

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASHLEY, YOUTH JUSTICE AND DETENTION IN TASMANIA MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON TUESDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2007.

Mr MIKE DUVAL-STEWART, CHANCE ON MAIN, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Hall) - Thank you for your submission, which is number 10. We have basically 30 minutes, Mike. If you would like to elaborate on your submission, I will then give the committee the opportunity to ask some questions.

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - I have brought along some paperwork for you to look at at your leisure; I am happy to table those and leave them here. There are some brochures from Chance on Main, our final evaluation report to the Federal Government, and also a copy of our business plans, so there are two of each of those there, and several brochures.

My reason for being here is that I run a program in Moonah, in the City of Glenorchy, called Chance on Main. Chance on Main is a program for young people at risk - at the high end of the scale - of offending, of reoffending, of going into detention, of sexual assault, abuse, of dropping out of school and training, and of homelessness and the like. So we work with a lot of young people who have not had a lot of luck in their lives, you might say, and this program has been running now for around two years. It was originally funded by the Community Crime Prevention Program through the Attorney-General's department in the Federal Government, and we have only just received some top-up funding at the end of last year; we came within a week of closing our doors.

We work with young people. Our original core business was with those aged 14 to 19. We have since, after research and running a pilot program with Moonah Primary School, increased that to young people aged from 10 to 19. One of the programs we run is called Handshake P-Plate, which is for young people from year 6 who have been recognised as having difficulty in adjusting to grade, especially regarding literacy and numeracy, self-esteem issues and so forth. We ran the program again last year for a full term - that is the time for the program to run - and during that time, the teachers and parents could not believe the changes that took place in the six young people involved. It was extraordinary; we had trouble believing it actually, and we ran the program! One young gentleman who was considered to be at the bottom of the pecking order at the start of the program was at the top of that order at the end of the program. His self-esteem and gusto and self-belief had grown to such an extent that we actually had to stifle it a little bit, you know, pull it back a little bit and put some processes in place whereby he had a better understanding of his own power, if you like. So that program is again coming into place.

The programs we have had in place dealt in a lot of instances with young people on community service orders. A lot of these young people have either come out of or are about to go into Ashley or have, shall we say, the opportunity of not going into Ashley by doing their community service orders and coming to Chance on Main where they get to do things like woodwork and metalwork. We have a school link program through

which several young people have completed year 10 and gone on to college and further training. We had two instances where they were expelled from schools and we were able to re-engage them into mainstream school and complete year 10. Both of them now have full-time jobs, so what we are doing must be reasonably okay.

We have an 80 per cent-plus non-recidivism rate, so over 80 per cent of the young people who come through our program do not reoffend or have not reoffended in the two years since the program has been going. That is not to say that some young people will not reoffend and one of the things that we have in place is to ensure that we are there to support them if they should reoffend, because it is all very well to support them when things are going well, but where the support does not come in is when they are not doing very well, so we endeavour to ensure that does not happen and they have that support.

I was out until 10 o'clock last night with a young person who called me on my mobile and was in a bit of a crisis, so I spent about six hours with him last night. That is the kind of things we do, we link up. I spent four hours with a father and a son this morning and dad had just found out that the son was sexually assaulted between the ages of nine and twelve. Dad and son are having great difficulties in coming to terms with that, so we spent just on four hours with them this morning and they have made some incredible progress, just simply by having a mediator there and someone who cares. The hardest part about it is that I actually know the dad, so that made it a bit more difficult, but it was rather an emotional morning. However, they seemed to have a better understanding of what was going on. We put processes into place where the young person is linked up with the SASS, the Sexual Assault Support Service people, and gets personal counselling with that and for the family as well. So it is very important that we have those links in place. That is the kind of thing we do.

Chicks at Risk is another program we have, although we have had to change that name because Chicks at Risk was deemed to be politically incorrect or unsuitable. We won't go into that - it is a whole other argument - but the girls involved in the program were the ones who named it and these were five young girls in year 10 from Cosgrove -

Mr MARTIN - Who picked on that? Some rooster!

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - Terry, don't get me started!

Mrs JAMIESON - Some silly old chook.

Mr MARTIN - They were proud of the name.

Mrs JAMIESON - Absolutely!

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - It was actually a politician.

Anyway, these five young girls half-way through last year were talking about the \$4 000 they were going to get for having babies at the end of year 10 and those sorts of things, and they were a fair handful; one of them had been expelled - and that was one of the people we got back into school and is now going to college. Suffice it to say that after six months at Chance on Main one day a week they all completed year 10. The one who had been expelled went to TAFE and completed it there. One is going to TAFE to study

photography, one is going to part-time TAFE to do theatre makeup and is doing retail in years 11 and 12 - she enrolled herself in the college she wanted to go to - and the other two are going on to a different college as well - and none of them are pregnant.

They won a competition, they became involved with a competition for photographic art and structure, including their own personal stories, and they were selected nationally to travel with the particular show that highlights their photography, which is extraordinary for little old Tassie. Three of those five girls achieved that.

We also have a metalwork program for young guys. One of our trainers is a qualified boilermaker-welder and he creates a workshop environment and it is a workshop environment. It's cough-cough-spit-footy boots - it really is a workshop environment - but that's the real world and that is what we try to show them. They get there early enough in the morning to start at a reasonable time and they don't get a smoke break or anything until 10.30 a.m. for morning tea smoko. Then they break for lunch time, then afternoon tea and when they have finished afternoon tea then they clean up and it is all done.

We feed them; all of the participants at Chance on Main who come to the program are fed every day. The reason for that is that I can learn more about those young people in 30 minutes at lunch time while they are eating, listening to them squawk and carry on, than I can in 10 hours of counselling, and that helps us with our insight as to how we achieve our goals.

I will point out one thing, however; we had a young lady who came into our program - her name is Victoria - and Victoria came into our program and had a long history of drug abuse and many terrible things happening in her life. No-one else could engage this young woman, by the way - she had a lot of CSOs to do - but after a period of several weeks our female youth worker, Christine, was able to engage with her and a lot of wonderful things happened, to the point where they were doing mosaics. I am always complaining about them not cleaning up after themselves in the kitchen, so she did this mosaic saying 'Please Keep Clean' - it was absolutely fantastic - and told me that she would be back after the weekend to finish it off and she was doing a mirror for her mother. Unfortunately during that particular weekend there was a major crisis that happened in her life and Victoria took her own life, so it just shows how vulnerable these young people are.

I placed the mosaic in the kitchen above the sink with a memorial plaque of her name, Victoria Amanda Mills, for all the young people who knew her. We sat down and had huge sessions about how to deal with it but they all agreed in the end that they would respect her decision, because they respected her as a person so they would respect her decision. I think that is an outstanding level to come to.

Mutual respect, mutual obligation. A lot of the programs we have have the handshake attached to it; that is because I am a handshaker. I was a little wog immigrant kid who came to this country. I grew up in the Catholic orphanage system, have seen and had humanity at its worst inflicted on me and have also seen humanity at its best. I would like to state here and now, categorically, that humanity at its best is far more favourable. As I result, I am a handshaker, so I shake people's hands. A lot of people sort of wonder when they first meet me - 'Why does Mike always shake my hand?' - but they get used to

it after a while. When young people come in, I seek them out, shake their hand and say hello. Before they leave they shake my hand and say goodbye. The reason for that is it is contact without intimacy; it is about getting to know that comfort zone and so forth and the mutual obligation is, 'We'll bust our back for you if you bust your back for you', so that is what it is all about.

The programs we have had this year have had to be refined because of our lack of funding. We received \$113 000 from the Tasmanian Community Fund and we are also in the process now of applying for more money through the Federal and State governments through the illicit drugs program as well. At the end of last year we were one of only four programs in the entire country to receive the national Community Crime and Safety Prevention Award. That is recognition from the Federal Government that we are one of the four best programs of the type in the country, so that is a pat on the back for a little Tassie program as well.

CHAIR - Thanks very much for that, Mike, that was very enlightening. You talked about the current situation with the programs you are running out there so it is probably a little bit difficult to address our terms of reference in Ashley per se, but obviously one you might have more comment on is the alternative methods of sentencing for young offenders. You would have some views on that. Would you like to expand on those?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - Yes, most definitely. Michael Hill, who is the Deputy Chief Magistrate, also happens to be our patron, so every few months I get my head in front of the magistrates and talk to them about how we are going. Having young people being able to access a program like Chance on Main on a community service order basis is akin to their being sent to Chance on Main as part of an accountability factor with sentencing. It is very important when they come to Chance on Main that they want to be there. With Ashley they do not have a choice, while going to Chance on Main is a choice. Our saying there is 'It's your chance, make the choice'. If they come there as an alternative sentencing process, they have the opportunity not only to continue education or to relink with education but also perhaps to learn what is going on out in the real world, for instance as far as woodwork is concerned, metalwork and those sorts of things, art works.

We also have links with various other businesses that we can put young people into for work experience, so if they were to be alternatively sentenced, if you like, to a program like Chance on Main or given that option, that gives them a new direction - a whole other direction. My reason for being here today is perhaps to try to create that environment or such a program within the offences, if you like, of Ashley so they had that opportunity. Then, when they come out, they have that link back into the community, so there is not that, 'Okay, you've finished, shut the gate, you're out, off you go'. What we want to do is say, 'Okay, you've spent three months here, you've done this and this'. Then someone from Chance on Main in Hobart - and there is a program that is just starting called Lighthouse in Devonport which is actually a Chance on Main copy - links in with them and away they go. When they come out they have that link outside with somebody they have known inside and in that way they get the opportunity to further their skills, knowledge and ability to fit back into society. One of the things that I have noticed with the young people who come out is that they stick together because that is what they know. Their fellow former inmates have an understanding of what they have been through and what they are going through. In accordance, the very moment one of them

gets into trouble it is monkey see, monkey do; it is that lemming factor. My main reason for being here and making the submission today is so that something along those lines is created within Ashley so it can then be brought outside.

I have spoken also to Professor Rob White about this, the man in charge at UTas, and he has given me 110 per cent support.

CHAIR - Mike, you talk about mentors outside in the community; are you getting much support there?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - Yes, a lot of support. We have former professional basketball players and football coaches. I have been the sports chaplain at the Glenorchy footie club for the last couple of years and the senior coach there and a couple of other people involved in coaching in the community come to Chance on Main on a fairly regular basis and just stick their head in. It is a family mentoring role, if you like, just talk to the lads, have a chat. Michael Hill and Roger Woolley have been out -

Mr MARTIN - Business people?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - Business people call in. Businesses and so forth that have supported us are on our wall of fame wall. The young people paint their logo on for them. Everybody is willing to do that, not just by supplying us with stuff in kind but by helping to create pathways for these young people to find their way later on.

CHAIR - Have you had the local MLC there?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - Terry was there at the opening, and with all due respect, and I don't want to embarrass him, but Terry is probably one of the main reasons why Chance on Main exists.

Mr MARTIN - Thanks for the Dorothy Dixier, by the way.

Laughter.

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - David Bartlett and Graeme Sturges have been involved in it and have supported it.

Mr DEAN - How can Ashley be more involved with Chance on Main? Can it ensure that when they leave there that youth living in the south of the State can connect up with those at Devonport and programs in Launceston?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - It does fit within part of the thing with Ashley, but it is also a matter of us doing the work as well through one of our people coming up to Ashley and being involved in the program.

Mr DEAN - That is my next question.

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - That is where the link is formed, so they see that face. Young people have great bulldust barometers; they pick it up pretty quickly so they can tell if you are fair dinkum. My head is a bit of a reality factor; they see me and they understand

straightaway that I mean what I am talking about and I always will back up what I say. If I say I will do something and I find I can't do it then I will go to them and explain why and then find an alternative. The most important part is that mutual respect, and total honesty and trust. You develop that inside. They get to know you and then when they come out and have the opportunity of coming into the program on the outside they are far more inclined to do so because they know somebody there; they have that connection. That is the original premise of Whitelion - a mentor inside to link up with outside. We have just written a program called Guardian Angel for prisoners at Risdon.

Mrs JAMIESON - What is the optimum number in a group that you would work with? How many staff do you have?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - Three to four people.

Mrs JAMIESON - Is it just you?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - No. I am the only full-time employee. There is a guy called Jeff Cumberland and he is our senior trainer. He is a boilermaker/welder/carpenter; you name it, he can do it. Christine Redden is our female youth worker. She has qualifications in social work, youth work and art. We have a new program on a Monday that links up with CSO kids. There are two young girls who have, shall we say, less than favourable outcomes working with men, so Christine will work with them in particular. That will be a two-on-one situation.

Mrs JAMIESON - And your background is?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - My background is social work, youth work and counselling. I am trying this year to complete my masters.

Mrs JAMIESON - What is the length of stay with you?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - It can vary. We had one young guy who still drops in and he was there on our first day. He will pop in and spend a day every now and then. He is working part-time but he comes in and says, 'Can I use the X-box?' or 'Can I have a chat?' There is that link up there; it is that stability. We are part of his family.

Mrs JAMIESON - Could he ever become a mentor for some of the younger ones?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - Most definitely. It is like Maslow's theory of needs: food, family, comfort, support, succour. That is the environment we try to create.

Mrs JAMIESON - You mentioned being involved with a family. Is that your norm, to be involved with a family as a unit?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - It is not unusual. We have had several young people whose mums and dads have popped in to see what is going on and they will sit and ask questions. I can give you one instance where mum had a great history of amphetamine abuse, dad had paranoid schizophrenia, and the kids were caught in the middle. Mum had a stroke and all dad ever wanted to do was look after mum. For the first time in their married life she needed him. As a result, the drug habit changed. He looked after her

and the child was doing very well. About the beginning of December I was at Eastlands and I heard, 'G'day, Mike, how are you going?' - he was only 15. He walked up to me, shook my hand and said, 'I'm working here at Woolworths now full time. Thanks, mate'. He told me about his folks again; everything was cool. I worked with that whole family for about 12 months. There is no real time structure. The Handshake Blokes and Handshake Chicks program, for example, are one day a week for a term. We link up with the schools so we do not double up and they don't miss out on schooling as well. If one of them needs to be there, say, for two terms then that is automatic; they just go on. We debrief every day and we debrief with the students every day. In that way everybody knows what is going on and there is total communication.

Mrs JAMIESON - If you had the resources, would you see the value of music, art and drama therapies?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - We had a music program but we lost the funding. It was called 'Off the Street, Into the Studio' and we ran it out of the Pulse music studio. We had a lot of young people. The Battle of the Bands in the gardens was populated mainly by young people coming off the street into the studio program, which was funded and run by us.

Mrs JAMIESON - Who funded that and why was it not continued?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - We funded it but we only received \$113 000. We have to pay three people's wages and run a program and pay \$30 000 for rent.

Mrs JAMIESON - But you couldn't get specific funding for it?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - At that particular time we couldn't. We are looking at the new round of funding we have applied for and that may very well pick up again.

Mr MARTIN - Mike, a lot of the submissions we have had today, and a lot of the written submissions, talk about the need for looking after the kids once they come out of Ashley, or trying to stop them from going to Ashley by intervening in family situations et cetera beforehand. What you are describing fits the bill pretty well. You would deal with a lot of kids who have come out of Ashley?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - Most definitely. I would say 80 per cent of the kids that we work with have come out of Ashley.

In the first instance, if we can prevent them from going in that is great, otherwise we link up with them when they come out, but what I am concerned about is how that link happens inside. So if we can get something inside that they have a link with on the outside, either before or after, then that gives them a connection and a far greater desire to perhaps stay out of there and not go back.

Mrs JAMIESON - I was talking to a lass in Devonport the other day about that very issue. She is a music therapist, and I said 'Maybe you can get them before, during and after'.

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - That's it. We all say let's try to stop them from going in, and when they get out let's try to keep them out, but what are we doing while they are in there? Those links made within the institution can make all the difference to the next

stage of their life and development. All I am interested in is giving them the opportunity to find out if they have potential. Once a young person finds out they have potential - 'Hang on a minute, I can do this' - all of a sudden they start achieving something. Everybody they speak to says, 'You will'. They come before a magistrate, a teacher, a parent, a copper in the street, and everybody is telling them what to do. When they come to Chance on Main we say 'What would you like to do?'

CHAIR - Thanks, Mike, that's a good message. Anything else you would like to encapsulate in what you have said?

Mr DUVAL-STEWART - The concept of Chance on Main is about your chance to make the choice. Young people will make positive choices if given the correct information and the opportunity to make those choices. I am not saying it has to be us, but in some way, shape or form we can have a huge increase in young people who do not go back into Ashley.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.