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ABORIGINAL AND ISLANDER VIEWS

WORKING AS TEACHER AIDES AT MOUNT ISA

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We would like to share with others our role as Aboriginal teacher aides at Healy State School, Mount Isa.

The administrative staff of the school has encouraged us to keep our roles and timetables very flexible. Our timetable changes as the needs of the Aboriginal children change within the school.

The Aboriginal population at school is 16%. Half of these children come under the heading of 'assimilated Aboriginals'.

The suburb of Healy was built by the Mount Isa mining company for sale to mine employees. The Aboriginal children from these homes have equal housing and their parents have no trouble 'fitting in'. They are accepted on their own worth along with children from first and second generation migrant families. These children could be called success stories but we see them as the result of equal opportunities.

Close to our school we have the 'camping area'. These are the children we mainly work with in Reading and Maths. Within this area we have found two distinct groups. Families who say 'I never had much schooling, so I always send the kids', and families who see no benefit in schooling. From the first group children come on a regular basis and we are able to help individual members of the family to catch up and return to ordinary classroom activities, or keep them learning at a different level. The other group from this area do not see the benefits of school and have heavy social problems. Consequently we have a truancy problem with their children.

Our work consists of three hours a day. On arriving at school we mark a special roll of the children in our care. We go from class to class establishing eye contact with the children. At this time

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the teachers are able to approach us with any questions about the children they are concerned about, or with messages for the parents.

We do lunch orders for those children in Years One and Two whose parents cannot write. In Year Three the children do their own orders with the help of their teachers. During the morning we do little lunch duty with the other aides, supervising set areas. The rest of our time is spent working with children, often with remedial-type work.

Once a week we do home visits. We call on parents, the same day each week, so that they know when to expect us. We encourage them to talk about their children, to come to the school and to meet the teachers. We act as a link between parents and teachers, hoping to establish an understanding on both sides. We have found that we have continuing support from some parents. One boy from this area won a Rotary Scholarship. To win the award the following were considered - academic merit, personality, conscientiousness and economic need. The scholarship is awarded annually to a Year 7 student at Healy School. It is open to all students. Steven Sarmardin was the proud winner in 1979.

Unfortunately, those children who do not attend enough to have a feeling of achievement do miss out on a great deal. These children (18 per cent of our Aborigines) are very vulnerable. Because they are missing school they have nothing to do. Through boredom they can, and sometimes do, end up in trouble with the authorities for various petty misdemeanours.

In the long term we may have to wait for these children to become parents to be able to see any benefit, from schooling, for their own children. For this reason, any little bit of help we can give to establish their self confidence, and confidence in the school, is of major importance.

We do not think of this part of our job as failing, rather as a more difficult road to success. We do need assistance from outside of the school in this area.

The Aboriginal Health Scheme is run by a group of women who are a tremendous help with children who are ill, and we call on them regularly for assistance.

Often we feel that we need training in our work, to achieve more in the time we have. Sometimes we feel we could be doing more in a better way.

We feel very strongly that it is very important that there should be Aboriginal aides in all the primary schools in Mount Isa; so that when children transfer from our school to another in Mount Isa, support is continuing.

We like our work and really appreciate the help and encouragement the teachers, aides and administration staff give us. We know that we could not enjoy our work as much as we do without their support.

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NOTICE

Readers are advised that all articles and letters submitted for consideration for publication must be accompanied by a statement to this effect, and must show the author's current address. Where more than one author is involved, the signature and address of each must accompany the submission.

We regret that in two recent instances we have been unable to contact the authors because no address was provided. *Ed.*