

LONDON SUCCESS OF DAVID KERIN

David Kerin, 22-years-old blind Aboriginal who left Sydney in September, 1962, has successfully completed a physiotherapy course in London.

Announcement of his success was made early in March by the Minister for Territories, the Honourable C. E. Barnes, and the New South Wales Chief Secretary, the Honourable E. A. Willis.

In 1962 the Commonwealth and New South Wales Governments joined to help David, a former pupil of St Edmund's School for Blind Boys, Wahroonga, to undertake a physiotherapy course at the Royal Institute for the Blind in London.

Physiotherapy is the electrical treatment and massage of the human body.

Although David was born in the Northern Territory he was educated in New South Wales since infancy—first at St Lucy's School for the Blind and later at St Edmund's where he obtained his leaving certificate in 1961.

The New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board approved of part of the funds held in trust for the benefit of Aborigines being applied towards the cost of David's studies and altogether contributed \$4,000. The Board has maintained a continuous interest in David's progress and a member of the Board, while on a private visit to England, interviewed and counselled the lad. The Commonwealth Government continued his pension with supplementary weekly assistance for a totally blind person and paid air fares to and from London and other expenses while he was in England. He was also given help by St Edmund's School.

The course was not easy for David and although he had to repeat a year his persistence has been crowned with success.

In congratulating David both Ministers said that the help given by the Catholic Church and the two Governments was an indication of the close

partnership between governments and the missions to help Aborigines find a useful place in the community.

The Ministers said that this was a practical result of the policy of assimilation and expressed satisfaction that their Governments have been able to co-operate in helping David Kerin to qualify for a worthwhile profession.

Early Life

David, the youngest of a big family, had a grim start to his life. But through sheer hard work, and with great help and care from his educators, his fellow pupils both blind and sighted, and from Government and outside friends, he has won fine achievement.

Living with his family in Alice Springs in the Northern Territory in 1949, David suffered an attack of conjunctivitis in both eyes.

He was flown to Darwin for treatment, and at one stage it was thought he would have to have his eyes removed.

In Darwin, Father Flynn, who used to be an eye specialist, arranged for him to go to Melbourne and then to Sydney, where he came under the care of the Dominican nuns of St Lucy's, Homebush.

After two years there, when he was six, David went to St Edmund's, and stayed there till 1962.

David was one of the first pupils at St Edmund's School for the Blind, Wahroonga, when it opened 12 years ago. The principal said that David had been an excellent, above-average pupil.

David has amassed some impressive "firsts".

He was the first Aborigine boy at St Edmund's. He is believed to be the first blind boy from a N.S.W. school to go to London for the physiotherapy course under the Royal Institute for the Blind. He is the first blind Aborigine to pass the Leaving Certificate in N.S.W.

Braille

David had mastered braille by the time he was 10 years old.

Braille is a system of writing, using abbreviations and contractions not unlike shorthand, by which blind people can read any text, book or even music. A machine like a typewriter punches indentations on a hard paper, and by passing his fingers over the raised punchmarks, a blind person can read.