
ABORIGINAL MEDICAL SERVICE

The July issue of *NEW DAWN* carried a report about the Aboriginal Legal Service now operating in Redfern. It was set up especially to help those Aborigines who felt unable to take advantage of the normal free public services and is staffed partly by Aborigines whose presence gives their people confidence that their problems will be understood.

The formation of the Aboriginal Legal Service provides a clear example of what can be done when Aborigines recognize a need in their midst and decide to seek a solution to this need. Now, out of the legal service idea has come the next logical development—an Aboriginal Medical Service. It was the idea of National Tribal Councillor Gordon Briscoe, who is the field officer of the Aboriginal Legal Service. Supported by FCAATSI's Dulcie Flowers and well-known Aboriginal identity Shirley Smith, he approached interested white people—doctors, medical students, social workers and others—about the health problems of Aborigines in both city and country areas. Professor Fred Hollows, who has done many eye operations amongst the Gurindji tribesmen, agreed to become the Service's Medical Director. He and the other organizers of the A.M.S. decided that a start towards tackling the problem of Aboriginal health could be made in the Redfern-Newtown area of Sydney. Eventually they hope to spread over the whole state.

The Aboriginal Medical Service opened its doors on 20th July, and one week later Professor Hollows was quoted as saying that he had "seen things I thought died out with the Depression". That comment is a partial answer to the question "Why a special medical service for Aborigines?" Because many have only a low income, Aborigines tend not to see a doctor until their illness is at an extreme stage, especially as very few of them belong to the normal medical and hospital benefit schemes. Also, a man with six children earning say \$59 a week, earns just a few dollars too much to get free health insurance under the Commonwealth's subsidized medical scheme. Yet he may be in serious trouble when faced by big medical bills. A free service is a partial answer to these problems.



Mrs Dulcie Flowers



Gordon Briscoe