

FILE C.966

REPORT ON HOME VISIT 28TH APRIL + MARY WHITTAKER

I visited Mary's foster parents at [REDACTED] Glen Waverley at the above date (28.4.71.). Their home is set in a quiet neighbourhood and is tastefully furnished and neatly kept, it is a three bedroomed home. Mrs. Pratt was home and I interviewed her while waiting for Mary to come home from school. The following details were discussed.

Personal background of foster parents

Mrs. Wendy Sylvia Pratt born [REDACTED] 39. Mr. Grahme John Pratt born [REDACTED] 37. David Pratt 8 years old and Philip Pratt 5 years old. Mrs. Pratt was born in the U.K. while Mr. Pratt is a native of Melbourne. He is now assistant lecturer in Applied Science at Melbourne University, which is near by. Mrs. Pratt is occupied with domestic duties. The placement was arranged when the Pratt's met Mary at the Retta Dixon home where their friends the Hendersons were cottage parents. Mary has been there since the start of this year.

Relationships at home

Mrs. Pratt stated that she was fairly unsure of how to handle Mary in some respects. Mary appeared to be fairly withdrawn and shy and apparently did not show any affection or hostility either way, although when she is rebuked she often becomes sulky. Mrs. Pratt feels she has let Mary "get away with things" more than she has with her own children and feels that this leniency is due to her uncertainty of how to handle her. However she feels that Mary is gradually settling down into the family and quite accepts the fact that it may take a while before Mary feels completely at home. Mary appears to get on fairly well with the other two boys and Mrs. Pratt feels that their arguments are indications of their familiarity and friendship with one another.

The Pratts themselves feel that they have given support in their move to foster Mary by their relatives and neighbours and also by their Methodist Minister Mr. Ellmore, who apparently was a Missionary in the Territory for some time. Mary is involved in all the activities in which the Pratts are involved, including church youth groups, camping trips, sporting teams, etc. She is probably the only part-Aboriginal child in her school, but does not appear to have any trouble mixing with other children. At present she is attending Brentwood High School which is a relatively small school (270 pupils) and Mrs. Pratt feels that she receives more attention there. She is doing only reasonably well at school and while Mrs. Pratt feels that she is not lazy she thinks that Mary could not care less about her school work.

Mrs. Pratt is unaware of the details of Mary's background and is not quite sure why Mary was sent south for fostering, after being in the one cottage home at Retta Dixon since the age of 2. I was not able to enlighten her on this matter.

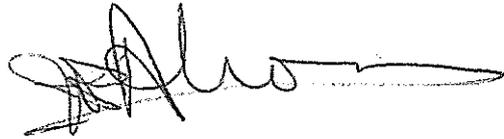
Contact with Mary

I interviewed Mary by herself at the Pratts home on the same afternoon. She is a slightly built girl of light complexion, not obviously of Aboriginal descent. Her manner was initially shy, but she was able to express feelings and doubts which concerned her. After discussing various aspects of her progress at school and social development, I asked Mary how she was getting on in her foster placement. She expressed strong ambivalent feelings about the placement and I feel that I was not able to get the true picture

of her own feelings. She said there was no obvious trouble even though she had felt homesick at first. She misses Darwin and her friends in Darwin, but expressed strong feelings of resentment to the Hendersons and a definite rejection of any suggestion of return to Retta Dixon Homes. This interview really only served as an introduction and it is hoped with further contact Mary's true feelings may be ascertained.

### Conclusion

This placement appears to be reasonably satisfactory for the present. Mary's expressions of hostility towards the Hendersons probably represents an attempt to hide feelings of rejection by them, especially after being separated from them after a life-time together. Lack of affective response towards the Pratts is a common phenomenon with foster children and this condition may diminish as time goes by. In the meantime it is causing some anxiety to the foster parents and obviously represents some feeling of uncertainty and withdrawal on Mary's part. Future interviews should be used to ascertain the progress of this placement.



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