

# IT LOOKS LIKE A SHOP

## —new material aid service

There's a door in Brunswick Street, Fitzroy, which opens into a short alley between two buildings. You walk up that, open another door and find a waiting room that leads into what looks like a shop.

There are attractive wall racks full of frocks, suits, overcoats, jackets and slacks. Modern island style counters of underwear, jumpers and childrens' clothing, and rows of shoes to suit all sorts of feet and occasions. There's a gay, warm carpet on the floor and on sunny days the sun streams in through the large windows high on the western wall. This is the home of the Brotherhood's new Material Aid Service.

Over the years the Brotherhood has distributed clothing and household goods to thousands of families and elderly people in need of assistance. Families requiring clothing could discuss their needs with a social worker who would make out a list and send it down to the clothing store. There, a voluntary helper selected the clothing and sent it back in a parcel or else railed it if the family came from the country.

We have never felt that this was a very satisfactory method of distributing clothing. It is bad enough to have to wear secondhand clothing, if you can't even select your own clothes, no matter how limited the choice, it is even worse.

Now this has all changed. On November 13 the Material Aid Service was opened at 71 Brunswick Street, Fitzroy.

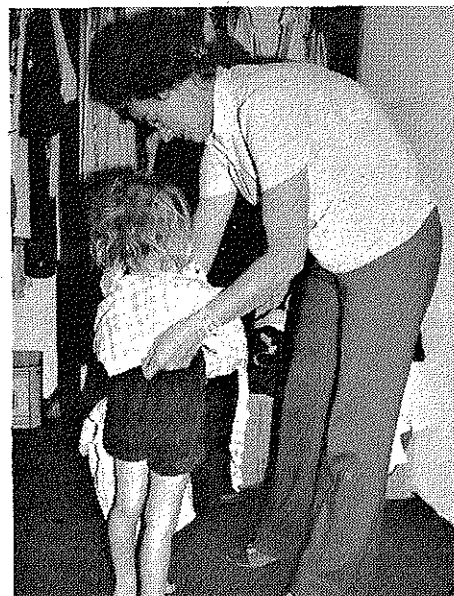
Two hundred and fifty people have already been assisted through the service which caters for pensioners, low income families, people in trouble or people who just haven't got any street clothes.

Glen Alderson, who is in charge of the Service, says it is not unusual to get a call from a Hospital Social Worker explaining that she has a patient ready for discharge but he hasn't got any clothes. Can she help?

In these cases Glen sends the clothes without seeing the client. It wouldn't seem quite the thing to ask a person to come out in the hospital pyjamas, she feels. But in most cases she insists on seeing the client herself. As Glen points out they can then choose their own clothing and it is more efficient.

She also handles requests for furniture and sends people down to Phyl Lowe at 145 Brunswick Street, the Brotherhood's furniture shop, for the items they need.

The biggest demand is for children's clothing and that is what is in shortest supply. Glen, who has two small boys of her own, knows just how hard it is to keep clothing up to growing children. You wouldn't think you could get so excited about a parcel of pyjamas and underpants,



Voluntary Helper, Mrs Enid Paterson, tries a frock for size on a small customer.

she says. As things settle down she hopes to get a voluntary sewing group established who will make pyjamas for older children and other items of children's clothing which are in short supply.

Glen finds that many people hear of the service from their friends. 'Go and see Glen down at the Brotherhood, she'll fix you up,' is becoming a familiar phrase at Gordon House for instance, 'they all know me there,' she says.

I see a terrific number of invalid pensioners; families that normally manage quite well on a low income but owing to an accident, unemployment or illness in the family need help until they are back on their feet again; families that have long term problems; young people trying to manage on unemployment benefits and aged pensioners living alone. Some just walk in off the street, others are people who have been helped by the Brotherhood previously, and about 25 per cent are referrals from such places as Prisoners' Aid, the Bouyancy Foundation, the Social Service Department, psychiatric hospitals and other welfare organisations. They don't all need material aid, often it's just someone to talk to or a social problem in which case Glen will refer them on to the appropriate organisation. Whatever the case it takes anything up to an hour to attend to each person.

Glen runs the whole show herself with the help of voluntaries. Over the Christmas months she has had the help of students but she will need replacements when they return to their studies. She needs women who are used to mixing with all sorts and are prepared to get in and do anything from washing and ironing to fitting grubby small boys for shoes or boxer shorts. She would also like to establish a group of women to mend clothing at home. A lot of perfectly good clothes have minor faults that a few moments with a needle would put right, she says.

The service is open from 10.00 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Wednesday and Friday and from 2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. on Thursday.



Glen Alderson, Welfare Officer in charge of the Material Aid Service, helps select a pair of shoes.