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Assimilation, Theory, Policy and Practice : The Native Welfare Council's Experiment in Preparing Aboriginal Families at Allawah Grove for Assimilation 1961-1968

Angela Lapham
Edith Cowan University

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**Assimilation, theory, policy and practice: the Native Welfare
Council's experiment in preparing Aboriginal families at
Allawah Grove for assimilation 1961 – 1968.**

By Angela Lapham

A dissertation submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts (Social Sciences) with Honours

Edith Cowan University
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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

In the late 1950s, a community of Aboriginal people had formed a camp at 'Allawah Grove' in South Guildford, Perth. The public and the Western Australian Government considered them a nuisance, and wished to remove them from the area. But in 1960, a voluntary organization known as the Native Welfare Council offered to provide the Allawah Grove residents with supervision, housing and training. Their aim was to equip residents with the knowledge and skills that would enable them to live successfully as nuclear families in mainstream society.

In the 1960s Aboriginal welfare policy was informed by social assimilation theory. Governments believed that providing Aboriginal people with the same opportunities that mainstream Australians enjoyed would allow them to achieve equality with the rest of the community. The Native Welfare Council's view was that for Aboriginal people to be able to take advantage of these opportunities, they required training. So, they translated the government's assimilation policy into practice at Allawah Grove providing residents with training in an encouraging, non-institutionalised environment.

Allawah Grove residents were given the option of attending adult education classes and had their own representative body – the Allawah Grove Progress Association. To prepare Aboriginal people for living as a nuclear family in mainstream society, male residents were taught skills for employment and female residents learnt homemaking and childcare skills. For various reasons, training for female residents was more 'successful' than training for male residents. This disrupted the functional nature of the nuclear family, and thereby reduced the residents' ability to live successfully in mainstream society.

The Council's aim had been to use Allawah Grove to prepare Aboriginal people for living in mainstream society. But the majority of Allawah Grove residents did not see their future in mainstream society, instead envisaging living permanently as an Aboriginal community at Allawah Grove.

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- (i) Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
- (ii) Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or*
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A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of the author.

Angela Lapham

12th November 2002

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Thanks also to the staff at the School of International, Cultural and Community Studies; to my interviewees: Donna Pickett, Helen Lawrence and anon., and to Sally Hertzfeld, Jill Abdullah and Jeremy Garlett for providing me with these contacts; to the staff at the State Library of Western Australia and the Department of Indigenous Affairs Library; and to my family and friends.

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Chapter One: Background to the research project

In 1901 the Commonwealth of Australia was established and became responsible for the welfare of Australian citizens. Aboriginal people were excluded from this category with their welfare being the concern of the State in which they lived. States imposed harsh restrictions on Aboriginal people and provided them with only minimal assistance. Following World War II, Australian Governments adopted a policy of social assimilation. An Aboriginal person would now be able to gain access to Commonwealth provided welfare through exemption from the Aboriginal legislation within his/her State. But to qualify for exemption, he/she had to prove that they had adopted the manner and habits of “civilised” or European life.

This idea that Aboriginal people could become Australian citizens via a social transformation became the dominant theory informing Aboriginal welfare policies in the 1950s and 1960s. Prior to this, the Western Australian government aimed to assimilate Aboriginal people via biological means. Aboriginal people were classified according to their degree of Aboriginal blood. “Full-bloods” were left to die out whilst “half-castes” were taken from their parents, raised in a “White” environment and encouraged to intermarry with the “White” community. Absorption of Aboriginal people into the mainstream population would, after a few generations, lead to the elimination of the Aboriginal race.

But this did not eventuate. Hitler’s attempt at biological genocide in World War II made Australians realise the full implications of these eugenicist policies, forcing the government to rethink its assimilation policies. Biological assimilation was premised on Aboriginal people being inferior to “Whites” in terms of intelligence and ability, whilst the new social assimilation policy recognised that Aboriginal people were equal to “Whites” in this regard - they merely lacked the same socio-economic environment. Providing Aboriginal people with the same opportunities that mainstream Australians enjoyed, would allow them to live like they did and thus to attain equality with them. Strategies included: dispersing Aboriginal families throughout the metropolitan area in nuclear family sized homes, educating Aboriginal children in mainstream schools, and keeping a close watch over families to ensure they complied with the set standards.

But there were assimilationists who believed that providing Aboriginal people with opportunities alone was insufficient to effect their assimilation. For Aboriginal people to be able to take advantage of these opportunities they needed education and training in the ways of “civilised” living. This conviction led an organization known as the Native Welfare Council to implement training programmes for around one hundred and forty Aboriginal people who were camped at Allawah Grove in South Guildford, Perth.

The Allawah Grove Training Settlement was chosen as the subject of this research because it exemplifies how social assimilationists worked with the theories and policies of the time in order to improve Aboriginal people’s chances of experiencing “equality” in mainstream society. The Native Welfare Council’s efforts at Allawah Grove represented an attempt to translate assimilation theory and policy into practice in a co-operative venture between a private organization and the government. A great deal has been written about both assimilation theory and government policy, but there has been little documented on practical attempts to implement these.

Research into assimilation theory and policy has tended to focus on biological assimilation and on separating Aboriginal children from their families. Allawah Grove was premised on social assimilation and on keeping the family intact. In contemporary society, biological assimilation is widely condemned. Belief in the merits of social assimilation, however, continues to present itself in arguments against the current multicultural policy (which gives all individuals in society the freedom to practice their culture within defined limits), and arguments which challenge Aboriginal people’s right to land and to culturally appropriate services.

On the surface assimilation might appear to be in the best interests of both Aboriginal people and mainstream society, if research is limited to looking at documents produced by assimilationists. But it is the outcome of the application of assimilation theory that ultimately determines its validity. Therefore, it is important that we look at the implementation of these theories, which brings out their inherent contradictions and the impact they had on Aboriginal people as well as Aboriginal people’s responses to programmes designed to achieve their assimilation.

This research focuses on the female residents of Allawah Grove. Research on assimilation theory and policy cannot avoid discussions of gender because assimilation policy aimed to turn Aboriginal people into members of, what was in the 1950s and sixties, a highly gender-prescriptive mainstream society. The Native Welfare Council devised different programmes for each gender at Allawah Grove. Men were taught outdoor home maintenance, and skills that would help them to obtain semi-skilled paid employment, and the women were skilled in housekeeping, childcare, social etiquette and creative pursuits. Both genders had the opportunity to develop literacy and numeracy, public speaking and negotiation skills, and to participate in a progress association, which acted as a forum for discussing community issues. As women were expected to be competent in a wider range of tasks, training for Allawah Grove female residents was far more comprehensive than training for male residents. Female residents also had the added benefit of having a greater number of people present to assist them. Records kept of women's activities were more detailed and consistent than those kept of the men's activities.

Allawah Grove has already been the subject of four theses. All except S. Delmege's 'The fringe-dweller's struggle: cultural politics and the force of history', which was completed in 2000, were written during the Native Welfare Council's administration of Allawah Grove. R.J. Hansen's 1967 'Aboriginal education: a study of the academic achievements of the Allawah Grove Aboriginal children at primary school' focused on the educational outcomes of Allawah Grove children at the Guildford State Primary School. V. Strahan's 1963 'Allawah Grove' provided a very brief historical outline of Allawah Grove as a training centre for Aboriginal people. Also in 1963, University of Western Australia student, R. Oxeer looked at Allawah Grove from the assimilationist perspective of her time.

Delmege's thesis discussed the lives of Nyungah fringe-dwellers, focusing, in particular, on Robert Bropho. Allawah Grove formed a chapter of Delmege's thesis because Bropho spent a portion of his life there. Delmege based most of her information in this chapter on Bropho's autobiography 'Fringe-dweller', supplemented by State Records files and interviews with former Allawah Grove staff, which are available in the Battye Library. Delmege's objective was not to look at Allawah Grove as a practical attempt to implement assimilation theory, or to take a close look at the training

programmes provided at Allawah Grove, because the emphasis of her thesis was not on Allawah Grove, but on Bropho's life.

The bulk of information about Allawah Grove is located at the Battye Library of Western Australian History. The Library's Private Archives Collection houses records kept by Cyril and Elsie Gare detailing their work at Allawah Grove. The Battye's Serial Stack has copies of the two publications produced at Allawah Grove - The Council's newsletter *Allawah News* which was sent to Allawah Grove's public donors, and the Allawah Grove residents' newsletter, *Bebilwongai*. None of the previous theses about Allawah Grove made reference to these files or publications. The Battye's Oral History Collection includes interviews with former Allawah Grove staff, and both the Commissioners of Native Welfare in charge of the Western Australian Aboriginal population's welfare during the Native Welfare Council's administration of Allawah Grove. Correspondence between the Government and the Native Welfare Council regarding Allawah Grove is available in the State Records Office of Western Australia.

To allow me to place Allawah Grove within the context of government policy and prevailing theories of assimilation, I sought material outlining both. The Reid Library at the University of Western Australia has several publications from the era written by assimilation theorists such as A.P. Elkin and Paul Hasluck. Department of Native Welfare public relations documents, annual reports and assimilation policy manuals could be found in the Battye Library. The Battye also has an extensive collection of Western Australian newspapers: The *West Australian*, *Daily News* and the *Sunday Times* published many articles about the Government's implementation of assimilation policy and included regular features on the Allawah Grove assimilation experiment. I supplemented the available source material with my own interviews. My interviewees, three former Allawah Grove residents, all female, included one who spent her childhood at Allawah Grove, one her adolescence and another who lived there during her early married life.

My research aims to show how valuable the Native Welfare Council's attempt to translate the government's social assimilation policy into training programmes for Allawah Grove residents, was as an experiment for assessing the validity of assimilation theory and policy implementation. I aim to expose the similarities and differences

between the Native Welfare Council's approach to Aboriginal welfare, the Government's social assimilation policy, and the views held by mainstream Australians toward Aboriginal people. The responses of Aboriginal residents to the training programme provided at Allawah Grove is also crucial to this analysis, especially when this is compared to their experiences in mainstream society. Finally, I consider female and male residents' responses to the training programmes at Allawah Grove, and whether each gender's response was the result of different expectations that society placed on each gender and/or the different training programmes and levels of attention that each received at Allawah Grove.

Chapter Two: The development of assimilation policies: federally and in Western Australia in the 1950s and 1960s.

As each Australian colony was established, it instituted its own regime to govern Aboriginal people. When Australia became a Federation, in 1901, the Constitution was designed to allow these colonies - now referred to as States - to retain many of their powers and responsibilities, including the administration of their Aboriginal populations.¹ The Federal Government was charged with the responsibility of providing Australia's citizens with welfare benefits. Unlike other Western Australians, Aboriginal people were not accorded citizenship at birth. So, after federation when the new national government began to make welfare benefits available to Australian citizens, Aboriginal people were excluded, forced instead to rely on less generous State Governments to provide them with unemployment relief, education and health care. In the 1950s and 1960s, Commonwealth assistance became available to Aboriginal people who had shown themselves capable of living a "civilised" life. The nature of this change in policy is crucial to understanding the subject of my study – the Native Welfare Council's experiment in preparing Aboriginal families at Allawah Grove for assimilation, 1961 – 1968. It helps to explain the reasons for Allawah Grove's establishment as a training centre; the motives of its voluntary staff; its purported function to prepare Aboriginal people for life in the community; and the difficulties that the Council encountered in attempting to achieve their assimilationist goals.

The Commonwealth Government introduced welfare benefits in 1908 with the *Invalid and Old Age Pensions Act* followed by the *1912 Maternity Benefits Scheme*. In the 1940s another batch of welfare laws were passed: the *Commonwealth Child Endowment Act 1941* provided mothers with a subsidy to assist in child expenses; in 1942 the *Widows' Pension* was introduced, and in 1944 the *Unemployment and Sickness Benefit* for males of an employable age.² Aboriginal people of more than "half Aboriginal descent" were initially excluded from all of these Commonwealth benefits. Only those people of less than "one quarter Aboriginal blood" were eligible for Commonwealth

¹ J. Chesterman & B. Galligan, *Citizens without rights: Aborigines and Australian citizenship*. (Melbourne: Brown Prior Anderson, 1997), p. 6.

² N. Peterson & W. Sanders, *Citizenship and Indigenous Australians: changing conceptions and possibilities*. (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 285.

Invalid and Old Age Pensions, and Maternity Allowances, when, in 1942, they became available to Aboriginal people.³

In Western Australia, Aboriginal people's welfare was controlled by the Department of Native Affairs, administered under the *1936 Native Administration Act*, which built on the oppressive *Aborigines Act of 1905* (an act that established a harsh system of controls over Western Australian Aboriginal people in order to "protect" them). The Act's main objective was to encourage the biological assimilation of Aboriginal people into the mainstream community. Aboriginal people deemed to have more than "one quarter" (replacing the previous "one half") "Aboriginal blood" were brought under the State Government's control. Children could be removed from their families to institutions, and adults forced out of towns on to missions and reserves. Permission was required for marriage between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.⁴

Aboriginal people's eligibility for Commonwealth benefits and lived experience of State imposed restrictions began to change following World War II. Hitler's attempt at biological genocide⁵ made Australians realise the full implications of eugenicists' policies and pushed the international community, through the newly established United Nations, to pressure member states, including Australia.⁶ War-time conditions created employment opportunities for Aboriginal people in cities and towns as men went away to fight, encouraging many Aboriginal families to migrate to urban areas.⁷ Those Aboriginal people who joined the armed forces also experienced equal pay and conditions for the first time in their lives and were not satisfied to revert to the discriminatory and unequal employment and living conditions of civilian life.

After the war, returning soldiers resumed their positions of employment. Refusal to surrender the freedom they had gained during the war led Aboriginal people to set up

³ C. Rowley, *Outcasts in White Australia: Aboriginal policy and practice – volume II* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1971), p. 39.

⁴ Haebich, A. *For their own good* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1988), p. 78.

⁵ S. Delmege, 'The fringe-dweller's struggle: cultural politics and the force of history' (PhD thesis, Murdoch University, 2000), p. 79.

⁶ A. Haebich, *Broken Circles: fragmenting indigenous families 1800 – 2000* (Perth: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000), p. 424.

⁷ M. Howard, *Aboriginal politics in South-western Australia* (Perth: University of Western Australia Press, 1981), p. 19.

camp on the fringes of Australian society.⁸ Within an assimilationist framework, this act was interpreted to be a “transitional phase” from the Aboriginal way of life to the “civilised” European one – attracted to, but not yet competent to fully participate in, Australian society. They became known as “fringe-dwellers”. Policy-makers believed “fringe-dwellers” required welfare assistance that would encourage their further assimilation into mainstream society.

Assimilation theory did not recognise Aboriginal culture as equal to European culture. Equality was only recognised upon *adoption* of European culture. It was not simply a matter of making Commonwealth welfare benefits open to all. Instead, legislation was amended to permit Aboriginal people to *become eligible* for benefits.⁹

The grounds on which an Aboriginal person could be exempted from Western Australian Aboriginal legislation were set out in the *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944*. An applicant had to make a statutory declaration that for two years prior he (included females) had dissolved all tribal and native associations (except for relations of the first degree) and that he was of “good character and industrious habit”. A magistrate had to be satisfied that the applicant had adopted the manner and habits of civilised life, that he was able to speak and understand English, was not suffering from a contagious disease, was industrious, well behaved and responsible, and that the full rights of citizenship were likely to be conducive to his welfare.¹⁰ Restricting Commonwealth welfare benefits to those of “mixed-blood”, who had assimilated, or who were on their way to assimilation was justified on the grounds that social security would hold no meaning or benefit for those living in their traditional tribal way.¹¹

Assimilation policy essentially forced Aboriginal people to leave their extended family, friends, settlements, and missions for a nuclear family home; to keep a consistently ordered home; and to tolerate continual supervision by outside authorities. This had significant implications for the citizenship rights of Aboriginal people.

⁸ J. Collmann, *Fringe-dwellers and welfare* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1988), introduction.

⁹ C. Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 39.

¹⁰ J. Chesterman & B. Galligan, p. 132.

¹¹ A.P. Elkin, *Aborigines and Citizenship* (Sydney: Association for the Protection of Native Races, 1958), p. 18.

The Certificate of Exemption system deprived Aboriginal people of these rights by forcing them to act according to another's set of standards and not their own.¹²

European culture was considered superior, Aboriginal culture inferior. If Aboriginal people wanted to be treated on an equal basis with other Australians, then it was their responsibility to adopt the "superior" culture.

Unlike other Australians, Aboriginal people's citizenship was conditional. Placed under constant surveillance to ensure they maintained a "civilised" lifestyle,¹³ they lived in constant fear that their "citizenship" would be revoked. Coupled with a lack of financial independence (dependency on welfare), individuals faced a great deal of uncertainty. This hindered their ability to make long-term plans.

In 1942 the *Commonwealth Child Endowment Act, 1941* was amended, allowing Child Endowment to be paid to third parties on behalf of Aboriginal parents (including those of full-blood).¹⁴ Only those people who were nonadic, or who had a child/children in State care were excluded. This Commonwealth benefit was controlled and administered by the States. Not surprisingly, government settlements profited as a result.¹⁵

Amendments to legislation regulating eligibility for social security benefits were confirmed in the *Commonwealth Social Services (Benefits) Consolidation Act, 1947*. An "Aboriginal native of Australia" was entitled to receive any of a range of government benefits (Old Age and Invalid Pensions, Widows' Pensions, and Maternity Allowance) if he/she was exempt from the provisions of the Aboriginal protective legislation in force in his/her State or Territory. Unemployment and Sickness Benefits were only payable to Aboriginal people who the Director General deemed had attained an acceptable degree of "social development".¹⁶ In this way, the Commonwealth Government (the body accountable to international standards of human rights) could be seen to be upholding human rights, in particular, equality and freedom from

¹² A. Davidson, *From subject to citizen: Australian citizenship in the twentieth century* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 196.

¹³ J. Chesterman & B. Galligan, p. 133.

¹⁴ J. Eveline, 'Feminism, racism and citizenship in twentieth century Australia', P. Crawford & P. Maddern, *Women as Australian citizens: underlying histories* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001), pp. 141-177, p. 158.

¹⁵ R. Kidd, *The way we civilise* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1997), p. 167.

¹⁶ J. Chesterman & B. Galligan, pp. 162-163.

discrimination, when all it was doing was exploiting the division between Commonwealth and State responsibilities.

In 1948, Stan Middleton became the Western Australian Commissioner of Native Affairs (the official in charge of the welfare of Aboriginal people in Western Australia).¹⁷ Middleton had twenty years experience of colonial administration in Papua New Guinea. In Papua New Guinea, people of “mixed descent” were not legally classified as “natives”. They were generally educated at their white father’s expense and assimilated as equals into the white community.¹⁸ This influenced Middleton’s approach to native welfare in Western Australia, which was to focus on the Aboriginal family and on programmes of “education for living in the ‘White’ Australian community”.¹⁹ In 1951, he stated that the Department now officially opposed the removal of Aboriginal children, on the grounds that: “...enforced separation of children from parents does little more than arouse the bitterness of adults and children alike”.²⁰

Middleton wrote in his 1953 Annual Report: “that it is degrading and wrong in principle to make racial categorisations for a purely welfare purpose, especially when the legislation concerned goes so far as to impose sanctions and special restrictions on the people concerned merely because of their racial origin”. He went on to add:

Aborigines and their descendants could and should receive assistance from the Commonwealth and State without being categorised for the purpose in a way that deprives them of civic rights and personal liberty, and without legislative divisions of caste which must result in social discrimination, legal confusion and inevitable failure...He knows that many people whose skin colour is different from his own need the financial and physical assistance of the State for welfare and rehabilitation purposes and receive it without interference by the State legislature with their civic rights.²¹

¹⁷ M. Howard, p. 20.

¹⁸ Western Australia Department of Native Welfare, *Annual report of the Commissioner of Native Welfare, 1953*, (Perth: Audit Department, 1953).

¹⁹ A. Haebich, *Broken Circles*, p. 445.

²⁰ A. Haebich, *Broken Circles*, p. 517.

²¹ Western Australia Department of Native Welfare, *Annual report of the Commissioner of Native Welfare, 1953*, (Perth: Audit Department, 1953).

Middleton was convinced that social assimilation would achieve equality for Aboriginal people. In his 1958 Report, he argued that citizenship rights were everybody's birthright, and that legislation should not be passed that specifically denied people these rights.²²

Middleton set about easing the requirements for "citizenship", beginning by amending the *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944* in 1951. The children of "citizens", who were previously regarded as "natives", would have their names inserted upon their parents' Certificate of Exemption. Exemptions were now to be granted by a board, consisting of a magistrate and a ministerially appointed "district representative". Still, Middleton acknowledged the limited nature of these concessions in his accompanying comments: "aboriginal people still resented this method of giving them the right to exercise the responsibilities of citizenship".²³ In 1958 the Act was again amended, removing the requirement that an applicant for two years prior to the date of application had to have dissolved all tribal and native associations and had adopted the manner and habits of civilised life.²⁴

Middleton's commitment to the welfare and advancement of Australia's indigenous population was mirrored at the second Canberra Conference of Aboriginal State Administrators in 1951 with all governments adopting assimilation as official policy.²⁵ The Federal Minister for Territories (1951-63), Paul Hasluck, advocated an end to the racial classification of Aboriginal people. All efforts were now to be directed towards the attainment of equal outcomes, with special arrangements made only for those in need of assistance. Hasluck warned that if such measures were not taken, the Aboriginal individual might retreat into his community, making assimilation even more difficult.²⁶ With both States and Commonwealth now acting within the same theoretical paradigm,

²² Western Australia Department of Native Welfare, *Annual report of the Commissioner of Native Welfare, 1958*, (Perth: Audit Department, 1958).

²³ Western Australia Department of Native Welfare, *Annual report of the Commissioner of Native Welfare, 1952*, (Perth: Audit Department, 1952).

²⁴ Western Australia Department of Native Welfare, *Annual report of the Commissioner of Native Welfare, 1959*, (Perth: Audit Department, 1959).

²⁵ Western Australia Department of Native Welfare, *Annual report of the Commissioner of Native Welfare, 1952*, (Perth: Audit Department, 1952).

²⁶ P. Hasluck, *Shades of darkness: Aboriginal affairs 1925- 1965* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), p. 132.

policies came to be more consistent. Gradually States began to repeal their restrictive and discriminatory Aboriginal welfare policies.

Perhaps, this greater commitment to Aboriginal welfare indicated, for the first time, the recognition that the poverty, derelict living conditions, poor education and employment outcomes experienced by Aboriginal people were a result of the State's "Protectionist" policy, which denied Aboriginal people's citizenship rights in order to "protect" them. The solution therefore lay in providing Aboriginal people with the same opportunities that the mainstream population enjoyed. It would then be the responsibility of Aboriginal people to take advantage of these opportunities. Hence, if they failed to do so, it was by their own decision. Simplistic thinking and ethnocentric attitudes ignored the previous damage to self-confidence, lack of resources, and the possibility that Aboriginal people might not want to replace their culture with another's. Aboriginal people who failed to live up to expectations were branded as useless and lazy. It was these traits that were believed to be responsible for preventing them from achieving equality with the wider community.

Many aspects of the "Protectionist" policies were removed in Western Australia in 1954 when the *Native Welfare Act* replaced the *Native Administration Act*. The old Act's "protectionist" emphasis, rations and controls were replaced by measures designed to assist in the economic and social assimilation of Aboriginal people. The Department of Native Affairs became the Department of Native Welfare, and the Commissioner of Native Affairs - the Commissioner of Native Welfare. No longer would the Commissioner be able to remove Aboriginal camps or Aboriginal people from towns to reserves, compel medical treatment, declare areas that Aboriginal people could not enter, or regulate Aboriginal marriages. Aboriginal workers' wages and employment conditions ceased to be controlled by the Department. Special courts were abolished²⁷ and provision was made for those who served in the armed forces to automatically gain full citizenship.²⁸ But some controls were retained including the Commissioner's power to determine who should have custody of "native" children.²⁹

²⁷ J. Chesterman & B. Galligan, p. 167.

²⁸ A. Haebich, *Broken Circles*, p. 483.

²⁹ J. Chesterman & B. Galligan, p. 167.

Accompanying these changes was a trend towards mainstreaming welfare for Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people were encouraged to use mainstream welfare agencies before they resorted to the Department of Native Welfare for assistance. The Public Health Department, Education Department and State Housing Commission all accepted responsibility for Aboriginal people's health and welfare.³⁰

The *Child Welfare Act, 1947 (W.A.)* set up provisions for the removal of Aboriginal children through the Children's Court and the Department of Child Welfare. At the same time laws that enabled the government to take Aboriginal children away from their families because they were Aboriginal (previously this constituted sufficient grounds) were amended. Now removals were only to occur if children were deemed neglected. Children continued to be removed from their families in large numbers, but the basis on which it was done conformed to assimilationist rhetoric that equality of treatment should underpin Australian social policy. Aboriginal parents were subject to greater expectations than non-Aboriginal parents, forced to assimilate to an ideal that most mainstream families never attained. Meanwhile, the Department of Native Welfare continued to use its powers of legal guardianship to remove children.³¹ Mainstreaming therefore effectively doubled the number of agencies working to "protect" Aboriginal children's welfare.³²

In 1958, Frank Gare, who later became the Western Australian Commissioner of Native Welfare, headed a Special Committee on Native Matters. Like Middleton and other bureaucrats in Aboriginal Affairs, he saw the so-called "native problem" as being essentially one of a depressed section of the community rather than a question of "race". The answer lay then in legally making Aboriginal people citizens and in improving their social conditions. Gare concluded that: "Integration will have been achieved only when natives live in and maintain homes of the same type as other members of the community".³³

³⁰ Western Australia Department of Native Welfare, *Annual report of the Commissioner of Native Welfare, 1965*, (Perth: Audit Department, 1965).

³¹ A. Haebich, *Broken Circles*, p. 539.

³² A. Haebich, *Broken Circles*, p. 517.

³³ H.P. Schapper, *Aboriginal advancement to integration* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970), p. 28.

But as Aboriginal people were not in a position to purchase a home or to take on a lease independently, the Department of Native Welfare began, in the early 1950s, to provide Aboriginal families with houses. Most of these families (75%) failed to pay the rent and/or adequately maintain their home. This led the Department to develop a transitional housing scheme.³⁴ Selected families began in, what was termed, a primary transitional home, which was a self-contained house on a reserve.³⁵ Payment of rent (which was within their economic means), and successful maintenance of the home qualified the family for a conventional home in a suburb.³⁶ Transitional homes had the added benefit for the Department of being cheaper, allowing more to be built.

Under the transitional housing scheme, Department field officers assumed responsibility for allocating and supervising tenancies, effecting evictions, collecting rent, advising and assisting in the acquisition of furniture, and maintaining a general welfare contact with the families involved.³⁷

Conventional education became increasingly accessible to Aboriginal people. In Middleton's thirteen years of office, more Aboriginal children went to high school and into trade and nursing careers than in the fifty years prior.³⁸ Primary school education was made available to all, and in 1959, the Minister for Native Welfare subsidised the levy parents were required to pay to send their children to kindergarten.³⁹ Secondary education was subsidised for Aboriginal children who had proved their ability and interest. Adults were given opportunities to learn technical, recreational, work and literacy skills, and were trained in community attitudes, family care, independence and responsibility.⁴⁰

In 1959 the *Commonwealth Social Services (consolidation) Act* was amended. Announcing the changes, the Minister for Social Services said:

³⁴ B.A. McLarty, *Native welfare* (Perth: Department of Native Welfare, 1966).

³⁵ A. Haebich, *Broken Circles*, p. 539.

³⁶ Western Australia Department of Native Welfare, *Annual report of the Commissioner of Native Welfare, 1964*, (Perth: Audit Department, 1964).

³⁷ B.A. McLarty, *Native welfare* (Perth: Department of Native Welfare, 1966).

³⁸ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 4 (Dec 1961 – Jan 1962).

³⁹ R.J. Hansen, p. 14.

⁴⁰ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 5 (Feb - April 1962). The subsidy ceased in early 1962.

E Lewis, Minister for Native Welfare to CML Taylor, Hon Secretary, Allawah Grove Kindergarten Committee, 16 August 1963. The subsidy was resumed in mid 1963.

An additional 1 000 000 pounds will be paid towards the welfare of Australia's Aborigines as evidence of the Commonwealth Government's intention to give them equality with other Australians in the field of social services. Unless they are nomadic or primitive, aborigines will in future qualify for Age, Invalid and Widow's Pensions, and Maternity Allowances, on the same basis as other members of the community.⁴¹

Aboriginal people residing on settlements and missions would now be entitled to Commonwealth benefits (these provisions had earlier applied only to Child Endowment), although these were received not by them but by their institution. The institution would use the benefit to pay for the resident's food and lodgings with a percentage being placed into their trust account. Individuals could then draw upon this trust account "under supervision".⁴² This method of payment maintained control in two ways. Mission/government staff could control how a resident's benefits were spent, and Aboriginal people were prevented from leaving these institutions, which had previously been a pre-requisite for qualifying for a Certificate of Exemption, and gaining access to Commonwealth benefits. As assimilation theorist Elkin warned in his '1944 National Policy for Aborigines': "every care should be taken lest 'social benefit' allowances be an inducement for them to leave from reasonably good conditions of a mission to makeshift and undesirable conditions off the settlement. It would be wise not to make residence on a settlement a disqualification for pensions".⁴³

In 1961, State and Federal governments set out a clear statement on assimilation at the National Native Welfare Conference:

The policy of Assimilation means that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected eventually to attain the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights

⁴¹ Department of Native Welfare, *Functions and activities* (Perth: Government Printer, 1965).

⁴² J.C. Altman & W. Sanders, 'From exclusion to dependence: Aborigines and the welfare state in Australia', J. Dixon & P. Scheurell, *Social welfare with Indigenous peoples* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 206 – 229, p. 20.

⁴³ A.P. Elkin, *Citizenship for the Aborigines: a national Aboriginal policy* (Sydney: Australasian Publishing Co, 1944), p. 89.

and privileges, accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, as other Australians.⁴⁴

Two years later the Western Australian Government repealed most of the remaining restrictions with the passage of the *Native Welfare Act, 1963 (W.A.)*. The Commissioner no longer had the power to act as legal guardian of Aboriginal children, and children would now be educated in State Schools.⁴⁵ Despite this emphasis on equal treatment, the Act retained the racial definition of “native”.

This suggests that the government was not ready to commit itself to a fully assimilationist ethos by relinquishing control over Aboriginal people. While the rules governing “citizenship” had progressively eased, the definition of who constituted a “native” escaped revision. Overlapping Commonwealth and State responsibilities trapped Aboriginal people into assimilation. In order to qualify for social security benefits they had to assimilate so they could be recognised by the Commonwealth Government as Australian citizens. The Commonwealth Government could afford to enforce these strict regulations in the knowledge that Aboriginal people already qualified for State Government assistance. The State Government was also working to effect the assimilation of Aboriginal people, and in having an interest in reducing pressure on their budget, imposed harsh regulations on Aboriginal people.

In 1965, governments replaced the term assimilation with integration. Integration represented a different approach to achieving assimilation:⁴⁶ “The policy of integration seeks that all persons of Aboriginal descent will choose to attain a similar manner and standard of living to that of other Australians and live as members of a single Australian community”.⁴⁷ The *will* preceding *choose* would seem a contradiction. This is what integration policy precisely amounted to: an individual had a choice, but only providing he/she “chose” the objective defined.⁴⁸ Theoretically, individuals were free to retain

⁴⁴ C. Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 399.

⁴⁵ A. Haebich, *Broken Circles*, pp. 512 – 13.

⁴⁶ B.A. McLarty, *Native welfare* (Perth: Department of Native Welfare, 1966).

⁴⁷ *Western Australian Department of Native Welfare Newsletter*, 1, No. 1, (Perth: Department of Native Welfare, 1967).

⁴⁸ C. Rowley, *Outcasts*, p. 408.

their culture.⁴⁹ In reality, to advocate this in conjunction with assimilation was essentially contradictory and doomed the policy to failure.

Only in 1966 did the Commonwealth Government remove the last exclusionary provision from social security legislation. This was the same year that Australia signed the 'International Convention on Civil and Political Rights'. Ratification depended on the elimination of racial discrimination in Federal and State legislation.⁵⁰ A year later, a national referendum enabled the Commonwealth to legislate for Aboriginal people. States continued to dismantle their discriminatory regimes, albeit gradually. In Western Australia, it wasn't until 1972 that the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act* removed the last of the discriminatory clauses, repealing the *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944*; and the Department of Native Welfare ceased to control Aboriginal related welfare services.⁵¹

In the 1950s and 1960s governments adopted social assimilation as the official Aboriginal welfare policy. Aboriginal people were given the opportunity to become citizens, which, in turn, enabled them to access Commonwealth welfare benefits. They also gained access to mainstream welfare services such as State Government provided education and healthcare.

These changes in policy set up the conditions for the establishment of the topic under study, the Allawah Grove Training Settlement, and influenced the nature of the training programmes implemented and the environment created. The decision to provide Allawah Grove residents with citizenship training was essentially a response to the *Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944*, which in making Aboriginal people's citizenship conditional on their adoption of a "civilised" lifestyle made achieving equality for Aboriginal people synonymous with assimilation.

Many Allawah Grove families already qualified for Commonwealth welfare benefits. This allowed them to live independently of the administration, preventing the settlement from developing the typically institutionalised nature of missions and reserves.

⁴⁹ *Western Australian Department of Native Welfare Newsletter*, 1, no. 1, (Perth: Department of Native Welfare, 1967).

⁵⁰ R. Kidd, p. 265.

⁵¹ J. Chesterman & B. Galligan, p. 188.

Residents were free to leave the settlement and were not forced to participate in any of the activities.

The Allawah Grove Training Settlement was established soon after the Department implemented a transitional housing programme and was obviously heavily influenced by this. Training at Allawah Grove aimed to prepare the residents for living in mainstream society. Replacement of Aboriginal welfare services with mainstream services necessitated Aboriginal people learning how to deal with these new services. Hence, training for female residents, for instance, involved teaching them Western childrearing practices; equipping them with the skills needed to take an active interest in their children's education; and getting them into the routine of keeping a tidy home and ensuring their children were suitably presented each day.

Chapter Three: The establishment of the Allawah Grove Training Settlement.

As discussed in the previous chapter, by the 1950s and 1960s, Aboriginal people were expected to discard their “inferior” culture and embrace the “superior” European culture as a means to becoming equal citizens. The majority of Aboriginal people living in Western Australia at this time were not *in* a position to “assimilate”; nor did they necessarily desire to. The Department of Native Welfare was charged with assisting Aboriginal people to make the transition from “fringe-dweller” to “citizen”. However, the Department was overburdened, under resourced, and lacked empathy with the people they were attempting to assist. Private organizations and individuals committed to the goal of advancing the welfare of Aboriginal people sometimes took up the challenge of implementing policies when the government failed to act. Allawah Grove is an example of private individuals acting in this way.

Aboriginal people had a long association with this area of South Guildford. Their presence was tolerated but not actively supported by the Department of Native Welfare. In 1957 the Department planned to move them away, but a private organization known as the Coolbaroo League intervened. The League’s supervision of Allawah Grove residents was short-lived. Still, they established the necessary conditions for a larger organization - the Native Welfare Council - to embark on what was possibly the most comprehensive attempt to implement assimilation theory/policy in Western Australia in the period.

In 1910, in response to complaints about Aboriginal camps in West Guildford, land that was originally part of Guildford Common was made into the South Guildford Reserve,¹ which later became known as Allawah Grove. Although a reserve was never established,² Aboriginal people began camping there. During World War II the land was taken over by the military and a large number of huts were built to accommodate the servicemen. The Aboriginal inhabitants were forced to leave Allawah Grove to camp in barely habitable conditions in the Bassendean area, without access to water or sewerage.³

¹ S. Delmege, footnote at end of chapter.

² V. Strahan, ‘Allawah Grove’ (History thesis, Graylands Teachers’ College, Perth, 1963), p. 1.

³ J. Carter, p. 249.

When the War ended, the military no longer needed Allawah Grove.⁴ Concurrently, developers began forcing Aboriginal families out of Bassendean to make way for the establishment of a housing estate.⁵ Families forced to leave Bassendean returned to Allawah Grove. It was at this time that the Department of Civil Aviation acquired an interest in Allawah Grove because of its proximity to Perth Airport.⁶ Not requiring use of the land immediately, the Department of Civil Aviation leased Allawah Grove to the State Housing Commission to allow them to cater for the post-war housing shortage among the non-Aboriginal population.⁷ Most of the Aboriginal families were forced to leave.

In 1957, in an attempt to alleviate the Aboriginal housing shortage, the Department of Native Welfare (whose responsibilities included housing the Western Australian Aboriginal population) acquired land in Beechboro where it planned to establish a reserve. But the land lay within the electorate of the Minister for Native Welfare, who responded to local citizens' protests by stopping the development of a reserve.⁸

In the meantime, Allawah Grove had quickly become a slum area. By late 1957, the last of the non-Aboriginal residents had left the settlement. Aboriginal families that were forced to leave returned⁹ and began living in the huts. The Department of Civil Aviation offered to lease Allawah Grove to the Department of Native Welfare but the Department, responding to the earlier protests, was not interested. Demolition of the huts looked imminent. An organization known as the Coolbaroo League (An Aboriginal social group that became an effective political organisation, speaking out on issues of the day affecting Aboriginal people) became concerned for the families living there. The League made the following proposal to the Department: if they supervised residents at Allawah Grove, would the Department reconsider its decision. The Department agreed to accept the lease on these conditions, and officially transferred management and control of Allawah Grove to the Coolbaroo League on the 1st July 1958.

⁴ *Bebilwongai* 8 (Sept 1962).

⁵ J. Carter, p. 248.

⁶ *Bebilwongai* 8 (Sept 1962).

⁷ *Daily News*, 28 November 1957.

⁸ *Bebilwongai* 8, (Sept 1962).

⁹ R.J. Hansen, p. 10.

Volunteers began to work together to create an environment conducive to social learning. Many of the residents took an active interest in the activities provided, but there were some who refused to participate in the supervised society. These few failed to uphold their rental commitments and indulged in disruptive activities such as drinking and gambling. The Coolbaroo League was ill equipped to handle discipline problems. Consequently, the Department of Native Welfare was forced to take on more and more of the responsibility. This culminated in their assuming full administrative control on 1st July 1959.¹⁰

After the failure of the Coolbaroo League, the Department was determined not to have the public view *them* as being unable to deal with the so-called “native problem”. The Department announced that it could not bear the financial burden of assisting individuals to make the transition to “civilised” life. It was only to provide them with rations and housing. A set form of tenancy was enforced and it was intended that only families with the highest standard of living would remain at Allawah Grove; the rest would be shifted to a reserve. But, once again, public opinion prevented the establishment of a metropolitan reserve,¹¹ and the Department was obliged to cater for everyone living at Allawah Grove.

During these first few months, the Department served eviction notices on eleven of the fifteen Allawah Grove families who were in arrears with their rent.¹² According to the Department there was an attitude of exploitation among the majority of residents who lived either entirely off social service benefits, or Department rations.¹³ The Department was determined it would not continue to spend money on Allawah Grove without an improvement in the residents’ attitude.¹⁴ They set about gradually closing the settlement.¹⁵ In contrast to the Department’s poor view of the residents, Elsie Gare, a volunteer at Allawah Grove, refused to believe that the residents were a lost cause. She

¹⁰ R.J. Hansen, p. 10.

¹¹ R. Oxe, ‘Allawah Grove – An experiment in assimilation’, (Honours thesis, University of Western Australia, Perth, 1963), p. 62.

¹² *The Sunday Times*, 24 April 1960.

¹³ *Daily News*, 2 June 1959.

¹⁴ V. Strahan, p. 11.

¹⁵ R.J. Hansen, p. 11.

had observed that many Allawah Grove residents had begun to show pride in their homes. Gardens and lawns had been planted, fences erected and homes painted.¹⁶

Gare belonged to the Native Welfare Council, and her husband, Cyril, was president. The Council was established in response to a request from the Commissioner of Native Welfare, Middleton, that all organizations concerned with Aboriginal issues be consolidated under one umbrella organization. Twenty two organizations, including the Coolbaroo League, became collectively known as the Native Welfare Council in 1951.¹⁷

On the 1st December 1959 the Department announced that: "any 'flat' vacated, 'forcibly' or 'voluntarily', was not to be re-let, and that empty flats were to be disposed of because they were considered 'a standing invitation to squatters'". Once the Allawah Grove population had been significantly reduced, the Department put Allawah Grove to tender accompanied by the remark: "No further use to Department. Settlement being closed down".¹⁸

In 1960, Cyril Gare wrote to the Minister for Native Welfare, criticising the Department for its mismanagement of Allawah Grove. He set out an 11- point program, which the Council would implement to "improve" the Allawah Grove residents, if they had administrative control. Underlying the suggested program was a belief that all the residents needed was "encouragement" and "training" to make the best use of their opportunities.

This suggestion evoked a strong response from State government officials. Commissioner Middleton considered that all that could be done *had been done*.¹⁹ He believed it was "easier to deal with Aboriginal people individually than when they were grouped together",²⁰ and "preferred to see them established in their own homes throughout the community and gradually assimilated".²¹

¹⁶ E.C. Gare to C. Perkins, Minister for Native Welfare, 15 March 1960, MN 1176, ACC 3491, file 40, Battye Library of Western Australian History (BLWAH hereafter), Perth.

¹⁷ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard, 1989, Oral History Collection, OH2310 T/r, BLWAH, Perth.

¹⁸ S. Delmege, p. 161.

¹⁹ S.G. Middleton, Commissioner of Native Welfare to C. Perkins, Minister for Native Welfare, 29 March 1960, ACC 993, file 321, SROWA, Perth.

²⁰ *The Bulletin*, 3 May 1961.

²¹ *The West Australian*, 5 July 1960.

The District Welfare Officer, B. McLarty, attributed Allawah Grove's lack of success to the resident's passive acceptance of whatever anyone was prepared to give them: "Most of them do want better living conditions, but only if they are handed to them on a plate; they do not want them badly enough to strive for them or even to preserve or improve what they have".²²

Minister for Native Welfare, C. Perkins, wrote:

I cannot believe that a group of people needs to be "trained" not to damage the houses it lives in, or "encouraged" not to engage in drunken brawls, or not to waste their finances in self indulgence and then complain when their children are hungry, unless it is a group of imbeciles. The most primitive savage recognises the necessity to make the effort to provide for his family's needs and then to preserve and sustain the results of his efforts.²³

Even Paul Hasluck, Federal Minister for Territories and a former academic and journalist responsible for much of the theory informing the Government's assimilation policy, wrote to Gare to tell him that what he was attempting was a mistake. As Federal Minister, he could not intervene in matters that came under State control.²⁴ So, the fact that he felt the need to voice his concern (when he was in no way obliged to) shows just how at odds the Native Welfare Council was with Australian governments at the time.

Despite the Department's and Hasluck's repeated warnings, Gare remained determined. Consequently, Perkins eventually decided that the Native Welfare Council should be given the opportunity to prove the Department wrong.²⁵ He approved the project in 1961, agreed to continue the lease of the land, and promised to provide an annual grant towards the cost of electricity, water and sanitation.²⁶

²² B. McLarty, District Welfare Officer to E.C. Gare, 24 March 1960, ACC 993, file 321, State Records Office of Western Australia (SROWA hereafter), Perth.

²³ C. Perkins, Minister for Native Welfare to E.C. Gare, 4 April 1960, MN 1176, ACC 3491, file 40, BLWAH, Perth.

²⁴ P. Hasluck, Minister for Territories to E.C. Gare, 16 October 1963, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

²⁵ R. Oser, p. 73.

²⁶ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 1 (Sept 1961).

Financial assistance was also received from the Save the Children Fund and the Lotteries Commission. This money was used to create the independent body, Allawah Grove Administration Inc, to supervise activities at Allawah Grove, and to appoint a full-time superintendent. There were approximately twenty huts at Allawah Grove when the Native Welfare Council assumed responsibility.²⁷ All of them were in need of repair. Repairs were made to buildings, hot showers were installed and sanitary facilities improved. A public appeal was launched to raise funds to extend each of the huts to accommodate Aboriginal families of various sizes.²⁸

From the outset, the Council considered the community's support for the project vital to its success. A public meeting was held on the 27th November 1961 to inform Perth citizens about the Administration's objectives and how they could help contribute to them.²⁹ Donations to Allawah Grove were received from the public. In return, donors were regularly informed about the settlement's activities and the residents' "progress" in *Allawah News*, a newsletter produced by the Council.³⁰ Previously Aboriginal welfare policies had segregated Aboriginal people from mainstream society, but assimilation policy involved the entire community. Thus, the more people working towards improving Aboriginal people's position in the community, the greater the chance of Aboriginal people successfully assimilating.

The Council's main objective was: "to develop family life to the stage where a group consisting of a man, wife and several children can learn to create a home, to be later transposed into a suburb or a country town".³¹ They expected that this would require most families to undergo three to four years of education.³² Elkin, espoused that: "The Australian Aboriginal...has the right to a type of education which will fit him to live as a good citizen and to take a respectable place in the society into which he is inevitably thrown", emphasising that adults were especially in need of education.³³ Elkin's

²⁷ *Allawah News*, 3, no. 4 (Nov 1965).

²⁸ *Allawah News*, 3, no. 4 (Nov 1965).

²⁹ *Native Welfare News* (Jan – Feb 1962).

³⁰ *Allawah News* (1961 – 1965).

³¹ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 1 (Sept 1961).

³² *The West Australian*, 17 November 1961.

³³ A.P. Elkin, 'Native education, with special reference to the Australian Aborigines', *Oceania* 7, no. 4, p. 499.

strategy for achieving the assimilation of Aboriginal people was reflected in the Council's approach to training at Allawah Grove.

When, in the Council's opinion, a family had learnt how to live like mainstream Australian families they were moved into a more conventional house at Allawah Grove. This house was larger and better furnished than the standard huts at Allawah Grove, and consequently required more maintenance and a higher rent from its owners. It served as a "step" towards moving out into the community,³⁴ and was, thus, similar to the transitional housing programme implemented by the Department of Native Welfare.

Another attempt to motivate the residents in their homemaking pursuits involved offering a weekly prize to the householder with the best-kept house or garden.³⁵ This suggests that they expected Allawah Grove residents not to appreciate the value of keeping an ordered home, and that, like children, they required extrinsic rewards to do so. This attitude is reflected in correspondence between the Department of Native Welfare and the Native Welfare Council. The Department viewed the Allawah Grove residents as lacking the motivation to want these things in themselves. The Council agreed, but believed that if the residents received encouragement and training, they would learn to appreciate the value of adopting such practices. Not dissimilar to a child being motivated to eat his greens with the reward of dessert, Allawah Grove residents were tempted with a cash prize to keep their homes clean. Each week's winners were held up as an example for all to envy and hence emulate.³⁶ At a Council meeting, Cyril Gare, claimed that as a result of the house and garden competition there had been a marked increase in pride shown by the villagers in their home and surroundings.³⁷

Rewards were preferred to punishments, although punishment *was* used to prepare people for life in the outside community. Electricity was disconnected when accounts were not paid on the due date,³⁸ but there were few disconnections³⁹ because people valued electricity so they paid their bills. Similarly, people who consistently failed to

³⁴ *Allawah News*, 3, no. 1 (Sept 1964).

³⁵ E.C. Gare to C. Perkins, Minister for Native Welfare, 15 March 1960, MN 1176, ACC 3491, file 40, BLWAH, Perth.

³⁶ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 6, (May – July 1962).

³⁷ *The West Australian*, 11 January 1961.

³⁸ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 10 (June – July 1963).

³⁹ *Allawah News*, 3, no. 2 (Oct – Nov 1964).

pay rent or caused a nuisance to other people living at the Grove were served with an eviction notice.⁴⁰ During the Native Welfare Council's eight years of supervision only six families were evicted because of failure to live up to the required standards.⁴¹ Compare this to the eleven families that the Department planned to evict in the one year that it was administering Allawah Grove.

The Council appeared to have a genuine desire to assist these people to assimilate, and through careful observations, they identified the factors they thought prevented residents from doing so. They attempted to remove or reduce these factors rather than to immediately attribute residents' failure to comply with settlement regulations as deviant behaviour. Elsie Gare had realised that many residents could not get into the city to pay their rent, and thus fell into arrears. She received permission to collect the residents' rent and later pay it as a lump sum in the city.

Another strategy Elsie Gare used to encourage residents to pay their rent on time was to help them prioritise their spending. She recalled: "So having the opportunity shop going, they'd come over to me and I'd say, 'Well have you paid your rent? Pay your rent first and you'll get some cheap clothing'. And I managed to get quite a lot of rent and then I'd pay it over to the Native Welfare Council".⁴² Gare was teaching the residents to budget: to spend money on essential items before purchasing "extras". The Council claimed that as a result of these measures, some families were now two weeks ahead with their rent where previously they had been twelve months behind.⁴³

Inculcating residents with values that would ensure they maintained a "civilised" lifestyle formed a major aspect of the residents' social education. The key to achieving assimilation was, firstly, to convince residents that living like mainstream Australians was a far more desirable option: "The job is to make the reward appear so inviting and possible to the native, that he will *want* to make the effort".⁴⁴ Secondly, the residents had to be convinced that *they* were capable of adopting this lifestyle: "The most important job is to instil into the mind of the adult, a feeling that they and their family,

⁴⁰ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 9 (Feb – May 1963).

⁴¹ *The West Australian*, 1 December 1965.

⁴² Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

⁴³ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 3 (Nov 1961).

⁴⁴ Allawah Grove as a model training centre, MN 1176, ACC 3841, file 41, BLWAH, Perth.

can attain a higher standard of living differently which are worth the effort".⁴⁵ This was consistent with the philosophy at Allawah Grove of encouraging self-help, self-respect and the acceptance of full responsibility.⁴⁶

"Hand-out" charity was avoided,⁴⁷ and is evidenced in the following instances. The Council didn't renovate the residents' homes for them. Instead they made paint and a spray paint outfit available to residents. If they wanted their home painted, they had to paint it.⁴⁸ Likewise, if residents wanted internal cladding in their homes the Council presented them with two options. They could either do it themselves (under the guidance of the Administrative maintenance officer) using the linoleum provided free by the Council, or they could pay the Council to line their home.⁴⁹ In *Allawah News*, it was reported that several of the families had accepted these offers.⁵⁰ These measures were not only conducive to improving the standard of residents' homes (which was one of the Council's objectives), they were also teaching the residents *how* to improve their homes – requiring them to make decisions taking into account the available resources (budget, time, skills, and so on).

In time, Allawah Grove developed into a home training centre that had virtually all the facilities which were available in the wider community: a hall was available for social events; community service groups; a weekly youth group; and film nights. There was a library that once a week doubled as a hair salon. An opportunity shop sold second-hand clothing and household goods to residents. A kindergarten educated the young. Various religious denominations held weekly church services. A community newspaper informed residents about the "goings on" in their community. Adult education classes taught interested residents reading and writing, domestic science, civics education, community development, craft classes and trade skills.

The range of activities conducted at Allawah Grove required a committed pool of workers. There were two paid positions: a full-time social worker who was employed to

⁴⁵ E.C. Gare, 'How is the Aborigine and part-Aborigine to find his proper place in Australian society?', MN 1146, ACC 3491, file 8, BLWAH, Perth.

⁴⁶ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 7 (Aug – Nov 1962).

⁴⁷ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 8 (Dec 1962 – Jan 1963).

⁴⁸ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 3 (Nov 1961).

⁴⁹ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 9 (Feb – May 1963).

⁵⁰ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 3 (Nov 1961); *Allawah News*, 1, no. 9 (Feb – May 1963).

encourage the residents in their experiments at self-government⁵¹ and to prepare the male residents for employment; and a Kindergarten Director who was employed to operate the Kindergarten four days a week.⁵²

Volunteers made up the bulk of Allawah Grove's staff. Director of Adult Education at the University of Western Australia, Hew Roberts, organised and conducted adult education classes.⁵³ Elsie Gare established the Friends Centre, which catered for the Grove's female residents, and consisted of a sewing room, opportunity shop, kindergarten and weekly medical clinic.⁵⁴ It was called the Friends Centre because Elsie belonged to the Society of Friends (also known as Quakers), and it was the Friends Service Council (relief organization of the Society of Friends) that provided the major funding for its establishment.⁵⁵ Margaret Clements, the Kindergarten Director (who was also a Friend), was heavily involved in the Friends Centre. A trained nurse, she also served voluntarily in the Friends Centre medical clinic.⁵⁶

The great majority of Allawah Grove volunteers were middle-class women, largely the result of social attitudes, which made women financially dependent on men, and cast them as homemakers and mothers. Only men were eligible for Unemployment and Sickness benefits, because in a society where women were dependent on men, only men needed to work. Child Endowment and Maternity Benefits were paid to women because they were deemed to be primarily responsible for children. Women employed in government positions were forced to resign from paid employment when they married. In their early adult life, they were encouraged to take up occupations (eg: teachers and nurses), which were believed to be suited to women's inherent nurturing qualities. Upon marriage these nurturing qualities were channelled into rearing children. When their children had grown up many women devoted themselves to voluntary service. Voluntary organizations were able to reap the benefits of women's earlier training as well as their experience gained within marriage.

⁵¹ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 5 (Feb – April 1962).

⁵² *Allawah News*, 1, no. 5 (Feb – April 1962).

⁵³ H. Roberts, Director of Adult Education Board University of Western Australia to J. Carr, Secretary of Allawah Grove Administration, 15 February 1962, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

⁵⁴ E.M. Gare, Allawah Grove Friends Centre, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

⁵⁵ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 6 (May-July 1962).

⁵⁶ *The West Australian*, 24 March 1962.

Elsie Gare and Margaret Clements were Allawah Grove's longest serving and most dedicated volunteers. Gare came in contact with Aboriginal people through the Department of Native Welfare's transitional housing scheme. She often accompanied Department staff to York to visit the mothers and to offer advice on cooking, dressmaking, and other domestic skills. Her main objective was to: "just be friendly...what I was doing with them was secondary. It was getting to know Aboriginal people".⁵⁷ The *Daily News* reported: "Years ago, without any background of academic studies on assimilation, she said: 'if every white woman had a friend who was a native woman, there would be no problem'".⁵⁸

Elsie Gare introduced Margaret Clements to Allawah Grove. She appeared to share Gare's philosophy that all humans were equal:

People often ask me the question, "How do you talk to Aboriginal people?" which always surprises me because I think, well, you talk to them like people. You don't shout at them, they're not deaf. You don't talk down to them...Lots of Aboriginal people are very shy and they tend to hang their heads down in the early days of when you meet, but you've just got to work on that, and I used to find, as well as taking an interest in their kids, I used to find it very helpful to say, "How are you yourself? You must be very tired. You must have all these problems and so on. How are you managing and so on?" They realise then that they're not just the kid's mother but they're a person, too...it's a matter of seeing people as they really are and how their life is affecting them.⁵⁹

A former Allawah Grove resident's impression of Clements was remarkably similar to these comments of Clements:

She used to love Mum. Mum was very shy. She didn't really mix with people much. Mrs Clements tried to bring her out of it. She'd sit down and have tea

⁵⁷ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

⁵⁸ *Daily News*, n.d., MN1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

⁵⁹ Margaret Clements interviewed by J. Gothard, 1989, Oral History Collection, OH2309, T/r, BLWAH, Perth.

with her. I think when Clements left Mum felt a bit left out 'cause she didn't have her friend there anymore.⁶⁰

Gare's and Clements' belief in the equality of Aboriginal people was likely to have been influenced by their religious beliefs. Both women belonged to the Society of Friends. Social justice was a major concern of the Society, and they preferred to translate Christian doctrine into action.⁶¹ The Society was particularly concerned with counteracting racial prejudice, and sought the truth in human relationships, which they believed to be unaffected by race or nationalism.⁶²

The female volunteers at Allawah Grove draw a striking parallel with women involved in the Society of Friends in early America. Bacon described these women as having a determination to achieve their goals, adopting a multifaceted approach whereby one problem's solution became the next project.⁶³ This is an apt description of the female volunteers at Allawah Grove. Bacon emphasises the Friends' belief in the equality of all races. The American Society of Friends was requested by Indigenous Americans to represent their interests when treaties were negotiated with the new American Government following the War of Independence. They established centres where farming and other skills were taught to the indigenous people.⁶⁴ The Society at Allawah Grove instituted similar programmes.

Despite their commitment and hard work, the Native Welfare Council and its volunteers could not facilitate the assimilation of Allawah Grove residents without the support of the Department of Native Welfare. Margaret Clements' recalled:

The idea of the place was that they would be helped to be prepared to take their place in another house out in the community when one became available, and that was a wonderful idea...but in all the time we were there only two houses ever became available. People would get ready and be longing to have their own

⁶⁰ Anonymous, personal communication, 9 September 2002.

⁶¹ H. Gillman, *A light that is shining: an introduction to the Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1997), pp. 66 – 67.

⁶² *Friends Service Council (Australia)*, (Melbourne: The Ruskin Press Pty Ltd).

⁶³ M.H. Bacon, *Mothers of feminism: the story of Quaker women in America* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), pp. 22 -23.

⁶⁴ M.H. Bacon, p. 79.

house and then nothing would happen and they'd sink back into apathy. We actually had one house much better than the others. As they improved in their ability to look after a home, they were moved to this house. But we had a case where they'd been in this house for a long, long while and saw no hope at all of getting another house, in the mid years we were there, and they got very...very disappointed so they left Allawah all together and they went up and lived at Mogumber.⁶⁵

The Council believed that providing training in mainstream living, first in the Allawah Grove huts and then in the improved house, would create the preliminary stage needed to assimilate Western Australia's Aboriginal population. Once determined capable of "civilised" living, the Department would allocate residents a house in the mainstream community. If they maintained this lifestyle, assimilation had been achieved. Given that the Department instituted a transitional housing programme when their attempt to place Aboriginal families in conventional housing without training failed, it seems odd that they didn't offer the Council more support.

But perhaps the Department's opposition to Allawah Grove was more motivated by a desire to retain favour with the mainstream community – the taxpayers. The Department obviously saw a need for a training settlement in the metropolitan area because in the years leading up to Allawah Grove's establishment, it made various attempts to establish a reserve. Public opposition stopped this from becoming reality. According to the public, despite evidence, grouping Aboriginal people together only created a nuisance as it allowed them to continue their "undesirable" ways and prevented them from integrating into mainstream society.⁶⁶

Budgetary constraints also limited the Department. But whilst the Department's budget may have been insufficient to cope with housing the State's Aboriginal population, there were other avenues of funding that they could have explored. On at least two occasions, the Native Welfare Council attempted to persuade the Department to apply for a Commonwealth grant to help with "native" housing. The Council believed that if successful, the Native Welfare Department would have been able to turn its full

⁶⁵ Margaret Clements interviewed by J. Gothard.

⁶⁶ J. Carter, pp. 180, 241, 245.

attention to the supervision and training of Aboriginal people. But both times, the Department refused to seek the Commonwealth's assistance.⁶⁷

Assimilation in practice differed considerably from assimilation theory or even government policy. In the 1950s and 1960s policies of biological assimilation were replaced with policies of social assimilation. Biological assimilation was premised on the assumption that racial identity could be changed by "breeding out" Aboriginal people's "colour",⁶⁸ thus allowing Aboriginal people to "blend" in with a homogenous "White" society. Social assimilation was more demanding on the community as a whole. It required the community to see past physical appearance and preconceived notions of Aboriginality; and for Aboriginal people to discard their previous lifestyle and adopt the skills and attitudes necessary for living in mainstream society.

The Department believed that affording Aboriginal people equal opportunities would lead them to achieve equal outcomes. Simplistic logic overlooked the fact that Aboriginal people had historically been excluded from mainstream life and disadvantaged by discriminatory legislation. Acknowledging these past injustices, the Native Welfare Council proposed that Aboriginal people required proper training before they could be expected to live like other Australians. The Department dismissed such thinking, seeing training as expensive, time consuming and wasted on its trainees.

The Department and the Council's conflicting views of Allawah Grove essentially represented a difference of opinion over the cause of the resident's lack of conformity. The Department attributed residents' separatist behaviour to laziness and a victim mentality, whereas the Council saw the residents' lack of interest as just that – a lack of interest. For Allawah Grove residents to both desire and feel they were capable of living like other Australians, they would require a great deal of training and encouragement.

The following chapter will take a closer look at the encouragement and training that residents, in particular, female residents, received at Allawah Grove. It will consider in

⁶⁷ The *West Australian*, 1 December 1965.

⁶⁸ A. Haebich, *For their own good*, p. 351.

great detail how the Native Welfare Council and Society of Friends put the government's assimilation policy into practice, the implications that gender had for social assimilation practice, and the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal responses to the training programmes devised.

Chapter Four: Assimilation strategies in practice at Allawah Grove: Training for female residents.

Assimilation policy aimed to make Aboriginal families indistinguishable from Anglo-Australian families so they would “blend” into mainstream society. The Council believed Aboriginal families required assistance to achieve this transformation. At Allawah Grove, men and women were provided with activities that would allow them to develop the skills and attitudes necessary for the roles they would be expected to assume in a nuclear family and within mainstream society.

Allawah Grove’s social worker, Tom Toogood offered male residents training which focused on giving them skills for employment, and household maintenance and repair. Commonwealth Employment Services and an Allawah Grove employment fund attempted to place the residents in employment, but jobs were difficult to find.¹ A workshop was erected at the Grove: metalwork and woodwork were taught and machinery was installed for making boomerangs and small artefacts for sale.² The workshop also served to help develop the men’s concept of repair and maintenance,³ as this constituted one of their responsibilities as a husband in a nuclear family. Likewise, men were encouraged to garden and to help maintain the Allawah Grove grounds. Despite measures to increase their employability, unemployment at Allawah Grove remained consistently high with around eighty percent of Allawah Grove males registering as unemployed at any given time.⁴

Female volunteers (most of whom belonged to the Society of Friends) provided the female residents with domestic training at the Friends Centre, which consisted of an opportunity shop and sewing centre, a kindergarten, and bark painting classes. In addition to this gender specific training, both men and women were given the opportunity to participate in adult education classes and a progress association. All activities included components specifically designed to increase the quantity and quality of the residents contact with mainstream society. This chapter considers the assimilation

¹ V. Strahan, p. 17.

² V. Strahan, p. 18.

³ R.J. Hansen, p. 58.

⁴ V. Strahan, p. 17.

programmes established at Allawah Grove and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal responses to them.

The Friends Centre

In 1958, Sally Gare, Elsie and Cyril Gare's daughter, received the Department of Native Welfare's permission to organise a Girl Guide Company at Allawah Grove.⁵ The Allawah Grove girls' parents lacked the means to purchase or make uniforms so Sally turned to her mother for advice.

Elsie proposed holding a jumble sale at Allawah Grove to raise money to purchase material. She appealed to members of the public for clothing donations.⁶ This was sorted and suitable clothing was sold to Allawah Grove residents at a jumble sale. After sufficient funds were raised, Elsie began visiting the Grove with her sewing machine, encouraging the girls' mothers to help sew the uniforms. They responded enthusiastically, as many already knew how to sew. The Girl Guide Company was soon established.

The jumble sale became a permanent fixture at Allawah Grove in the form of an "Opportunity Shop". Clothing in good condition was sold to the residents. Not all of the clothing donated towards the jumble sale was suitable for sale; however, it could be cut up and used for sewing.⁷ Each Tuesday afternoon Elsie Gare visited the Grove to teach the women "how to make the useful things, you know, hemming nappies and buying sheets very cheaply and they'd be hemming their own sheets, making skirts into little boy's trousers".⁸ Former Allawah Grove resident, Helen Lawrence, recalled:

I was into it [sewing]. My mother was a mission girl so she did knitting crocheting and all that...rubbed off on me. I made my own clothes and I did a lot of quilting. The Salvos used to give us clothes, but they were outdated, gave

⁵ E.M. Gare, Allawah Grove Friends Centre, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

⁶ Margaret Clements interviewed by J. Gothard.

⁷ E.M. Gare, Allawah Grove Friends Centre, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

⁸ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

us heavy things in summer. I kept them and cut them up and made rugs and things. We didn't have a lot of money, you see.⁹

Facilities and materials were provided and residents were made aware of when volunteers would be present to assist them. This self-directed learning approach proved fairly successful. By mid-1962, six sewing machines were in frequent use and volunteers were present to give instruction on most days.¹⁰

Tea and biscuits were permanently available in the sewing room¹¹ to get women used to socialising in a "civilised" manner and with "White" women. Considering that assimilation of Aboriginal people was dependent on others' perceptions of them, this seemingly frivolous activity actually constituted a crucial aspect of training, especially since the Friends used these encounters to indoctrinate residents with the virtues of Western living.¹² The opportunity shop developed into the "Mothers' Club" as described by Elsie Gare:

...that came in with the second-hand clothing shop. They used to come over and make a cup of tea and sit and talk and be interested in what I brought out because by this time I was getting known as somebody that wanted second-hand clothes or household goods. The mums were always interested in seeing what was coming in. They'd help me sort it and we had really a little op shop.¹³

Second-hand clothing activities provided a socio-economically disadvantaged group with an avenue for both inexpensive clothing and for socialisation. By the end of the first year five women attended regularly. In July of 1962, the Friends decided to allow the female residents to operate the Friends Centre Opportunity Shop every Friday (which later increased to several days a week).¹⁴ The residents would also be allowed to determine how the shop's proceeds were spent at Allawah Grove.¹⁵ In 1963, they

⁹ Helen Lawrence, personal communication, 31 August 2002.

¹⁰ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 7 (Nov 1962).

¹¹ *Aboriginal Welfare News*, 6, no. 4 (May 1967).

¹² *Allawah News*, 1, no. 3 (Nov 1965).

¹³ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

¹⁴ Allawah Grove Friends Centre Report to Administration 1961-62, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

¹⁵ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 6 (May-July 1962).

decided to put the proceeds towards kindergarten fees. The Department subsidised fees for Aboriginal children, but the assimilationist goal of having parents take responsibility for their children's education, made them require parents to pay a percentage.

Within this framework, the women's decision to use the proceeds to pay kindergarten fees was interpreted to mean that they had accepted this responsibility. The Secretary of the Kindergarten congratulated the women on their decision, going on to say: "Most Kindergartens are run with money provided by the parents of the Kindergarten children. Five pounds a week is a start towards this being done sooner or later at Allawah Grove".¹⁶ Her enthusiasm would appear to exceed reality. Had the women received payment for their work and the freedom to spend this as they wished, would they still have paid their children's kindergarten fees? By the Friends specifically demanding that the proceeds be spent on community projects, they were effectively controlling how the residents spent their "wages". The residents were not able to spend the proceeds frivolously because they only had sensible options available to them.

The Friends similarly instituted a scheme whereby donations of food and clothing to Allawah Grove were not distributed freely among the residents, but were sold to them at a nominal price.¹⁷ Likewise, any excess profits from clothing sales at the Opportunity Shop were used to purchase essential items like crockery, curtains, sheets, towels, pegs, and toilet paper. These were then resold to the residents at a little under cost price,¹⁸ making budgeting easier and enabling women to familiarise themselves with purchasing goods considered essential for everyday living. This also reduced the likelihood of money being spent on frivolous or unhealthy items and pursuits. Pickett, a resident of Allawah Grove, remembers the advantages of communal living, rather than these lessons in suburban living: "If you didn't have food at Allawah Grove you just used to go next door. Out there you had to wait until the next dole cheque".¹⁹ She also recalled the women continuing to hunt turtles and cooking them on an outside fire at Allawah Grove.

¹⁶ *Bebilwongai*, 10 (June 1963).

¹⁷ *Aboriginal Welfare News*, 6, no. 1 (Feb 1967).

¹⁸ Allawah Grove Friends Centre Report, Sept 1966, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

¹⁹ Donna Pickett, personal communication, 2 August 2002.

The Kindergarten

Mothers attending the Friends Centre brought up to twenty kindergarten-age children with them. Gare saw the potential for an Allawah Grove Kindergarten.²⁰ She and Clements visited the mothers' homes to ascertain whether they would be interested. The mothers *were* interested. The Allawah Grove Kindergarten opened outdoors in February 1959 and became the first kindergarten for Aboriginal children in Western Australia.²¹ Gare, Clements and other Native Welfare Council volunteers, including three former schoolteachers and two trained nurses, took turns supervising the children three days a week.²² In February 1962 the kindergarten began operating four days a week in one of the huts and Margaret Clements was appointed Kindergarten Director.²³

Children were required to arrive at kindergarten on time, clean and well presented. As they could not achieve this without their mother's assistance, the site for "training" Allawah Grove's younger children came to form a large part of the female residents "training" as a housewife and primary caregiver:

If a child arrives looking uncared for, we tell them to go home again and ask mother to get them ready for kindergarten. We didn't adopt the policy of bathing and dressing them after they came because that was defeating the object.²⁴

Mothers of children who were continually late or unclean were accused of engaging in undesirable behaviours. Clements recalled:

They used to play "two-up" a lot and they'd be out in the bush or somewhere gambling and then...we always knew if there'd been a school on because the children would either not come at all or they'd come late and they wouldn't be properly [dressed].²⁵

Donna Pickett spent her childhood at Allawah Grove. Her memories appear to confirm Clements' suspicions: "Aboriginal people would play cards, 'two up', rounders, skittle,

²⁰ E.M. Gare, Allawah Grove Friends Centre, n.d., MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

²¹ E.M. Gare, Allawah Grove Play Centre, 1959, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

²² *Daily News*, 9 June 1959.

²³ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 5 (Feb-Apr 1962); Margaret Clements interviewed by J. Gothard.

²⁴ Margaret Clements interviewed by J. Gothard.

²⁵ Margaret Clements interviewed by J. Gothard.

brandy...it gave them a chance to gather round and be part of a family, to share and care for one another".²⁶ Residents had two choices: they could break reciprocal kin ties and be viewed positively by the Friends or they could maintain reciprocal kin ties and be viewed by the Friends as neglecting their children.

Gambling performed a function for Allawah Grove residents: it gave them a reason to come together, which in turn sustained their communal identity. The problem was that it had serious negative implications. Gambling made it difficult to keep to a routine and there was less money available for purchasing essential items. Recognising this, Gare attempted to turn gambling into a productive activity and remove its negative implications:

I got a whole quantity of wool and had them knitting squares, and we'd give the squares a lucky number and the one...when the rug was finished I'd join up all the squares and take them out of the hat you see, and the one that had the lucky number would win the square, the blanket. So that was quite a good way of gambling I thought...it was a great joy to go out there and see them sitting on the steps in the sun knitting instead of playing cards, because you know if they wanted a finished blanket they didn't have time to play cards...²⁷

By the kindergarten's eighth year (1967), *Aboriginal Welfare News* reported that mothers were displaying a marked keenness in getting their children ready for kindergarten.²⁸ In the same year the new superintendent, Peter Coleman, used the *Allawah Newsletter* to criticise the residents for continuing to gamble and for neglecting to ensure their children were clean and well presented.²⁹ Differing interests might explain these conflicting opinions. Only Allawah Grove residents received the *Allawah Newsletter*, whereas *Aboriginal Welfare News* was written for interested members of the public. The superintendent's job was to see that the residents exercised the particular responsibilities expected of them. Mothers might have "improved" in getting their children ready for kindergarten, but this didn't mean there wasn't room for further improvement. In contrast, it was in the Council's best interest to concentrate on the

²⁶ Donna Pickett, personal communication, 2 August 2002.

²⁷ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

²⁸ *Aboriginal Welfare News*, 6, no 11 (Dec 1967).

²⁹ *Allawah Newsletter*, 1, no. 3 (May 1967), MN1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

observed “improvement” so that they could give the public a glowing report of the success that training was having on Allawah Grove residents.

Through the kindergarten, the Friends could encourage mothers to take an active interest in their children’s education. Education was crucial to assimilation: it played a major role in achieving both social mobility and a greater understanding of mainstream society. It was therefore important that the Friends provided an environment where mothers felt comfortable participating in their children’s education.

Lack of education and a learned fear of “authority” figures, (a result of child removal policies), prevented parents from interacting with teachers. The Friends aimed to reduce the parents’ anxiety by easing them into these types of encounters. The teacher of grades one and two at the Guildford State School (the school attended by Allawah Grove children), Mrs Tilbrook, was invited to an afternoon tea with the mothers. Mrs Tilbrook accepted the offer, and informed the mothers that the previous year’s kindergarten children were settling in well.³⁰ Mothers were also invited to accompany the kindergarten children when they visited mainstream kindergartens. According to the Bassendean Kindergarten Director, Mrs Page: “the visits showed that assimilation between ‘native’ and ‘White’ children was possible at an early age”.³¹

Maintaining the interest of the mothers in the kindergarten was difficult. Clements recalled:

They did not like having to come and help so much. It was quite hard to get a really reliable roster of mothers. We tried right up to the end but it used to fall down for various reasons: they had to do their washing or they had to do this or that. But we had several very faithful ones that really saw the value and liked coming I think too.³²

Clements attempted to increase involvement in the kindergarten by making “star pupils” out of those women who *had* provided their assistance. In information distributed to the

³⁰ *Aboriginal Welfare News*, 8, no. 3 (March 1968).

³¹ *The West Australian*, 21 December 1961.

³² Margaret Clements interviewed by J. Gothard.

parents of kindergarten children, she thanked Mrs M. Yarran and Mrs L. Mogridge for cleaning the Kindergarten. She finished this same sentence in an assertive tone: “and those mothers who have promised to do it in the future”.³³ The Friends’ objective to assimilate female residents made a mother’s lack of involvement indicate a failure on her part to appreciate the value of education. This was an unfair assumption to make, given that all kindergartens share this difficulty of attracting broad parental assistance. Furthermore, the mothers’ apparent lack of interest might have been due to them placing more value in their own systems of learning.

Aboriginal children had always learnt through exploration, enjoying the freedom to learn at their own pace, by themselves and in small groups.³⁴ In contrast, the western kindergarten placed many children together, expecting them all to learn at the same pace and to participate in all activities designated important for their development. If mothers didn’t believe that the kindergarten had educational merit, they cannot really be blamed for viewing it as little more than a child-minding centre.

The Friends used standards set by kindergartens in mainstream society (suitable presentation, punctuality, parental support and so on) to encourage Aboriginal women to adopt western child rearing practices and to perform household duties. A “good” mother paid attention to her children’s hygiene and presentation, and supported their education with an encouraging home environment. The kindergarten got mothers into a regular routine, which, in turn, facilitated their mastery of the housewife role. Mothers had to rise early to get their children ready for kindergarten and had to ensure there were clean clothes for them to wear. Because children were supervised at kindergarten during the day, mothers were able to devote their energies to pursuits like housework, sewing, or socialising with other women.

The public were made aware of the “improvement” in female residents’ childrearing and homemaking duties via the implementation of a child hospitality scheme. In the Christmas holiday period, “White” families were offered the opportunity to invite Allawah children into their homes. Results of the scheme were publicised in the *Daily*

³³ *Bebilwongai*, 1 (Nov 1961).

³⁴ G. Partington, ‘In those days it was rough’, G. Partington, *Perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education*. (Australia: Social Science Press), pp. 27–54.

News.³⁵ Host families and readers learned of the Allawah Grove children's high standard of hygiene and behaviour, and about the programmes responsible for the observed outcomes.

Bark Painting

Outside their child rearing and home making responsibilities, women had time available to devote to leisure activities and/or casual employment. In 1962, after observing that the Friends Centre's programme of activities revolved around the performance of practical tasks, Mrs Taylor, an artist and volunteer at Allawah Grove, offered to teach the female residents paperbark painting.³⁶ Taylor had learnt bark painting at Teachers' College. Using natural materials, she taught the female residents to paint, later encouraging them to develop their own style.³⁷

Although westernised, the artwork's use of natural materials like bark, and the Aboriginal background of the artists associated it with Aboriginality, and it was this that ultimately led to the class's success. Prior to starting the class, Taylor made the following request to Elsie Gare: "Well if I teach them to make them, will you sell them?" Gare agreed, and started showing the paintings, when completed, to various groups in the community.³⁸ Unexpectedly, the pictures began to sell rapidly and were sent as far as the Eastern States, London and Paris. By the end of 1962, over a hundred paintings had been sold and orders were on hand for more.³⁹ Sales continued to grow, averaging thirty per month in early 1963⁴⁰ and increasing to seventy in August.⁴¹ It would be reasonable to conclude that the high demand for paintings, especially from overseas buyers, was largely due to these paintings being produced by "authentic Australian Aboriginal people". Had "White" middle class women, like Mrs Taylor produced the same paintings, their retail potential would have been slim. Allawah Grove residents' Aboriginality was, ironically, being used to further their advancement into mainstream society.

³⁵ *Daily News*, n.d., MN1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

³⁶ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 6 (May-July 1962).

³⁷ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

³⁸ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

³⁹ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 8 (Dec-Jan 1963).

⁴⁰ *Allawah News*, 2, no. 1 (Feb-May 1963).

⁴¹ *Allawah News*, 2, no. 1 (Sept 1963).

Each artist received the profits from her work.⁴² For the first time in their lives the female residents were *earning* money instead of merely receiving it as a Child Endowment payment.⁴³ But, according to Oxer, Gare found a way to regulate the incomes from the bark paintings, so as to minimise the “bad effects”.⁴⁴ If this was the case, the women were denied the freedom that comes with increasing financial independence. Still, the success of the paintings must have given the women confidence in their own abilities, and introduced them to the possibility of a profitable business that had potential long-term viability. Donna Kickett’s mother was involved in Taylor’s bark painting class. As she grew up, Kickett watched her mother paint. As an adult, she took up bark painting seriously for ten years selling paintings to overseas buyers.⁴⁵ Lorna Dickson, commented in 1971 three years after Allawah Grove closed: “I think now its become quite an industry hasn’t it. Well I think it more or less started there”.⁴⁶

In September 1963, in *Allawah News* it was reported that: “Four members of the Artists Group are now producing pictures in their own homes without supervision”.⁴⁷ In 1964, the women were given a room of their own where they could work when they chose.⁴⁸ The Friends were satisfied that members of the bark-painting group had developed the ability to work independently, and thus they had achieved their main objective:

As Quakers, we always feel that any aid we give should only increase the people’s desire to do things for themselves, and we feel that no project is worthwhile unless after a few years you can leave it and the people can do it themselves. It’s more of encouraging people to take responsibility for their own lives.⁴⁹

The philosophy of the Society of Friends linked closely with assimilationist theories. Social assimilation was premised on the idea that Aboriginal people were “primitive”

⁴² *Bebilwongai*, 10 (June 1963).

⁴³ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

⁴⁴ R. Oxer, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Donna Pickett, personal communication, 2 August 2002.

⁴⁶ Lorna Dickson interviewed by R. Jamieson, 1971, Oral History Collection, OH293T/r, BLWAH, Perth.

⁴⁷ *Allawah News*, 2, no. 1 (Sept 1963).

⁴⁸ *Allawah News*, 3, no. 2 (Oct-Nov 1964).

⁴⁹ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

simply because they lacked exposure to more “civilised” ways of living. Hence, the Friends believed that giving the residents opportunities for education in “civilised” living would lead them to both desire this way of life and would provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills. Next, people would receive opportunities to use these skills in a semi-supervised environment. These “opportunities” functioned as tests. If individuals chose not to continue the behaviour, they were considered failures, and, consequently, would have to wait longer for a house in mainstream society. The Friends did not interpret this as restricting the residents’ freedom because they lived in a society where assimilation was regarded as the means *to* give Aboriginal people freedom. Certainly, former residents indicated that they felt they had the freedom to choose whether to participate in activities and even whether they stayed at Allawah Grove.

Placing the decision in the residents’ hands whilst at the same time giving them only one option made it less likely they would reject the lifestyle presented. And the element of “choice” gave the residents the impression that they had made the choice because *they* had wanted to. Consequently, change was more likely to be permanent. This reflected the governments’ integration policy, which in 1965 replaced assimilation policy. Integration policy seemingly gave Aboriginal people the choice to assimilate, but in actuality, made only one choice available to them.

Interviews with former residents also clearly conveyed they had formed strong attachments to the Friends. Indeed, both Clements and Gare cited forming friendships with Aboriginal people as their prime motive for working among Allawah Grove women. Perhaps, it was the emphasis that the Friends put on forming friendships with the residents that accounted for Oxe’s observations that Elsie Gare and Margaret Clements were the most influential at Allawah Grove. Oxe offered the following explanation:

She [Elsie Gare] had been visiting Allawah Grove for five years and knew all the residents, and many of their relatives personally. She was also viewed as having a greater understanding of the people and their problems than many other

members of the Administration. Many of the women accepted Mrs Gare as a friend and went to her for advice and support.⁵⁰

Assimilation policies articulated by government authorities sounded simple and straightforward. Ambiguity and contradictions inherent in these ideas were not acknowledged. The volunteers at the Friends Centre tried to put these policies into practice. They were flexible in their approach and sensitive to Aboriginal responses to their initiatives, but contradictions of assimilation become evident in this attempt to implement these ideas. Development of the Friends Centre was the result of an effort to achieve one objective inevitably leading to the development of further objectives as new ideas came to the fore regarding how the activity already in place could be used to achieve the newly identified objective.

Adult Education

Inadequate education (thirty percent of residents were illiterate)⁵¹ contributed to the high unemployment rate among Allawah Grove residents, and hindered the ability of parents to assist children with their schoolwork.⁵² So, the Native Welfare Council made education first priority at Allawah Grove. University of Western Australia Adult Education Director, Hew Roberts, provided adult education classes for Allawah Grove's male and female residents. There were classes in public speaking, reading, civics, and community development.⁵³ Attendance was voluntary.

Residents were told that education could benefit them and their people. Particular emphasis was placed on the public speaking class and the community development class. The social worker, Tom Toogood, encouraged the residents to acquire public speaking skills:

If you think the native people of Western Australia (including Allawah Grove) could do with better housing, more education and more jobs, then here's your chance to help your own people (and help yourself). All of these things cost

⁵⁰ R. Ozer, p. 155.

⁵¹ *The West Australian*, 20 Sept 1962.

⁵² *Aboriginal Welfare News*, 1, no. 2 (Aug 1961).

⁵³ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 5 (Feb-Apr 1962).

money. To raise money, native speakers are needed to tell the people who have the money about these things. Already two members of the Allawah Grove Public Speaking class have spoken: to a meeting of the Rotary Clubs and raised two hundred pounds for Allawah Grove. This means of course more verandahs and more necessary equipment for the Youth Club and more adult classes.⁵⁴

Sixteen people attended the full course of classes and gave speeches, eight of whom were women.⁵⁵ The Friends observed that, as a result of Roberts' public speaking classes, many of the Allawah Grove women were able to address an audience. Consequently, Elsie Gare encouraged the women to join her in giving talks to various audiences about the work being carried out at Allawah Grove.⁵⁶

Community Development class took the form of a weekly discussion group where residents met to consider the community's problems and to work together for the common good. Roberts recorded the responses of a class in which he asked each resident to imagine he/she was a delegate at the upcoming *Conference of the Council of Social Changes*. Each class member was required to tell the group what he/she would say about the Grove or would suggest as the next need of the Grove. Mrs Garlett said: "Everything is much better now at the Grove". Mr Bodney said: "I'd like to see more linings and trimmings and doing up of all our houses". Mrs Pickett: "I'd like to see Mr Kickett remain in the chair for a long while. He had only promised to remain a month. He is doing a good job and treats us right and we can talk to him". Mrs Yarran: "Continued and developed association with white people". Miss Bennell: "Cleaner children, better dressed children, and that goes for mothers too". Mr Kickett: "More spirit of 'kick-in' to the common kitty for finance wanted by the committee".⁵⁷

Interpreted within an assimilationist framework, all of the reported responses show a desire to adopt the way of life impressed upon residents in programmes at Allawah Grove. Although, there is also the possibility that the residents were telling Roberts what they thought he wanted to hear.

⁵⁴ *Behilwongai*, 8 (Sept 1962).

⁵⁵ *Behilwongai*, 6, (June – July 1962).

⁵⁶ Allawah Grove Friends Centre Report to Administration, 1961 – 1962, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

⁵⁷ H. Roberts, Allawah Grove Community Development Class: a group interpretation and evaluation, lesson no 5, 26 July 1962, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

In the second half of the lesson, Roberts raised the stereotype: “The Abos are alright, but they just can’t stick to anything”. Class members were asked whether there was a basis for this stereotype and whether they had evidence to challenge this stereotype. Residents believed that due to “the significance of the Committee’s struggles and its present smooth operation”, they had shown that “they could stick at something with help, and even possessed enough ‘social learning’ to try to stick to something even without help”.⁵⁸

In this exercise, Roberts raised the issue of discrimination as a major obstacle to the assimilation of Aboriginal people in society. Assimilation theory attributed much of this discrimination to Aboriginal people’s participation in undesirable behaviours. Roberts asked the residents to assess whether “Whites” had any basis for discrimination towards them given that they had now as a result of living at Allawah Grove, adopted more “civilised” ways of living. In other words, Roberts requested residents to look at themselves as the products of assimilation theory. Class members may have felt empowered in dispelling “Whites” views of them. Ironically though, they could only do this by proving they no longer behaved like “Abos” but conformed to mainstream society’s image of a useful citizen.

Those residents who used the public speaking skills they had developed to speak to non - Aboriginal audiences were also expected to both be exemplars of assimilation and to attain the benefits of assimilation for Aboriginal people.

The Allawah Grove Progress Association

Community development classes were reinforced with the creation of the Allawah Grove Progress Association in 1961 by social worker, Tom Toogood.⁵⁹ Toogood believed that all groups had their natural leaders who were ready to exercise their leadership opportunities, if given favourable opportunities to do so.⁶⁰ The Association (which included all Allawah Grove residents) appointed a Committee of six men and

⁵⁸ H. Roberts, Allawah Grove Community Development Class: a group interpretation and evaluation, lesson no 5, 26 July 1962, MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

⁵⁹ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 4 (Dec 1961 – Jan 1962).

⁶⁰ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 2 (Oct 1961).

three women, including a Chairman/President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer.⁶¹ Replicating the patriarchally biased division of responsibilities in mainstream society, men assumed the leadership roles of President and Vice President, and women assumed the secretarial roles. The Association met frequently to discuss and decide ways and means of good order and progress for the Allawah Grove community.⁶²

Helped only by the Native Welfare Council's suggestions, the Association redrafted rules for behaviour in the settlement (Examples included: prohibiting "two-up" and punishing persistent brawling with eviction)⁶³, before presenting these to a full meeting of the Progress Association for confirmation.⁶⁴ Unauthorized visitors to Allawah Grove had always posed a significant problem for the Council. Visitors contributed to overcrowding in huts and some visitors encouraged the residents to drink, gamble and engage in violent behaviours. With the introduction of the Progress Association visitors had to apply to the Committee for permission to enter the settlement.⁶⁵

In setting their own rules and punishing offenders, residents were seemingly conforming to the rules that had originally been set by the Council. Resisting the rules meant turning against your own people. Resistance to a dominant "other" was, therefore, effectively made redundant. At least that was the theory. In 1963, five families caused a crisis and the Council was forced to take charge, proceeding to evict them. As a result the Progress Association lost confidence in their ability to control the community.⁶⁶ The Council interfered again in December 1964, when, as a result of their intervention, Allawah Grove was gazetted as an institution under Section four of the Department's *Native Welfare Act*. Their motivation for doing so was to relieve the residents of the embarrassment associated with having to order a misbehaving relative to leave.⁶⁷

⁶¹ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 3 (Nov 1961).

⁶² *Allawah News*, 1, no. 7 (Aug-Nov 1962).

⁶³ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 7 (Aug-Nov 1962).

⁶⁴ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 8 (Dec 1962 – Jan 1963).

⁶⁵ *Bebilwongai*, 1 (Nov 1961).

⁶⁶ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 10 (June-July 1963).

⁶⁷ *Allawah News*, 3, no. 3 (Dec 1964 – Jan 1965).

Toogood used the Progress Association as a vehicle to promote all forms of self-empowerment. Residents printed their own newspaper *Bebilwongai* (meaning “People’s Talk”), and organised their own sporting teams and educational and recreational activities. Introduction of a financial saving plan enabled the Association to raise funds to pay for various needs and wants in the community.⁶⁸

Bebilwongai was established on the premise that it would provide Allawah Grove residents with the opportunity to have some input into the running of their community. In the knowledge that residents would be far more likely to read a newspaper that belonged to them, the Council came to use *Bebilwongai* as a tool to inculcate residents with mainstream values. In it, the Kindergarten Director, social worker, various organizations working among Allawah Grove residents, the Department of Native Welfare and Progress Association Committee members praised, chastised and inspired the residents.

Bebilwongai and the Progress Association provided the residents with a forum for making suggestions to improve the Allawah Grove community. Early in the Association’s establishment the Committee decided that they might be able to handle rent collection better than the Council could. A resident was appointed rent collector, and a noticeable improvement in rent collections was observed.⁶⁹ The Association also erected a communal vegetable garden with the aim of familiarising residents with growing vegetables in their own backyards.⁷⁰

The Progress Association was created specifically to “advance” the Allawah Grove residents. An issue of *Allawah News* clearly stated: “The development of this community group is the crux of the advancement of the project. Much depends on how their officers and members can become aware of the need of taking responsibility to improve their own affairs”.⁷¹ The available information seems to suggest that views of committee members were consistent with those of assimilationists.

⁶⁸ *Bebilwongai*, 1 (Nov 1961).

⁶⁹ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 3 (Nov 1961).

⁷⁰ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 7 (Feb – May 1963).

⁷¹ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 7 (Aug-Nov 1962).

Six weeks after the commencement of the Progress Association, the first President, Chris Bodney, informed *Bebilwongai* readers: "In the last six weeks since this committee has been formed there have been some wonderful changes at Allawah Grove, and also in the people themselves. The gambling has stopped and we have taken steps to reduce drinking".⁷² Thus, he makes a direct link between the existence of the Association and a decline in behaviours considered by the Council to be undesirable. He goes on to say "slowly but surely we are winning our people from these bad habits to a better way of life".⁷³

Mr D. Kickett, the second President of the Allawah Grove Progress Association, wrote in *Bebilwongai*:

We have nothing to be proud of, us people of mixed blood. We should be the ones to pave the way and start setting the good example for our people who are way back there, so they will advance forward and take their place in our community and be recognised as citizens of the present day.⁷⁴

Kickett's statement is significant for it suggests that it was not only the mainstream population that were attempting to assimilate the Aboriginal population, but the people themselves. He has adopted assimilationist language to describe Allawah Grove residents' current position in society, and cites this as justification for them undergoing assimilation. Kickett equates citizenship with "advancing forward". His use of the phrase "to be recognised as citizens of the present day" reflects a belief in the existence of stages of civilisation and an acknowledgement that this was the criteria mainstream society required Aboriginal people to satisfy for citizenship. Aboriginal culture was less developed and so did not belong in today's society. If Aboriginal people wanted to become citizens of the "present day" they had to discard their own way of life and replace it with another's. Kickett's statement shows the indoctrinating effect of being submerged in a society where equality and citizenship was for some of its members not a given, but an achievement.

⁷² *Bebilwongai* 1, Nov 1961).

⁷³ *Bebilwongai* 1, Nov 1961).

⁷⁴ *Bebilwongai*, 9, (Mar 1963).

The transition from “fringe-dweller” to “citizen” was the subject of the Progress Association’s first vice president, D. Davies’ speech at a meeting of the Western Australian Anthropology Society in 1961. Davies was reported to have spoken about the difficulties a “fringe-dweller” encountered in moving to a house in the suburbs.⁷⁵ In another speech he stated: “It was white people who brought them into the city when they weren’t civilised, having been provided with no education. What could they be expected to do?”⁷⁶ Both speeches suggest that Davies had been influenced by the Council’s belief that Aboriginal people required education in this intermediary stage between “fringe-dweller” and “citizen”. Because “White” people had caused the situation, it was their responsibility to provide the education.

Ruth Kickett, Secretary of the Allawah Grove Progress Association makes a direct link between training provided at Allawah Grove and an improvement in the residents’ lifestyles:

I know that Allawah Grove will be a good place to live in, and that is for sure. People out here are taking an interest in their home life and every householder is looking forward to their workshop, which is well on its way. They know that when the workshop is finished, great opportunities will be theirs, and I for one think that this will prove to people that we are not such hopeless cases as people think we are.⁷⁷

Kickett assumes that every resident shared her enthusiasm for participating in the activities provided at Allawah Grove. Or was this her way of encouraging the residents *to* participate?

The Committee provided an ideal medium for sending powerful messages to the residents about the best way to live life. When a resident called for an end to gambling or drunken behaviour, he/she was implying that he/she believed in the ideal. The authority aspect was removed, and resistance was reduced.

⁷⁵ *Bebilwongai*, 6 (June – July 1962).

⁷⁶ *Bebilwongai*, 6 (June – July 1962).

⁷⁷ *Bebilwongai* 9, March 1963).

Charlotte Ridgeway, an American Social Worker visiting Australia with the Adult Education Board, attended a meeting of the Progress Association: "I am familiar with the history of Allawah Grove and I feel encouraged because I can see the beginning of progress towards community development which is never a quick easy thing to achieve".⁷⁸ Assimilationists could only see community development in terms of development towards the end goal of Australian citizenship. Aboriginal communities were not considered to be developed communities for Aboriginal people were inferior.

The Native Welfare Council had two aims. One was to train male and female residents in their respective roles, so that the two sexes could together establish a successful life in mainstream society. Another was to enhance residents' ability to participate as citizens in the community, with Adult Education Classes and the Progress Association directed at both male and female residents. The men who assumed leadership positions in the Progress Association Committee gained valuable skills from this citizenship training and exhibited strong leadership qualities. But the majority of men were not given this opportunity. Competency in public speaking was strongly correlated with holding a leadership position in the Progress Association. As a leader, a resident was required to speak publicly on behalf of Allawah Grove. Experience gained in doing this, in turn, improved the resident's public speaking skills. So, it was a case of the competent becoming more competent and the less competent failing to improve on account of being denied opportunities in which to develop their skills.

Female residents might have been deprived of leadership roles within the Progress Association, but the comprehensive training they received from the Friends far surpassed the training for male residents and was more egalitarian based. Availability of employment for "White" males meant they did not have time to devote to voluntary service, and so Allawah Grove male residents missed out on the invaluable voluntary assistance that the female residents received. Lack of assistance reduced the potential for male residents to develop the skills needed for employment, which in turn created high unemployment at Allawah Grove. In the press appeals were made to the public to provide Aboriginal men with regular employment, with the Commonwealth

⁷⁸ *Allawah News*, 1, no. 6, (May-July 1962).

Employment Service trying to do the same, but lack of available employment, prejudice and stereotypical attitudes worked against this.

High unemployment meant a large number of males were both unable to support their families financially, and there was an increased likelihood they would engage in undesirable behaviours. This disrupted the functional nature of the nuclear family and, as became apparent with the closure of Allawah Grove, threatened the very basis for its existence. As Hansen observed in 1967: "The increasing number of ...unmarried mothers at the Grove is defeating the ultimate aim of educating and assimilating the family as a unit, for eventual position in the wider society".⁷⁹ The objective to make Aboriginal families like families in the mainstream was ironically inhibited by widespread subscription to this family pattern in mainstream society.

⁷⁹ R.J. Hansen, p. 38.

Chapter Five: The closure of the Allawah Grove Training Settlement and an assessment of this experiment in assimilation.

Allawah Grove's closure highlighted the unequal outcomes of training programmes for women compared with those for men. After visiting Allawah Grove in 1962, Frank Gare commented on the high number of male residents dependent on Commonwealth benefits: "So I have come to the conclusion that the main thing wrong with Allawah Grove is its menfolk...No man can get real enjoyment or satisfaction out of his life if he comes to depend on others to support him". He admitted, "...unskilled work in Perth is not easy to come by at the moment" but still attributed most of the blame to the resident's laziness and "victim mentality". Gare urged the male residents to gain financial independence for their families and themselves.¹

Allawah Grove closed as a result of the Department of Native Welfare failing to produce the required number of houses for residents who were deemed ready for assimilation into mainstream society. According to Elsie Gare, only two houses were provided for Allawah Grove residents in eight years,² with only one more house made available each year from 1965 onwards.³ In addition, buildings and facilities, that the Department had promised to maintain at Allawah Grove, were in desperate need of repair. As the land was held on a twenty-eight day lease only, the Council felt they could not justify making the necessary repairs to the huts without security of tenure.⁴ They also believed it was pointless continuing to operate as a training settlement, if the Department wasn't prepared to provide the next step in the training process.⁵

In November 1967, the Council threatened to withdraw its services from Allawah Grove if the Department did not fulfil its obligations. This played into the Department's hands, which had been looking for an excuse to close down Allawah Grove ten years earlier. The Department responded by asking for time to build homes for "suitable tenants".⁶

¹ *Bebilwongai*, 5 (Mar-April 1962).

² Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

³ *Allawah News*, 3, no. 4 (Nov 1965).

⁴ *Aboriginal Welfare News*, 1968, 7, no. 2.

⁵ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

⁶ S. Delmege, p. 172.

They defended criticism for the move by claiming that the decision to close Allawah Grove was the Council's as it was they who "decided to terminate their activities".⁷

The Department's decision to close down Allawah Grove took the Council by surprise. New homes had to be found for Allawah Grove residents. Elsie Gare was asked by the Department to assess which families would be capable of maintaining a home in the mainstream community. She judged eleven families would adjust to suburban living while the other seven would probably need quite a bit of supervision and that some would not make the transition. In a letter to the Director of the Child Welfare Department, she wrote:

Allawah Grove is to close by November 30th this year. In some cases families will be able to adjust to suburban living but what of the children whose parents have not made the grade? There are strong family ties and separating the children from parents for institutional care does not seem to be the correct answer.⁸

The closure of Allawah Grove in 1968 had far reaching implications for the families living there. Not only would the community be broken up and people moved, but the families themselves were at risk as there was a threat that some would have their children taken from them. Within the assimilationist paradigm, there were families who were considered not yet ready to enter mainstream society. Living in mainstream society would put these families at a higher risk of attracting interference from government welfare departments, which removed children from their parents on the grounds of an assimilationist perspective of neglect.

Donna Pickett contrasted the freedom experienced at Allawah Grove with life in mainstream society: "They allowed us to walk and talk, not looking behind your back all the time. Out there, you have to, to survive".⁹ Helen Lawrence expressed similar sentiments: "There was a lot of discrimination at the time and Native Welfare was

⁷ S. Delmege, p. 173.

⁸ E.M. Gare to Mr McCall, 5 June 1968, Allawah Grove general correspondence, ACC 1733, AN 1/25, file 38/69, SROWA, Perth.

⁹ Donna Pickett, personal communication, 2 August 2002.

always breathing down your neck, had to always tow the line, really scared all the time. All police were potential child stealers".¹⁰

Adding to Elsie Gare's concerns about the residents' capability of living in mainstream society, were the implications of the unequal outcomes of male and female training programmes. Once again, she felt compelled to write to the Director of Child Welfare:

Do you know of an institution where the mothers and children could be accommodated? I think the fathers should fend for themselves and earn the right to visit their families by contributing to their support. Has your department any plans for family care centres where the mothers could be employed to care for their children under supervision?¹¹

Prior to Allawah Grove closing, if individual families wished to live in mainstream society, they had to prove themselves capable. The female of the pair had to show she could maintain a home and care for her children; the male had to be engaged in regular paid employment.¹² When Allawah Grove closed, the Council was not able to enforce this criteria as the residents had to leave Allawah Grove regardless of whether they had a regular source of income.

Gare had embarked on the female residents' training with the objective of keeping the family intact, with a male breadwinner able to financially support them. High unemployment among Allawah Grove males forced Gare to reconsider this initial objective. If female residents were to effectively exercise their homemaking and childrearing responsibilities outside the Grove, alternative arrangements would have to be made. Gare's proposal was quite controversial given that it challenged the established institution of the nuclear family, which, in the 1960s, was considered central to the creation of a homogenous, harmonious society.

¹⁰ Helen Lawrence, personal communication, 31 August 2002.

¹¹ E.M. Gare to Mr McCall, Director of the Child Welfare Department, n.d., MN 1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

¹² The high unemployment rate then could have been another factor reducing the number of families who left Allawah Grove.

Directing training at preparing people for life in a nuclear family was consistent with government policy, which, in the 1950s and sixties, came to focus not on separating the generations to achieve assimilation, but on keeping them together. Aboriginal “citizens” became eligible for welfare benefits – wives gained access to child endowment, husbands to unemployment benefits. Children of “citizens” automatically assumed their citizenship and families were dispersed throughout the metropolitan area in houses designed only to accommodate a nuclear family. Missions and Government Reserves, which had previously been used to train Aboriginal people as separate individuals, began to be closed down. The Department of Native Welfare treated people as individuals and defined the nuclear family as the primary social unit, ignoring communal, cultural and extended family contexts within which individuals live their lives. Separating Aboriginal people as nuclear families placed the Aboriginal communal identity at risk of being destroyed.

The Department’s new approach to assimilation put the Council’s plans for Allawah Grove as a training settlement at odds with government policy. By training Aboriginal people together, the Native Welfare Council was not immersing them in a “White” environment, but in an Aboriginal one. This, according to the Department, would not encourage assimilation, but rather the development of a distinct Allawah Grove community that rejected mainstream society.

Certainly, many Allawah Grove residents did become accustomed to life at Allawah Grove. It was a haven from the discrimination, enforced separation and culturally insensitive practices that characterised living in mainstream society. Describing Allawah Grove’s closure, Robert Bropho, a former Allawah Grove resident, distinguished between life at the settlement and life in the mainstream community:

It was like closing the gates of heaven and opening the gates of hell for Aboriginal people, opening the doors to State housing, opening the doors to all the prejudice neighbours, the tormentment of black brainwashed State Housing Officers who’d knock at your door and tell you that a complaint has been laid to the state housing by a neighbour.¹³

¹³ R. Bropho, *Fringe-dweller* (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-op Limited, 1980), p. 40.

Mainstream society was not a welcoming place for Aboriginal people in the 1960s. An article in the *West Australian*, in 1965, discussed the attitudes of people in the community towards Aboriginal neighbours. Reflecting an assimilationist mindset, many claimed that it was not the colour of the people that mattered but their behaviour. They would accept Aboriginal neighbours if the Department strictly supervised them. Others feared that Aboriginal neighbours would depreciate the value of their property.¹⁴ Acceptance of Aboriginal people in the community was conditional on restriction of their freedom - hardly conducive to them becoming equal citizens.

Prejudice in the community and the culturally insensitive nature of housing plans meant Aboriginal people could not just “blend” into society. The Department failed to acknowledge this, instead pointing the blame at Aboriginal people and instituting surveillance over them to ensure they “behaved”. Ironically policies that were supposed to be making them “equals” actually served to undermine their equality.

The lack of assistance available to Aboriginal people in the mainstream community worked against former Allawah Grove residents retaining the skills that would have helped them to assimilate. The Department’s assimilation policy dictated that Aboriginal people have access to goods and services on the same basis as other Australians. This assumed they were in a position to access these services. Little consideration was given to Aboriginal people’s educational disadvantage, extended family networks or their all too frequent encounters with discrimination. Providing the same services to all resulted not in equal, but in unequal outcomes. According to Donna Pickett: “Without the support of the community they ‘forgot’ a lot of what they had learnt at the Grove”.¹⁵

Allawah Grove was an attractive option for Aboriginal people who didn’t wish to join mainstream society. Accommodation at Allawah Grove was fairly basic, but at least there was sanitation, electricity, and cooking and washing facilities. Helen Lawrence said: “I didn’t mind the living conditions but I didn’t have anything to compare it

¹⁴ The *West Australian*, 19 August 1965.

¹⁵ Donna Pickett, personal communication, 2 August 2002.

with”.¹⁶ The women in the bark painting class were interviewed by a journalist who reported: “One woman remarked: ‘Every woman here would like to live in a better house’.” She went on to complain of cramped quarters, lack of heating, blankets and fuel, distance to shops and absence of social life at Allawah Grove. “Coping with eight children in an unlined draughty house and walking a mile to the nearest shop are difficulties which face most of the women at Allawah Grove”. The superintendent, Peter Coleman, responded bluntly: ‘they don’t complain. Its better than sleeping under a bridge and that is their only alternative’.”¹⁷

Those women who decided to leave Allawah Grove went to obtain a better quality house and not because they considered the Anglo-Australian life to be more desirable than their own. The misconception of their motives arose because assimilation was understood as a progressive adaptation to European life: the “fringe-dweller” was a “transitional phase”. If residents wished to leave Allawah Grove, they had to convince the Council that they were capable of living independently in mainstream society. Because the Council only encouraged and did not coerce the residents to participate in the activities provided, a resident’s decision to participate was thus considered evidence that they were “progressing” towards citizenship.

The outcome of the Allawah Grove experiment, in fact, challenged assimilationist assumptions, revealing that the “fringe-dweller” represented a choice and not a “transitional phase”. Prior to living at Allawah Grove, the residents camped on the fringes of the Bassendean, Success Hill, and Guildford townsites. Exposed to the elements and without electricity, water and sanitation, this act indicated a strong desire to run their own affairs and to resist joining mainstream society. Some residents had skills that would have enabled them to live successfully in mainstream society, but they had not embraced this life.

Both Hansen (1967) and Oxer (1963) observed that the residents identified themselves as socially and physically distinct from “White” people. This encouraged the development of a “sub-culture” based on their common Aboriginal background but

¹⁶ Helen Lawrence, personal communication, 31 August 2002.

¹⁷ *The West Australian*, 10 June 1967.

incorporating many aspects of the “White” society.¹⁸ Hansen observed that Allawah Grove residents’ general norms of behaviour differed from those of mainstream society, and while they spoke in English and used Western tools and appliances, the meanings ascribed to each were peculiar to Allawah Grove.¹⁹ Oxe concluded that Allawah Grove had to develop a sense of timing so that the residents could be channelled into the suburbs when they reached a suitable standard, before they considered themselves fixtures in Allawah Grove.²⁰ Writing during the assimilation era, Oxe seemed to share the Council’s belief in stages of transition to full citizenship. She believed long-term residency disrupted progression from one stage to the next, and consequently, the achievement of assimilation.

Supposedly, all residents needed were opportunities, friendly administration, and the support of fellow Aboriginal people to give them confidence to develop the necessary skills for mainstream life. The implication was that it was these very concessions that led many of the residents to prefer the lifestyle provided at Allawah Grove to the prejudiced, less understanding, heavily regulated mainstream society. Thus, the Council’s plan to entice the residents to assimilate backfired, making Allawah Grove’s closure not so much an impediment to assimilation as an impediment to the residents’ vision of a permanent Aboriginal community at Allawah Grove.

Allawah Grove offered what mainstream society could not. Elsie Gare and Margaret Clements’ approach to training drew similarities with that of women housing managers in South Africa, which Jennifer Robinson analysed in her article: ‘Power as friendship’. Robinson attributed the methods used by these housing managers to Octavia Hill. Octavia Hill believed women could use friendly interactions to transform socio-economically disadvantaged, often black, residents into citizens. She wrote: “The success of the project of improving tenants depended, I suggest, on exactly the humanising interactions which makes the Octavia Hill system of management seem so very out of place in the South African context”.²¹

¹⁸ R. Oxe, pp. 169 – 170.

¹⁹ R.J. Hansen, pp. 31-32.

²⁰ R. Oxe, pp. 169 – 170.

²¹ J. Robinson, ‘Power as friendship: spatiality, femininity and “noisy” surveillance’, J. Sharp, P. Routledge, C. Philio & R. Paddison, *Entanglements of power: geographies of domination/resistance* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 67- 92.

On missions and reserves Aboriginal people were typically treated like clones, as “half castes” and “quarter castes”, as people who didn’t matter. At Allawah Grove residents were treated like real people - as members of an individual family, as individuals with different talents and interests. This conformed to assimilation theorist and politician Hasluck’s approach to assimilation, which emphasised that Aboriginal people had to be encouraged to see themselves as individuals and not as members of a group.²²

The female residents’ association with their children, in particular, enabled the Friends to identify with them as women with children of their own. This recognition significantly influenced the women’s training programme, making “training” less like training because the residents participated in activities that the Friends, as homemakers, child-carers and hostesses, were involved in themselves.

Residents’ desire to continue living within a community saw many attempt to regain what they had at Allawah Grove. Some moved to reserves in the country so that they could feel safe and free and be part of a communal family.²³ In 1974, a group of Aboriginal people, including several former residents of Allawah Grove, petitioned the Department for the establishment of a new settlement similar to Allawah Grove, although they hoped that those setting it up would have learned from past mistakes.²⁴

A former Allawah Grove resident believed the decision to close Allawah Grove in 1968 was a mistake. Though, she said the project would not work now because of the high level of tension in the Aboriginal community and young people’s lack of respect for their elders.²⁵ Her statement is particularly significant because it indicates that she saw Allawah Grove as a functioning Aboriginal community and not as a training settlement designed to facilitate the assimilation of its Aboriginal residents. Either this was the impression that she got from the project or she simply chose to see it in this way. Bropho’s comments reflect a similar perspective: “Allawah Grove was the right idea of

²² T. Rowse, ‘The modesty of the state: Hasluck and the anthropological critics of assimilation’, T. Stannage, K. Saunders, & R. Nile, *Paul Hasluck in Australian history: civic personality and public life* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1998), p. 122.

²³ Donna Pickett, personal communication, 2 August 2002.

²⁴ M. Howard, p. 28.

²⁵ Anonymous, personal communication, 9 September 2002.

how Aboriginal people should live, there was only one thing wrong with it, it was run by 'White' ideas".²⁶

Donna Pickett attributed many of the problems that Aboriginal people experience today to the closure of places like Allawah Grove, and the government's poor handling of Aboriginal people since. "What we had back then, we haven't got now. Families are segregated now. People have lost respect, the trust. They don't want to own you. They don't want to know you. They're judgemental, being racist against their own race, being violent".²⁷ As the above comments show, residents saw Allawah Grove as *being* conducive to harmonious living – it was only their definition of harmonious living that differed.

There were, however, "some residents who fitted into suburbia well and loved the feeling of having a house and making it beautiful".²⁸ Allawah Grove could offer these residents opportunities that they were denied in mainstream society. Mr and Mrs Corunna expressed their gratitude to the Council:

It has been five months since we moved into a flat at Allawah Grove. We had nowhere to go. We could not rent a house because of our colour, and our only chance of having a roof over our heads was to come to Allawah. To our relief Mr Coleman let us have a place of our very own to live in. We were able to buy furniture, also grow a garden and do many little things when you have a place that is secure and you know you won't be on the move.²⁹

Mr and Mrs Bandry showed similar enthusiasm: "We are very pleased to be going into our new home – it is all so very nice. We think this will give some of the others a chance to come up and have the same opportunity. We are looking forward to putting in a lovely garden as I do love flowers, and Balga is a lovely suburb to live in".³⁰

²⁶ R. Bropho, p. 35. Bropho currently presides over an Aboriginal community in Lockridge.

²⁷ Donna Pickett, personal communication, 2 August 2002.

²⁸ Elsie Gare interviewed by J. Gothard.

²⁹ *Allawah Newsletter*, 1, no. 3 (May 1967), MN1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

³⁰ *Allawah Newsletter*, 1, no. 3 (May 1967), MN1246, ACC 3841, file 75, BLWAH, Perth.

Allawah Grove could provide Aboriginal families not wishing to live in a communal setting with a means to obtain housing in the mainstream community. Lack of interest in communal living meant it is likely that these Allawah Grove residents more readily settled into mainstream community living. Consequently, they wouldn't have attracted the same attention from government welfare departments.

Ultimately then it was the residents who decided the purpose that Allawah Grove would have for them. The Council and the Department mistook the residents' *choice* for *ability*, making some families appear successful and the majority as "failures". Basically, the distinction between those who "succeeded" at Allawah Grove and those who "failed" was a distinction between some residents' desire to live as a communal family and other residents' desire to live in the mainstream community. This is clearly articulated in Clements' statement: "Well some settled in quite well. Others got very lonely".³¹

The Allawah Grove experiment revealed that most of the residents integrated many of the skills they were taught at Allawah Grove with their pre-existing way of life. This challenged Elkin's assumption that Aboriginal culture could not possibly co-exist alongside the mainstream culture. He believed the two conflicted so greatly that it was impossible for an individual to integrate the two ways of life.³² Following their stay at Allawah Grove all of the former residents interviewed obtained a western education, housing, employment, and pursued crafts they had learnt at the Grove. But they also continued to exhibit strong extended familial and communal bonds and a commitment to assisting in the welfare of their people.

Allawah Grove volunteer, Lorna Dickson felt proud that a former Allawah Grove resident had been inspired by the Friends Centre to start a community effort in Gosnells helping women to make clothes and learning to cook.³³ Similarly, Helen Lawrence told of how she was recently asked by a group of women, many who lived at Allawah Grove, if she would lead a quilting class.³⁴ All the residents interviewed believed their experience at Allawah Grove helped them in later life. One of the women commented

³¹ Margaret Clements interviewed by J. Gothard.

³² A.P. Elkin, *Aborigines and Citizenship*, p. 27.

³³ Lorna Dickson interviewed by R. Jamieson.

³⁴ Helen Lawrence, personal communication, 31 August 2002.

that the Friends' philosophy influenced her in her current line of work at a domestic violence centre. She stated: "we have to work with individuals, families, and communities, it's a long term process".³⁵

She completed a university degree prior to undertaking this occupation. Another former Grove resident also resumed her education later on in life "for [her] own benefit and the kids. I just wanted to do things". Perhaps, this can be attributed to her belief that Allawah Grove "made you more outgoing and look at things differently".³⁶ Education had certainly always been stressed at the Grove. Allawah Grove influenced one of the women for different reasons: "I didn't want to go back there and live like that...spurred you on to do better than this". She later built on her training, studying at university and establishing a role model for all her children who are following suit.³⁷

Through participation in the Progress Association Allawah Grove residents learnt how to manage a community. The Allawah Grove Progress Association was reproduced outside the settlement in September 1973, when a progress association was formed in Coolbellup. The association consisted of a number of Aboriginal families who, in 1969, were allocated State Housing Commission homes in the suburb of Coolbellup. These included several former Allawah Grove residents – some of whom had been active at that time assisting officers of the Department and the Allawah Grove Administration with their work in Allawah Grove. The members decided to concentrate on acquiring funds from the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority for an Aboriginal centre but the Department was not particularly supportive of this new organization and made no funds available to them.³⁸

Residents' exposure to the knowledge and skills of mainstream society enabled them to make real choices about how to live their lives. A democracy should value free choice with all its citizens in a position to be able to embrace a range of options. An Aboriginal person's decision to reject mainstream society should not have been made out of necessity because they lack the knowledge and skills to participate in it. Hence, Allawah Grove could never have failed as a training settlement; nor could it have succeeded. For

³⁵ Donna Pickett, personal communication, 2 August 2002.

³⁶ Anonymous, personal communication, 9 September 2002.

³⁷ Helen Lawrence, personal communication, 31 August 2002.

³⁸ M. Howard, pp. 90 -91.

the very reason that in giving people skills you also empower them and open them up to a world of possibilities. Skills were not necessarily used in the way that the Council had intended them to be used, often utilised in Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal organizations, to fight for preservation of their identity, their rights as original landowners and their right to culturally appropriate services. Assimilationists thought that by giving Aboriginal people the skills to participate in mainstream society, they were effectively also giving them citizenship rights. What they didn't anticipate was that Aboriginal people would actually use these skills to exercise their citizenship rights as self-determining individuals.

Respect for Aboriginal people's communal identity was difficult to achieve because human rights were conceptualised in Western democracies as rights belonging to the undifferentiated individual. Human rights did not extend to the rights of groups.³⁹ In Aboriginal society an individual's place was largely defined by membership to the group. So, while an Aboriginal person's individual rights were defended, their right to participate in society as a member of a group was not. Assimilation policy was a product of this. A homogenous society in which everyone had the same way of life would offer everyone the same rights, except minority groups. They would have to forgo their human rights as members of a group in order to have their "human rights" as an individual protected.

Assimilation policies did not achieve equality for Aboriginal people. It was Aboriginal people's resistance to assimilation policies that enabled them to attain equality. The Native Welfare Council saw Allawah Grove as a communal training facility where Aboriginal families could be facilitated in their "transition" from "fringe-dweller" to "Australian citizen". The Department of Native Welfare viewed the communal nature of Allawah Grove as working against the assimilation of Aboriginal people. And for Allawah Grove residents, Allawah Grove represented a compromise: allowing them to both retain their communal identity and to live in adequate conditions. Incompatible interests prevented all of the parties from achieving their objectives.

³⁹ D. Johnston, 'Native rights as collective rights. A question of group self-preservation', W. Kymlicka, *The rights of minority cultures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 179 – 201.

The government's assimilation policy and the training provided by the Native Welfare Council at Allawah Grove achieved outcomes opposite to their intended effect. Both were designed to see Aboriginal people disappear as a group. Yet it was this blind subscription to assimilation theory that resulted in it backfiring. Assimilation was an ambiguous term. It could be interpreted quite crudely as working towards the eventual disappearance of Aboriginality or, in a more liberal sense, as the promise of equality. Both were incompatible with one another. By treating an individual as if he/she were merely the product of a "transitional phase" on the way to becoming "White", you strip this individual of the self-confidence necessary to embrace the opportunities presented to them in the first place. On the other hand, if you give an individual equality, you give them the choice as to how they live their life. Neglecting to resolve the contradictions existing within the policy's framework, the policy was guaranteed to fail.

Another contradiction within assimilation policy was that to be given the opportunity for equality, Aboriginal people had to be firstly racially defined. This was constantly denied. The move away from making overt racial distinctions for the purpose of making policies, to covertly making these distinctions was perhaps more dangerous than the former. When an individual's disadvantage is explained by racial difference, it's almost written in stone. But if disadvantage was attributed to social differences, then it could be overcome.

Likewise, assimilation policy was premised on all humans being equal, yet an Aboriginal person could not achieve equality without first adopting the dominant Anglo-Australian way of life. The requirement that Aboriginal people adopt the Anglo-Australian way of life was not seen as a requirement because it rested on the assumption that Aboriginal people were desperate to assimilate. This same assumption led to the conclusion that Aboriginal people's assimilation would be rapid. The Department assumed assimilation would more or less happen immediately upon an Aboriginal family receiving a house in mainstream society. The Council saw the "transition" from "fringe-dweller" to "citizen" as considerably more difficult, and estimated that with training complete assimilation would take three to four years. The belief that assimilation could be achieved in one generation reflects assimilationists' conviction that Aboriginal people saw the Anglo-Australian way of life as superior. But the validity of assimilation theory was challenged when the majority of Allawah Grove

residents did not desire to live in mainstream society, but instead wished to live at Allawah Grove permanently.

The Council's objective "to develop family life to the stage where a group consisting of a man, wife and several children can learn to create a home, to be later transposed into a suburb or a country town" was not achieved by most residents, despite the tireless efforts made by Cyril and Elsie Gare, Margaret Clements, Celia Taylor, Tom Toogood, Peter Coleman, Hew Roberts, and several volunteers. The site for women's training – the Friends Centre – enjoyed relative success in their attempts to teach women to sew, cook, to actively participate in their children's education, and to develop skills for casual employment and socialisation. Training for male residents was far less comprehensive and failed to prepare them for their role as "breadwinners". The communal environment of Allawah Grove led the majority of residents to wish to continue living there as a community. Consequently, for many residents, the nuclear family – the key to assimilating Aboriginal people into society – lost its relevance. Therefore, the impact that the Allawah Grove Training Settlement had on its residents was opposite to the impact intended, and it is this that allows us to learn so much from the project about assimilationist goals in the 1950s and 1960s.

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