
*More about that very important pre-school stuff . . .
This time it's the:*

Sisters of Compassion, Wilcannia



Sister Mark, Sr Domitilla and Sr Vincent

Sister Mark, Sister Domitilla, and Sister Vincent run their Aborigines' Mission on the reserve. In charge is Sister Mark, who trained in New Zealand under Lex Grey some years ago. She learnt his methods and worked amongst Maoris until she came to Wilcannia in January 1966. Soon after arrival, the pre-school started, with five kids and two dogs. The children were pretty wary of us in the beginning, Sister Mark remembers. Not being used to the long white habits worn by the nuns, they used to run away when they saw them coming and called them "ghosters". But that didn't last long. The pre-school grew rapidly and now there are forty children attending the kindergarten at the mission. Four local mothers, Marlene Clark, Haze IMcEwan, Barbara Clark, and Gloria King come once a week to help with the children. They are now doing Lex Grey's A.F.E.C. Mother's Help course and are discovering new things about their children every day as a result.

At the mission, children from all over town are mixing now, because they come from the Mallee, the reserve and "round the bend" of the river to learn and play at the kindergarten. Sister Vincent gives them check-ups because she is a nursing sister.

Sister Mark is very much against the idea of taking away children in cases of apparent neglect. Despite neglect and poor conditions, she urges, there is often a very happy home. The answer, she feels, is to help the parents to help themselves. One of the ways the sisters do this is by giving cooking and sewing lessons. The sewing circle, Marlene Clark, Gloria King, Ngarie Cattermole, Hazel McEwan, Barbara Clark, and Norma Dutton, have made curtains for their homes, children's clothes and dressing gowns as well as their own frocks. All this, to the delight of Sister Vincent, their sewing teacher.

Gloria King is one of the young mothers who form the backbone of the young A.F.E.C. pre-school