

THE COMMUNITY CENTRE

THIS was the first of a series of four radio talks by H. C. D. SOMERSET on "The Community Centre," but it is complete in itself. These talks (the last of which will be heard next Monday evening) were prepared as part of 2YA's Winter Course programme

IN these talks I am going to try to tell you what a community centre is, what it can do and what it should certainly not attempt to do. Much of this is based upon what my wife and I have learned in working with the people of Feilding in the development of their centre. But I don't want to bore you with an account of what is done in Feilding. Much has already been written about it and much more has been said about it. When we went up to Feilding more than nine years ago with some ideas we asked for nothing better than time to try out a few of them; we wanted to learn by experiment the kind of organisation that would suit a New Zealand community.

And so we went to work. Before long, I was asked to give a series of

talks on the result of our efforts. I was in some doubt whether I should or shouldn't when my wife settled it by saying, "Remember the gentleman dining at Crewe?" I did: the one who discovered a mouse in his stew. "Said the waiter, don't shout, or wave it about. Or the rest will be wanting one too."

So we decided not to wave it about. But the experiment has become well known and lots of places are now wanting one too. I don't blame them; a community centre is a good thing to have. I think, therefore, that I can serve you best if I tell you some of the principles upon which centres should be founded.

Something New

Here is the first point I want to get clear; the centre is really something new in the life of the community; we may have to attach it to something already

existing for purposes of organisation, but its work, its spirit, is unlike anything we have had in the past. It's true that we call our venture in Feilding the Community Centre for Further Education and Recreation and it is, in fact, an educational centre with many recreational activities as well; but it is in no real sense an extension of education or recreation as we have come to understand these terms. Let's say for the moment that *further education* means a special activity that schools and university colleges as such cannot possibly provide for. Remember that schools and colleges cater for people who are still immature, for young people who are able to spend the greater part of their time in learning. The centre is designed for the use of adults and near-adults who have started their life's work and for whom the settling into a job and the establishment of a home and family must be the first concern.

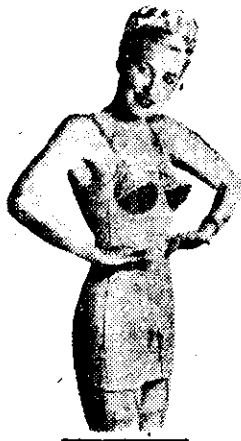
We can understand the needs of these people best if we forget about education and think about the word community. In your town or village you and your neighbours have seen to it that your needs are provided for. Shops have come into existence because you

need such things as food and clothes and petrol and books. So shops are part of the life of the place and no one could imagine a modern community without them. Yesterday I was talking to one of the oldest residents of Feilding about the early settlement of a near-by township. "I was there before the first settlers arrived," he said. "I took up a wagon-load of flour, tea, axes, spades, shirts, and trousers and opened the first shop in a tent." His tent was really the first community centre in the bush settlement because it supplied its first need. I imagine that it supplied much more than food and clothes and tools; it supplied, as early shops always did, a place for talk and discussion.

The Essence of Community

But as communities grow in size and complexity, more and more organisation becomes necessary. Soon there are churches for religion, schools for elementary education, banks for the collection and distribution of money, town councils for roads and drainage, the police station for law and order, the railway, the post, and the telephone for better communication with the outside world, the library for communication with better

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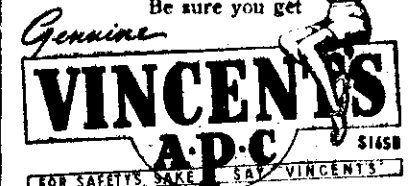
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