

PERSONALITIES: FRED RANGE

Fred Range was the first Aboriginal to become an executive member of the Aboriginal Children's Advancement Society and in March of this year became its first Aboriginal president.

He says of ACAS: "The society helped me get where I am today and I want to express my appreciation by working for ACAS."

Fred has indeed come a long way. He was born in Brisbane in 1944. He lived on a settlement outside the city till he left school at the age of 14. He then went to Brisbane where he worked as an apprentice for 6 months. Returning to the country he took odd jobs on farms and elsewhere till he was 16.

Fred then came to Sydney under the sponsorship of the Australian Board of Missions to study at Tranby. He stayed there for 2 years before moving to private board arranged through the Aboriginal Children's Advancement Society. For the next 3 years Fred worked with the Registrar General's Department in Sydney.

At 21 Fred moved again, this time returning to Brisbane where he spent a year working in the State Education Department. This was followed by another move, to Melbourne where he spent a year. Finally at 23, Fred came again to Sydney where he took up work in the Child Welfare Department.

For the past 4 years Fred has divided his time between the Department and ACAS. He started the Kirinari Younger Set which raised funds for the parent organization.

Fred has two sisters who are both married and living in Brisbane where his mother also resides. He shares a flat in North Sydney. Fred says his aim is to work among Aboriginal people on a full-time basis.

He believes that Aboriginal people should be involved in organizations such as ACAS and the Foundation where they can be of most assistance to their own people. He is critical of Aboriginal groups who talk a lot but seem to do nothing concrete in the area of Aboriginal advancement. "By being involved in ACAS, the Foundation and other Aboriginal organizations, Aborigines can do most for the advancement of their people."

Fred believes more Aboriginal liaison officers are needed: "Aboriginal officers can do the job as well, if not better, because we know the problems. We have been through the same things ourselves.



Mr Fred Range, newly elected President of the Aboriginal Children's Advancement Society

Aboriginal people speak to fellow Aborigines confidentially whereas they would not do so with a white man. Aborigines tend to think whites are interfering in their affairs and are not really sincere."

At the same time Fred is critical of some of his own people: "Aboriginal people have to learn to mix with the white community. When they come to Sydney they are inclined to mix among themselves in Redfern."

"The girls feel they are being used by whites. The men tend to stay in their own circle of mates. The white attitude that they can't do a job properly has rubbed off on them—they believe it themselves. They haven't sufficient confidence in themselves and this is the only real thing holding them back. This is why it's important that we get to the boys when they're young and convince them that they can hold down a job."

Aborigines must change their work patterns, says Fred. "Aborigines in the country tend to rely on seasonal work. They don't realize the insecurity and jeopardy of this sort of work. That's why Aborigines today must get a good job and stick to it. The opportunities like educational grants are there. They were never there when I was at school."

Recently Fred was interviewed on a Sydney radio station as a guest on a regular show. He believes it is essential that Aborigines seize every opportunity to appear in the media because this is the best way of getting to white people and other Aborigines who would never bother attending a meeting, but do listen to the radio.

Fred Range is a strong believer in the value of co-operation between the Government and Aboriginal groups. For instance, the Government purchased the building for the Burwood girls hostel while ACAS administers it. "That sets a good precedent", says Fred, "and hopefully there will be further examples of this kind of co-operation. The Government needs us as much as we need them."