

Katukutu Employment Hostel, Mt Lawley

“Mr. and Mrs. R. McKeich began the original Katukutu in 1958 in a rented home consisting of seven bedrooms, lounge, a small kitchen bathroom and toilet on a quarter acre site. Because of increasing financial hardship and inadequate facilities, they abandoned their independent venture and assumed control of the former Alvan House in 1961. At that stage, Alvan House consisted of eight bedrooms, dining room, large kitchen, two toilets and two bedrooms for the houseparents. Later alterations increased the resident capacity to fourteen and created a small office.

McKeich’s stated policy was

‘...to assist assimilation by providing a “home” of sufficiently high quality, and by demanding standards of behaviour approaching those commonly accepted as “white”. (McKeich, 1961)’.

One of his co-workers elaborated that the hostel was intended to establish

1. ‘High standards in health and hygiene; cleanliness and tidiness.
2. Courtesy and consideration of other people, notably staff and employers.
3. Particular respect for employers; regularity in going to work.
4. Regularity in church attendance.
5. Responsibility; sensible behaviour.
6. Co-operation.
7. Respect of property. (Coke, 1963:39).’

The fundamentalist Baptist approach in hostels...is further evidenced in Coke’s comments concerning the qualities desired of staff at Katukutu:

‘Persons must also have an interest in an evangelical church and should be committed to the Lord Jesus Christ. This latter characteristic is paramount since it is the belief of members of the Council that “the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and example is an integral part of Katukutu”. No work of this kind is of real value, or offers an answer to Aboriginal needs unless it is founded upon and operates through faith in Jesus Christ. (Coke, 1963:44).’

The McKeich family continued to manage Katukutu until 1964, when the hostel was taken over by [another family who] spent a four year term at the hostel and their work was relieved temporarily by mission workers from Marribank [see entry] until the present [1971] houseparents...migrated from New South Wales specifically to manage Katukutu.

The original aim of the hostel (i.e. when it was transferred to the Baptist Union) has remained basically the same, although the present houseparents are said to adopt a more fundamentalist line.” *Wilson and Robinson (1971) Aboriginal Hostels in Perth: A Comparative Survey*

Wilson and Robinson observed in 1971 that residents at Katukutu had to “attend a Baptist Church and although the houseparent claims that

‘we don’t take them to church to turn them into Baptists but to get them into an ordinary way of life’

there is little doubt that his conception of ‘...an ordinary way of life’ is synonymous with a Baptist way of life.” *Wilson and Robinson (1971) Aboriginal Hostels in Perth: A Comparative Survey*