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THE CROSSROADS CLUB



Mrs. S.M. Cusack,
East Moree, N.S.W.

Mrs. Cusack writes about the activities and results of a club for young Aboriginal girls and comments in her covering letter that the teachers felt that "we had to train ourselves to look for progress, to have confidence in the girls' potential and always to be optimistic in our own outlook".

Not surprisingly, teachers and students have found the experience very worthwhile.

On 9th November, 1971, the first meeting of the Crossroads Club was held at St. Pius' X Mission Clinic. This club was begun by three teachers, Mrs. Noelene Ryan, Mrs. Stella Cusack and Mrs. Jan Goldman as the result of a discussion following their attendance at a conference at St. Pius' Mission of that year. These teachers felt there was a need to extend the work of the Daughters of Charity who conduct a Medical Clinic and Pre-School to the sub-Primary Department of St. Philomena's School. When this plan was found to be impractical, it was decided to form a club for girls only beginning with Third Grade and going through to Sixth Grade. The girls' parents were circularised and permission for attendance obtained. Twenty-two girls attended the first meeting and chose a name for their club.

The original aim of the club was to introduce the girls to a program of beauty through good health. This involved talks by experts on such topics as skin care, dental care, hair-dressing, manicuring and planning nutritious meals. Yoga lessons were given regularly by Mrs. Goldman. On the practical side, the girls went on shopping expeditions to the local supermarkets comparing prices, planned meals for large families as economically as possible, and cooked and served one of these planned dinners to the club members. The use of the St. Pius' Mission kitchen facilities was gratefully accepted.

With the passing of time, the results were evaluated and it was found that additional activities could be profitably introduced. As well as crafts such as knitting, sewing and beauty-bag making, cultural activities were also included. The first effort was a Christmas Play produced in conjunction with the Christmas Carol Festival at St. Pius Mission. This has now become an annual event and a great confidence booster. Outdoor art competitions were also held. One of the members later won her section of a local Aboriginal Art Competition.

Unfortunately, early in 1973 Mrs. Goldman moved away from the town and in 1974 Mrs. Ryan also left the district. This has brought an unexpected response from the older members of the club who are now in High School. Many of them had drifted away from the club on entering High School but have now come back, uninvited and full of enthusiasm and plans to help the younger ones. This has been perhaps the greatest achievement of the club so far - the sense of community responsibility and initiative. With this new development it now seems more desirable to have more frequent meetings of smaller groups of girls who can engage in their own particular interest, with an older girl helping as the need arises. Formerly, meetings were held weekly. Any activity which will in any way contribute to the advancement and development of the girls will be encouraged. Some of the activities already tried include advice on the purchasing of clothes for the various seasons, picnics, barbecues, swimming at the local baths, a Christmas party for the relatives and friends of members and recently a mountain climbing excursion to the Warrumbungle National Park. Impromptu taped 'concerts' are popular and stimulate initiative and confidence.

An evaluation of the results over the two and a half years of the club's existence shows that the original goals are being achieved but that the most important advances have been sociological rather than physical.

These can be listed as:

- a. responsibility;
- b. initiative;
- c. confidence;
- d. awareness of potential of individual;
- e. communication;

f. sense of community.

Club membership now stands at thirty-five and includes girls from all three Primary and two High Schools in the town.

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ABORIGINAL POPULATION OF AUSTRALIA
(1971 CENSUS)

	N.S.W.	VICTORIA	QUEENSLAND
Males	11,682	2,855	12,306
Females	11,419	2,801	12,108
TOTAL	23,101	5,656	24,414
	S.A.	W.A.	TASMANIA
Males	3,697	11,250	307
Females	2,443	10,653	268
TOTAL	7,140	21,903	575
	N.T.	A.C.T.	AUSTRALIA
Males	11,686	136	53,919
Females	11,567	112	52,371
TOTAL	23,253	248	106,290

(These figures do not include Torres Strait Islanders, of whom there were 9,663 throughout Australia, including 772 in New South Wales.