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ABORIGINAL VIEWS

THESE AIDES ARE A FIRST IN EDUCATION

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The State Education Department is claiming an Australian first with the appointment of Aboriginal teacher aides for schools where there is a minority Aboriginal enrolment.

Ten Aboriginal women aides were appointed this week and eight have spent the week at a condensed induction course in Brisbane.

The other two appointments were in North Queensland.

Initial training would be followed by a more comprehensive in-service course, Queensland Primary Education Director (Mr. W.L. Hamilton) said yesterday.

These were the first such appointments in Australia, Mr. Hamilton said.

Aboriginal teacher assistants already at work in Queensland were all serving in schools with mainly Aboriginal student populations.

The Brisbane State primary schools where the newly trained aides will work are Petrie Terrace, Rochedale, Windsor, Inala and Inala West, Milton and Zillmere.

Mrs. Dorothy Kingston whose home is at Stradbroke Island will be appointed to Dunwich State School.

The women were recruited for a specific aim, Education for Indigenous Children State Supervisor (Mr. John Dwyer) said: "To get them into the system."

One particular function of the Aboriginal aides would be to help Aboriginal children to adjust to school and help teachers understand the special needs of these children, but generally, their function would be the same as all other teaching aides.

They would help provide any Aboriginal children with motivation to learn.

The women recruited also had "something special" to offer to the total school life, Mr. Dwyer said.

One of the new aides, Mrs. Fiona Barney, of Inala, sees that something special as "helping all the children to see that dark mothers aren't different to others.

"At the moment, when I go to P. and C. meetings, or to collect my children, some of the little kids there seem to think it's strange. I think my being there will help them."

That was why she responded readily when she received a letter from the Inala State Primary School headmaster asking her if she would be interested in becoming an aide.

"I thought to myself, this would be a good thing to do. So I went along to see him."

Mrs. Barney went as far as eighthgrade at school, but is enjoying the highly technical work in media all aides have to learn.

Audio visual, graphics reproduction, use and operation of open reel and cassette tape recorders are all included in her training course.

If she can help children in their school work, she "will be glad."

She wants her own five to "go as far as they can" and thinks her example might help them, too.

Miss Noela Johnson, of Wacol, was a G.P.O. telephonist from the time she left school until her sister's children brought home a letter from the Headmaster at Milton State Primary School.

The letter asked if the children's mother would be interested in undertaking a training course.

But Miss Johnson went along: "Because as soon as I read it I knew this was what I really wanted to do, to work with Aboriginal children in particular, but all children, really."

Her own schooling ended at Junior. She thinks her presence at the Milton State Primary School "will be a help all round." She "sincerely hopes so."

Mrs. Ruby Martin, of Inala West, was not as keen as the others when approached. In fact, she "shuddered at the thought," she admitted.

But then she considered the possibilities of training and helping, and decided: "If I could be of any help to Aboriginal, and other, children, the best time to help is when they are young - and maybe this is the best way."

So she enrolled.

Her initial shyness was because at Cherbourg she "only went to fourth grade, because nothing much more was possible, then ..."

She has done much towards self-education since. And she has high hopes for the futures of her own six children.

The eldest (now in her fourth year nursing training) won the first scholarship for Aborigines offered by the Brisbane Girls' Grammar School.

Education, Mrs. Martin has decided, "is very important and if you can help, you should."

Mrs. Zoe Johnson, of Rochedale, responded because she always wanted to work with children, her children are now old enough (11 to 17) to allow her time to work, and she has not forgotten the enthusiasm for learning she got from the "lovely headmistress" at Clayfield College.

(The headmistress was Miss Nancy Ashburn).

Mrs. Johnson was disappointed when she had to leave the school and always "wanted her own children to do better".

She thinks her job as a teaching aide will help them - and hopefully she will be able to help many of the children she will work with "to achieve".

Mrs. Dorothy Kingston, of Stradbroke Island sees her new role as "an interesting job for me, combined with the opportunity to help Aboriginal and white children."

She finds the combination very pleasing but won't try to predict an outcome.

"Only time will tell if I am going to be good, but if I can help a little, I will feel I've done something. We all will," she said.

Mrs. Eunice Collins, of Petrie Terrace, Brisbane, is the most experienced para-educator in the group.

She worked for a year with a Queensland University project last year on the preparation of four-year-olds for school this year.

"The work gave me something," she said.

"Until you become involved you don't know how hard it is for some children to settle in to school: Let alone how to help them, or to understand why they are not doing well."

The experience gave her "broader knowledge and understanding" and that was why she decided to join up.

She thinks she will be "able to help a lot."

She is sure she can now understand and help her own six children better when it comes to homework and school topics.

And she "sure wishes" there had been extra help available when she was at school.

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