

Remember Ted Field's article in the January issue? Here is a follow-up which I see as his contribution to:

The Other Side Of The Story

Walgett, to most people in N.S.W. who have read the press and heard the television and radio reports of the social, economic and political status of the indigenous people there, is a small country town in the north west of the state where racial prejudice, segregation and discrimination are an accepted part of the social structure. These reports have shown a large number of Aborigines living in sub-standard housing on the outskirts of society. They have focussed on the deficiencies of both races, emphasizing those of the white society. The worst that can be said of these reports is that they are incomplete.

Certainly Walgett is a town where racial prejudice and discrimination does exist and where a large number of Aborigines live in a depressed social and economic environment. Since the town is populated by people—fallible human beings—such deficiencies are inevitable.

What these reports do not show is Walgett as a progressive community. A community with a minimum of financial resources but secure in the knowledge that its prospects for the future are assured by virtue of the capabilities of its community leaders. Here is a brief outline of the achievements of this group:

Prior to February 1966, no Aboriginal family lived in the town area. We were not accepted into the community generally. Aboriginal labour was, and still is in isolated cases, exploited in the rural industries. However, on 14th February, 1966, the first Aboriginal family moved into better housing in town. Since then, there has been a steady move from reserve shack to town houses so that by February, 1971, there will be 63 Aboriginal families occupying houses in the town of Walgett. A further 10 homes are to be completed by the end of this financial year. Increasingly, areas of public discrimination are being removed, allowing Aborigines more freedom of movement and more participation in social activities.

I have lived in Walgett for the last 14 years and have noted that during the period from November to March, less than one third of the Aborigines were able to get jobs. This is the slack period in the rural industry. However, as at 31st December, 1970, there was no Aboriginal unemployed in Walgett. Full credit for this must be awarded to

the Walgett Shire Council which was able to obtain sufficient state and federal aid to employ these men.

In 1968 a local branch of the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs was inaugurated. Its Executive Committee comprised a good cross section of the community. This branch advanced to the stage where in April, 1970, two local Aborigines were employed in full-time welfare work. By February, 1971, work will have started on the building of an Aboriginal Community centre estimated to cost a total of \$85,000.

The progress made thus far is due to the combined efforts of both sections of the community. Whilst we do not pretend that ours is a utopian society and we admit that to some of us this progress has not been as accelerated as we would like, there is definitely a continuous, if gradual move in the right direction. To me, who is no less patient than most Aborigines, these things add up to progress. How many other towns of this state can boast of the same achievements in the past 5 years?



Pamela Murray and Robbie Rabbit.

Instructions for knitting Robbie Rabbit appear on opposite page.