen as the area for this experimental program because it is one of Geelong's oldest residential suburbs, with one in four residents being over sixty years.

Mrs Keenan's house needed new downpipes, alterations to the verandah to allow a better water run-off, a new back step and porch and an indoor toilet. Service co-ordinator Ken Lewis first visited Mrs Keenan to assess what was needed, then called in tradesmen to cost the work. Plans were drawn up and submitted to council for approval and the work was then supervised by Ken. "It wasn't too good before, having to go outside to the toilet in winter", said Mrs Keenan. "But it's really nice now. It's grand to have your own roof over your head!"

Mrs Keenan was able to pay for the renovations, but finance at low interest rate is also available if necessary. Only two loans have been made so far. These will be repaid if the house is sold or on the death of the client.

So far it appears that most people using the service have sufficient savings to do basic improvements but just don't know how to go about it. They know what they want but are worried about the cost and whether the job will be done properly.



Mrs Alicia Keenan and the Home Improvement Service's Co-ordinator Ken Lewis.

The largest job undertaken has been for an elderly lady who has lived all her life in the same house. It had no hot water and had not been painted for 19 years. Improvements carried out included reblocking, a new bath, handbasin, internal toilet, painting and, of course, a hot water service. The client was able to pay \$2,000 with the Brotherhood lending \$4,000.

The service opened in mid February with information being sent to local chemists, doctors, nursing and welfare services. Up until now it has deliberately not been too widely advertised so that the service would not be inundated in its early days, but already 27 applications have been received.

It was anticipated that most requests would be for fairly major alterations such as roof repairs and new bathrooms, but many are for simple handyman jobs. These people are happy to pay but because of their particular circumstances are unable to arrange it themselves.

The homes needing a considerable sum spending on them are usually owned by people who have had an illness or a parent to care for and who have never benefited from a superannuation or insurance payout. Their income has only been sufficient to buy the house and bring up their families, major improvements being beyond their ability to arrange and finance.

The Home Improvement Service is part of the Brotherhood's recently adopted policy of focussing its services for the aged on helping them remain in their own homes which is the best (and the least expensive) way of retaining their independence and purpose.

The Better Way

Instead of sending flowers to a funeral, a donation to the "Better Way" fund can give a more lasting expression of sympathy. The fund secretary, Wendylee Perrin, telephone 419 7055, will send a card from you to the bereaved and a donation can be forwarded at your convenience.

In twenty years the "Better Way" has provided \$45,000 which has financed the building of 15 units at G. K. Tucker Park, Carrum Downs, and St Laurence Park, Lara.

Should the Brotherhood have a Membership?

The Brotherhood is a many-sided organisation. It provides direct services to large numbers of poor or disadvantaged people. It investigates social issues such as unemployment, housing, child care and looks critically at some of its own activities to see if they really help people to the extent that is intended. It helps other organisations and groups to help themselves by providing finance and advice. The most notable example of this is the Action and Resource Centre, which is now run by people who were once customers of the Brotherhood.

The Brotherhood is also a school, or rather, it helps people to become aware of social injustice and attitudes that oppress or harm other people. It also tries to find new, more effective and participatory ways of meeting newly recognised needs through innovative projects.

Some people would like to see the Brotherhood also become more of a "movement!" A movement has members. It has clear objectives and encourages people to join and help achieve those objectives.

At present the Brotherhood has donors, volunteers, full and part-time staff. Do you think it would strengthen the Brotherhood if a membership was established? It could give those who wished an opportunity to become more identified with the Brotherhood and what it stands for and does. Of course, the rights and responsibilities of members would need to be worked out. Members would need to have ways of becoming more involved and being able to help influence what the Brotherhood thinks and does, as well as helping to promote those ideas in the community.

We would like to know what Action readers think of the concept of a Brotherhood Membership. If you are interested in the idea, please write to me at 67 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, 3065.

DAVID SCOTT



Over \$5,000 was raised at the first Fair and Open Day to be held at our Fitzroy Headquarters. Our thanks go to all the volunteers, auxiliaries, donors and staff who helped make the day a success. It

was very much a Brotherhood "Family" day with many residents from G. K. Tucker Park, Carrum Downs, and St Laurence Park, Lara, visiting Fitzroy for the first time.