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SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY

REPORT FOR THE YEAR 1979

Dear Friends and Compatriots,

It is our pleasure to present to you the 110th Annual Report on the activities of the Swiss Benevolent Society. Our aim, during the year under review, has again been to bring help, both material and personal, to those Swiss people who chose to call on us or on whose behalf we were approached by various organisations and institutions.

One of our difficulties is the fact that the very nature of the Swiss Colony, spread over such a wide area, often leaves us ignorant of the needs of some who we might be able to help in one way or another and there we depend on you, amongst others, to help us to get in touch.

At the last Annual General Meeting, Mr. M. Schneebeli, who had been a member of the Executive Committee since 1965 and its President since 1971, retired and has since returned to take up a position in Switzerland. We are much indebted to him for the many years of devoted service he has given to our Society and its clients. At the same meeting we were fortunate enough to elect four new members to the Executive Committee who have brought new enthusiasm to the task.

In August, we were sad to learn of the death of our Honorary Treasurer and friend Mr. Roland Asch. A member of the Executive Committee since 1969, he became its Treasurer in 1970. His passing leaves a great and painful gap in our midst and we wish to record here the gratitude we feel for all he gave to us.

Mrs. A. Sommer informed us during the year that she wished to retire from the General Committee as she could not now play an active part, as she and her late husband, our former President Mr. F. G. Sommer used to do. We thank her for the many years of faithful support of our cause.

The activities of the year have followed their normal pattern. The well-being of our Pensioners continues to rank high amongst our priorities, though quite a number of them need very few services from us as they are well integrated in their own communities and their main problem is simply the lack of

adequate funds. However, we try to be in regular contact with them as well, in the hope that we could spot other difficulties that might arise.

On the other hand, we do have clients who are in reasonable or even quite good financial circumstances but whose need of our services is great and often time-consuming.

Some of the problems we have encountered have been, for instance: searching for an appropriate home, advice with forms and applications of all sorts, contact with families in Switzerland, help with the administration of their income, visits to hospitals or doctors where at times we have to act as interpreters.

We have continued to pay out the Swiss Old Age Pension to some who find it more convenient to receive regular payments in advance, rather than have to wait for the three-monthly cheques arriving towards the end of the quarter.

Isolation continues to be a problem for many of the elderly. Having been "loners" all their lives, they find that they are completely alone in old age. If they found it difficult to create adequate relationships when younger, they are now totally unable to form new ones and benefit from the various clubs and organisations at the service of the elderly.

We have again given a considerable amount of occasional help to people who, during the year, found themselves facing unforeseen financial hurdles which they could not surmount without some support. Being a small organisation, we are in the lucky position of being bound by few rules. This enables us to be flexible and, we hope, imaginative in the solution of individual problems.

A large number of our pensioners and some other people, have accepted our offer for a contribution towards holidays or convalescence.

For twenty children who travelled to Switzerland with Pro Juventute, we paid all or part of the fares to enable them to spend a few happy weeks away from home; thus helping above all their mothers, many of whom work full time. They had the knowledge that their children were well cared for and also had a period when they could spend a bit more time on themselves by not

having to rush home to the many tasks that await a mother after a day's work.

Christmas brought the familiar bustling period and the bulk of the preparations lay in the able hands of Mmes. N. Burri and A. Diviani. The usual number of parcels went out, some large for families in real need, some small, just to tell lonely people that they have not been forgotten. We are much indebted to Mmes. G. Ficker, L. Hall, M. Hill, J. Mathison, Mr. & Mrs. E. Tangemann, Mr. & Mrs. V. Turner, Messrs. O. Batholdi & Son, C. Lyster, H. Maurer, L. Smith, Rev. U. Steiner, H. Weber, who all contributed in some way to the successful operation.

Whilst the welfare of our clients is our most important task, the administrative side of the Society's affairs calls for quite a large slice of our time and great care is given by both the Executive Committee and the Secretariat to run it as efficiently and smoothly as possible. The Committee, as usual, has met once a month to examine arising problems and has striven to find solutions to the many varied questions put before it.

This task is always greatly facilitated by the very careful work of investigation into the problems by our devoted Secretary Anna-Regula Sharp. It must be emphasised that without the careful case preparation undertaken by Mrs. Sharp, the Committee would in many cases find it most difficult to arrive at a correct decision; as there are often grey areas which need clarification and require tactful, persistent and discreet inquiries. We are, indeed, fortunate to have at our disposal full time services of such a qualified Social Worker in the person of Mrs. Sharp, and wish to place on record once more our appreciation for all the work she undertakes on our behalf. The Embassy was represented at the meetings by Consul-General M.Ch. Glauser.

There is little to report on the property of Belsize Grove. Some repairs had to be carried out and we have continued to give an allowance to the Hostel for the Swiss girls living there.

The property at Conway Street was given a major facelift during the year and now looks attractive and inviting both inside and out. The

rooms have been well occupied and we wish to express our gratitude to Mr. & Mrs. S. Jackson, our caretakers, for the interest and pride they take in the building.

The presence of the Swiss Welfare Office for young people has continued to be of great value to both organisations. It ensures that during office hours, there is always someone available for our clients and the two Social Workers benefit greatly from the exchange of ideas and a possibility to discuss problems amongst themselves. We are grateful to Mrs. Margrit Lyster for a happy and useful collaboration and for assuming the responsibility for our office during Mrs. Sharp's absence. Our joint secretary, Mrs. Marietta Lee left us in the autumn and our best wishes accompany her. We were able to secure the services of Mrs. M. Fraser, née Schroeter, whom we thank warmly for her help.

Our task has been much facilitated by the useful and

increasing co-operation with the Swiss Church and the Mother's Group. They have been able to draw our attention to needs of which we were ignorant and, on the other hand, we could put lonely people in touch with them for the support which does not lie within the scope of our activities.

Our Honorary President Ambassador Dr. E. Thalmann left London in November and we wish to thank him for the interest and support that he gave us during his term of office in London. We wish him and Madame Thalmann well in their retirement.

We also would like to express our gratitude to the institutions and individuals who, during the course of the year, have helped us in our work, namely the Swiss Embassy, the Swiss Churches, the Swiss Observer, English Social Services and our friends and contributors whose support means a lot more to us than just receiving their welcome financial contributions, although these

are still most important as we have to report an increasing call on our financial resources as can be seen from our Annual Accounts for 1979. Even though we recognise that we are well endowed financially, it is still a fact that we continue to outspend our revenues from capital investment. We, however, received a number of legacies in 1979 which replaced the usage of capital. Our Finance Committee continually seeks to invest our funds to the maximum benefit of the Society which we hope will strengthen our finances in the course of 1980.

In conclusion, we can look back on 1979 as a year which has permitted the Society to continue its activities in a satisfactory way and we can go into 1980 with confidence.

On behalf of the Executive Committee,

V. Berti
President

SPRING FLOWERS FOR THE LADIES AT THE SWISS CENTRE

The beginning of Spring was celebrated by Swiss Fair in the traditional Swiss manner by giving flowers on the first day of Spring (21st March).

Lady visitors to the Swiss Centre Restaurants and shops, customers of Swissair and passers-by received a bunch of narcissi, presented by Blumen-Fritz from Basel, where he is a well-known personality, an "original" with an eye for the ladies.

Swiss Fair Ltd., and Swissair brought him over for the occasion and from his highly eccentric bike and wagon combination, (modelled like a typical Swiss Chalet) stationed in the foyer of the Swiss Centre Restaurants, he distributed armfuls of narcissi to the delighted members of the fair sex.

He also recorded some of his funny songs for LBC, which he seemed to enjoy as much as his audience.

