

“GETTING PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES”

The appointment of Joan Bates at Wilcannia marks the sixth Aboriginal community health worker employed by the Health Department under its Aboriginal Health Programme.

The other workers are Eileen Lester in Sydney; Essie Coffey, Brewarrina; Maureen King, Dareton; Liz Doolan, Moree; and someone soon to be appointed at Narooma. They work in co-operation with the seven community health nurses spread throughout the State.

Joan Bates was chosen for the position by the Wilcannia community after the idea was proposed by Sister Betty Crisp, the local health nurse.

“Normally I wouldn’t apply for a job”, said Joan, “but just lately I’ve changed. At first I didn’t know how people would react and this worried me. I thought they would think I was trying to big-note myself, but in fact the people have taken to the idea very well.

“I thought that personally this wasn’t for me. My attitude, though, really changed once I started. I can only thank the people for voting me into this job. I have to do something in return.”

PEOPLE’S FEELINGS IMPORTANT

Joan was born in Wilcannia and has lived there all her life. Her four brothers and three sisters still live at Wilcannia. She is secretary of the local Advancement Association.

She is married and has two young boys, aged 4 and 3. Her husband, Billy, is to become the manager of Wilcannia’s first caravan park when preparations are completed.

Her role is to work with the people, find out their needs, and assist Sister Crisp. She believes the people take to her better and listen to her because she is one of them and because she was chosen by them.

Joan believes Wilcannia’s first need is for more houses, followed by “something permanent in the way of work for the men”.

Asked how important is her work, Joan replied: “It is very important if I can help the people. In this sort of job you have to be careful what you

Joan Bates, Community Health Worker at Wilcannia



The men working on the site of the new caravan park to be set up at Wilcannia. On the extreme left is Billy Bates who will manage the park when it is completed. The other men in the photo, from left to right, are Charlis Dutton, Len Kerwin, Jim Wyman, John Wilson, Neville Bright, and Wayne Kirby

