

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASHLEY, YOUTH JUSTICE AND DETENTION IN TASMANIA MET IN THE TOWN HALL, LAUNCESTON, ON WEDNESDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2007.

LINDI KRUGER, WHITELION, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Hall) - Thank you for coming along to give some evidence. We do not have a submission from you.

Ms KRUGER - No.

CHAIR - I will invite you to tell the committee what you are about and if you can in some way address some of the terms of reference as you see it. I know Whitelion do a lot of mentoring with Ashley people and then I will invite committee members to ask some questions.

Ms KRUGER - Would you like a brief overview of Whitelion our organisation to start with?

CHAIR - Yes.

Ms KRUGER - Whitelion is a charity organisation that works mostly with young people who are involved or at risk of involvement in the youth justice system so it covers quite a broad range.

Mr MARTIN - Not for profit?

Ms KRUGER - Yes, not for profit. We work very closely with the Ashley Youth Detention Centre and we work inside the centre very closely with the young people who are residents at the centre. We have been operating in Tasmania since 2002. We had a total staff change in February of last year. Our programs that we run here are mentoring, as Greg mentioned, also employment and role models and those three programs all operate within the centre. Probably the largest amount of contact that we have with the residents at the detention centre is through our mentoring program where we visit the centre once a week. This week it is an evening visit and next week it is a day visit and it rotates fortnightly. We also run a Pathways program at the centre and it can run from two to four weeks and it can be a session from 45 minutes to an hour-and-a-half and it depends on the program structure as to how that runs but it generally runs back-to-back so that when one program finishes another one starts the next week. Those programs are mainly focusing on life skills and reintegration into the community.

Mr MARTIN - Are they funded by anyone?

Ms KRUGER - This year part of the Pathways program was funded by Ashley and it is also partly funded by the Tasmanian Community Fund and we do have some funding from the gambling for it as well. Through the Pathways program we also invite corporate supporters to go into the centre to help us deliver the programs and there is a range of subjects. Since February last year we have delivered AFL as a business which covers

leadership skills and the backend of football so it is not so much about playing football but about being a member of a club and how that can help you to build your self esteem and become reconnected to your community.

We have also delivered Pathways on sexual health and we are currently delivering Pathways on outdoor skills, which has been really helpful in some ways but we are not sure if outdoor survival skills are very appropriate at this particular time.

Laughter.

Mr MARTIN - You don't teach them to climb fences do you?

Ms KRUGER - We haven't done. No, the ones that are over the fence are probably well able to look after themselves in the bush for a couple of days.

Mr MARTIN - We might note that it is all their fault!

Ms KRUGER - It's absolutely all our fault.

Mrs JAMIESON - Lindi are the programs well attended? How much coercion, shall we say, is there for the kids to attend?

Ms KRUGER - Pretty much the programs are well attended and it is in the best interests of the young people to attend programs because it affects their privileges at the end of the day. They are given points for attending a program. I measure the success of the program not on how well the program is attended but on how well the young people who are involved at that particular time engage.

We have really high levels of engagement in our programs and it is fairly common for the young people attending to be awarded at least half points and usually up to full points and I think that is probably because we are delivering programs that they can relate to. We take into account that their literacy and numeracy skills are quite low and we always try to make sure that we can communicate well with the young people so they can build a relationship with us. Part of our focus on delivering those programs is that once they are due for release that they will want to voluntarily refer to Whitelion and at that point we can then help them to reintegrate into their community.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you have any younger people who are before Ashley as it were?

Ms KRUGER - We do. Probably not in relation to a Pathways program but people are referred to our programs from Community Youth Justice, from Tasmania Police, from schools and they can be referred by their parents or themselves or any other organisations if anyone thinks they are behaving in any way that could put them at risk of -

Mrs JAMIESON - Detention.

Ms KRUGER - Yes or any offending behaviour.

Mr MARTIN - Where do you operate from?

Ms KRUGER - We operate from the Wesley Chambers building which is in the Pilgrim Centre. I am not sure of the logistics but on the other side of the library.

Mr DEAN - Just across the road.

Mr MARTIN - Do you have a drop-in centre?

Ms KRUGER - We don't have a drop-in centre, no.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would you see the value in it?

Ms KRUGER - In saying that we don't have a drop-in centre but, because we are quite close to the Mall, young people do drop into our office on a very regular basis to find out if there are jobs or activities or to vacuum our floor. We have things for them to do to amuse them - maybe write a story and things like that; whatever we can do at the time.

Other than the mentoring program and the Pathways program, we also run a school holidays program. That is a daytime event held once every school holidays and again we are inviting our volunteers and our corporate supporters to attend the centre and join in a range of activities that we plan for the day.

CHAIR - Do you get much support from outside mentors in that respect?

Ms KRUGER - We have about 25 volunteers at the moment. Our levels are quite high in comparison to when I first began with Whitelion.

CHAIR - Just for example, the school was closed down during these last school holidays and I presume it hasn't opened yet - or it must be very close. Have you had people out there through the summer period at all?

Ms KRUGER - We have had an artist one day a week for that entire time. Our visitation program has run one day a week over the time. We had a Christmas event. Pathways has continued to run over the school holidays as well, on outdoor skills. We have also assisted Ashley for this school holidays with their contract staff so that they could continue utilising their contract staff for programs. Whitelion has paid for contract staff and invoiced that to Ashley. I am not sure of the politics behind it but something happened that prevented them from hiring their own contract staff and we agreed to help out.

CHAIR - What were their own contract staff involved with?

Ms KRUGER - Those people are involved in art, technology and relaxation therapy.

CHAIR - Do you have any idea how much time they spend there?

Ms KRUGER - One of the artists has spent a full day a week and one of the other contract staff has spent around 20-25 hours a week. I am not sure about the other lady; she hasn't invoiced me yet. I believe it is around 20-25 hours a week.

CHAIR - So you supplement and complement those people with similar programs of your own?

Ms KRUGER - Yes. They actually run those programs through the school term as well, as a supplement to their education.

CHAIR - I am just wondering whether that is picked up by the Education department or Health and Human Services. Do you have any idea?

Ms KRUGER - That is picked up by DHHS.

You were asking me what educational programs are run through the school holidays. The Education department doesn't run a program, that I am aware of, but the programs staff of Ashley certainly ensure that there are a full range of programs running, although the difference is that through the school term programs start at nine o'clock in the morning and through the school holidays they start at 10, but they still run until three o'clock in the afternoon, Monday to Friday.

CHAIR - For all residents or some?

Ms KRUGER - Programs at Ashley are voluntary participation but the programs staff and youth workers will always encourage the young people to attend the programs that are available to them. It is in their best interests because it affects their privileges.

CHAIR - But in some cases you might go along to do a program and not have anybody there? Does that happen?

Ms KRUGER - It has never happened.

CHAIR - You always had somebody there?

Ms KRUGER - I think the minimum number we have had has been three residents. That has been the entire group so the numbers have been low in the centre. Occasionally residents are on a non-participation program and they have obviously behaved in a way where the staff feel it is not appropriate for them to be spending time with other people in the centre. They wouldn't be allowed to participate in a program at that point.

Mrs JAMIESON - There's a difference between participating and engaging.

Ms KRUGER - Exactly.

Mrs JAMIESON - So how do you assess, if you were going to assess the person, for getting any benefits to go for their points?

Ms KRUGER - We would assess them by how much interest they are showing in the program. If they are sitting in the corner with their back to me, I am thinking, 'You're probably not really into this'. By their body language and asking questions and showing general interest, also by participating in the activities that are run as part of that program.

We often do not use work books and things like that because of their literacy and numeracy skills so we will do perhaps a group activity where everyone who disagrees with a statement is in this corner, those who agree in the other corner and so on. If they are sitting in their seat and not moving around the room then they are obviously not really participating in that learning activity, so we would assess their inclusion in the group.

Mrs JAMIESON - Could it be that that student, child, remandee or whatever might have had acquired brain damage or a psychiatric problem which did not give them the insight that was required? 'You are going to class', and by going they think they are participating. In other words, they cannot rationalise or reason.

Ms KRUGER - There is always a youth worker present in every program that is delivered in the centre and the youth worker is on duty for that group of people for their shift. The youth workers who are permanent staff at the centre are always very well aware. Occasionally we might go to the centre and maybe someone has called in sick or something has happened and someone is filling in but who might not be well aware. The interesting thing is that frequently the residents at the centre, once they are released, come back again, so our staff usually have a pretty good understanding of any issues that they might have after meeting them and being involved with them through different programs. I really don't think we have had any situation where people have been unable to participate because of a medical or health reason that we have not been aware of and have not addressed accordingly.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you have the capacity, then, to fill out an incident form or any other report back to the youth leader?

Ms KRUGER - Yes. Our programs are evaluated, so we provide an evaluation at the end of the program and the young people participate in the evaluation. We can also complete an incident report if there is an incident that we feel is out of the ordinary.

Mr DEAN - On the programs you are running there is the older age bracket of youth there, the 17 to 20-year-olds, and some of them are seen as tough nuts, as it were. Do you know whether or not they are participating in your programs?

Ms KRUGER - They do participate in our programs.

Mr MARTIN - Successfully?

Ms KRUGER - I believe that they participate very successfully in the programs. For the young people in detention, on Monday morning they find out their privilege colour for the week. Monday afternoon is a terrible time to deliver a program at Ashley because in the morning they have found out that they have stayed on the same colour, dropped a colour or gone up a colour, so they are either really happy or really unhappy. After delivering several programs on Monday afternoons last year I went back to the centre and said, 'This isn't working and we all know the reason why. For these young people to get the most they possibly can out of these programs we need to change to a different day'. That was accommodated immediately and we now deliver our programs on a Tuesday.

Mr MARTIN - There was a submission this morning that the system of allocating colours to the kids is not fair. Do you think it is?

Ms KRUGER - I don't agree that it is not fair.

Mr MARTIN - Also that it leads to too much tension on the Monday.

Ms KRUGER - It does lead to a lot of tension on Monday but the young people are very well aware that their actions within the centre are reflected by the privilege colour they are on. I think everyone had the same privileges then it is quite hard to reprimand anyone for inappropriate behaviour

Mr MARTIN - I think the alternative suggestion was that it should be more instantaneous, that the team leader might make the decision immediately rather than wait until the meeting.

Ms KRUGER - As the day goes by, at the end of every program and before they leave the young people ask how many points they have been given. They know how many points they need, they know immediately at the end of their program. I have never witnessed anyone not tell them how many points they have been given. If they are doing something that is extremely inappropriate, they are written up. They have a report form written about them and they know it immediately. They have a pretty good idea that that is going to be reflected in their privilege colours.

Mr WILKINSON - What do you think of the situation where a person has acted in a way which is unacceptable and that person thinks, 'I did this on Monday afternoon after I'd been allocated my privileges', and so he acts atrociously on Monday night and Tuesday but then is a complete angel on Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. He thinks, as a result of that, he has made amends for his actions on Monday night and Tuesday and therefore feels wronged by a decision a week later for behaviour which happened a week earlier. In other words, if it is punishment then justice delayed is justice denied.

Ms KRUGER - My understanding is that if somebody is behaving horrendously they will be placed immediately on a non-association program. They would be removed from any programs and would be detained within the unit.

Mr WILKINSON - So that would happen straightaway, would it?

Ms KRUGER - That would happen immediately. Again, the young people are extremely well aware - even if they do have mental health issues or literacy and numeracy skill problems and things - of how the system works. They know exactly how many points they need to accumulate. They know that if they are acting up on Tuesday and then are fabulous for the rest of the week the reality of that situation is that they probably will not be able to gain enough points to move up to the next colour. They might be able to redeem their behaviour enough by remaining on the same colour, rather than dropping back a colour. What colour you are on is a really big thing in the centre. It affects the time to which you can stay up, how many phone calls you can have, whether you can have a TV in your bedroom. To a teenage boy,

the difference between going to be at 7.30 p.m. and 10 o'clock is the height of importance.

Mr MARTIN - Ashley is supposed to be a rehabilitation centre. There have been quite a few comments made to us, both in writing and verbally, over the last two days that it is perhaps not doing that anywhere near well enough, that a lot of programs are more recreation and sport-focussed. One person said they are more babysitting-type programs and therefore not really doing enough to help rehabilitate those who are capable of being rehabilitated.

Ms KRUGER - I probably wouldn't agree with that. I do work really closely with the program staff at Ashley. I have spent a lot of time in meetings and conversations with them to ensure that we agree that the programs we are developing are working towards a goal. The goal we are working towards is reintegration into the community, so they might not be typically educational but are still certainly working towards skills that will help them to be reintegrated. We are working on programs that will achieve self-esteem, relationships, communication - probably those sorts of things more than how to add up and things like that.

Mr MARTIN - How many hours a week is it? It is being suggested that there are not enough hours in a week being devoted to those programs.

Mr KRUGER - Education is compulsory for school-age children or young people at the centre; that is 9.00 a.m. to 2 or 3.00 p.m., Monday to Friday -

Mr MARTIN - We have been led to believe that it is about two hours a day.

Mrs JAMIESON - For formal schooling, yes.

Ms KRUGER - That is not my understanding, but I could be wrong. The school staff seem to be on site and in the school area at all times.

Mrs JAMIESON - They might be on site, yes.

Mr MARTIN - Yes, the school is operating but they are in groups so an individual school-aged child is only there for two hours a day.

Mrs JAMIESON - One to two hours.

Mr MARTIN - You might need to check that.

Ms KRUGER - Okay, yes, I will certainly ask that question. It certainly wasn't my understanding.

Mr WILKINSON - Should they be there for longer, if that is your understanding? Should they be there to 3 p.m. or 3.30 p.m. or whatever the hours are?

Ms KRUGER - I would agree that if they are compulsory school-aged young people they should probably be attending the same amount of hours as community schools. I am not sure of the reasons but I know there is a school facility, Ed Zone, where young

people who are not connecting with school attend minimal hours, but that is looking at a re-integration back into school as well.

Before I comment too much on that, I would probably want to see what the reason is and what is behind that two hours a day. I am not sure of the actual program structure that fills up the rest of the day. My understanding is that there are programs available to participate in throughout the day, and obviously that is not school or education for the entire time. I know that there are the recreational programs for fitness and swimming and things like that.

Mr MARTIN - Which are important.

Ms KRUGER - They absolutely are important. As I am sure you are all aware, they help with team skills, self-esteem, anger management and things like that as well.

Mrs JAMIESON - Lindi, do you have the capacity to either increase your hours if they were available to you out there? Do you feel safe working out there and can other people carry on a project? If you have started something on the Tuesday, for example, can somebody else be given the authority to continue that particular program if somebody is obviously really enjoying it through the week?

Ms KRUGER - Yes, as far as capacity goes, financially it would be a squeeze on our budget to increase our hours. If I was to have a conversation with Ashley and they said, 'We would really like you to do that', then I would be seeking funding immediately to make sure that I could do that. However, if they phoned me and said, 'We really need to run this program now' - and I am just about to help them out with running an extra program - if it were for a short term then, even though it is a squeeze on our budget, I would still do it, but as a long term process it would be quite difficult.

Do I feel safe working there? Absolutely. I visit the centre several times a week and I have never been a situation where I have felt any danger to myself. I have been at the centre with a group of young people when a situation has arisen and it has always been dealt with immediately by the youth workers who are on duty at the time, whether through the day or during an evening visit. I have only met one person who has been detained at the centre with whom I felt uncomfortable, but he is no longer at the centre. In that situation I always asked that I had a youth worker with me. Sometimes if I go out to visit young people for an employment program we might not always have a youth worker present, but there will be one very close by. There has been one instance where I have made that request and that was honoured.

Mr MARTIN - A lot of the kids are there on remand and have not been found guilty of anything. Some spend an extraordinary amount of time there on remand, so it must have an impact, do you think, on the psychology of the child?

Ms KRUGER - Absolutely. Of all the issues that the centre is trying to deal with I think that is probably one of the most prominent ones. I am not sure what the answer is except for some process to shorten that remand period so that a court date can come quicker. Most of these young people are represented by legal aid and I am not sure they are getting access to the best legal advice. In several situations we have had young people on our programs who said, 'I have been charged with this, this and this,

and I did all of it, but the police have also brought seven other charges which I didn't do. My lawyer is saying just to plead guilty anyway so we can hurry up and get it out of court'. It absolutely disgusts me that this is being told to a 12 year old girl who has been told by the judge that it is her last chance. She is putting her hand up and saying these are the things she did do but her lawyer is saying just plead guilty anyway. I am sure that contributes to the reason there is an extraordinary number of young people in remand in comparison to how many there are on detention.

Mr MARTIN - It would upset me if I was one of them. I wouldn't have much sense of justice out of that.

Mr DEAN - Lindi, what are some of the programs you run?

Ms KRUGER - The three umbrellas are mentoring, role-modelling and employment. The mentoring program has two parts which we run at the centre. One is a group visitation program. That program is a social program, so we have our volunteers going into the centre. We are usually playing sporting activities, board games, card games and we have just started doing some unit challenges as well.

The other part of the mentoring program is one-to-one mentoring where a young person is matched with an adult volunteer. Those volunteers can visit that young person while they are in detention. That can happen during our group visitation or it can happen separately.

CHAIR - So you select those volunteers?

Ms KRUGER - We select the volunteers and they are trained and police checked.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do those volunteers follow the young offender home afterwards?

Ms KRUGER - They do.

Mrs JAMIESON - And continue a relationship?

Ms KRUGER - Yes, they do. We ask that the volunteers in that situation make a commitment to the young person for a minimum of 12 months. We expect that relationship to continue on indefinitely.

CHAIR - So how often would a volunteer visit over a period of 12 months? Can you give an average of how much work they might do?

Ms KRUGER - If the young person is in detention they would mostly visit once a week for one to two hours.

CHAIR - They would mentor the same person for the whole 12 months?

Ms KRUGER - Yes; if the young person was released prior to or after the 12 months that relationship would continue.

CHAIR - Do you evaluate how successful that has been?

Ms KRUGER - We do. We have our formal evaluation process.

Mr DEAN - Do the records you have demonstrate that the detainees from Ashley have been turned around as a result of the program? What is the success rate? How many have gone on from this program into employment or back into schooling or what have you?

Ms KRUGER - It is probably difficult to give you exact numbers but I would say that for young people who have been detained and referred to our programs there is probably about a 60 per cent success rate of reducing or eliminating offending behaviour.

Mr DEAN - If it is successful for one I think it is worth it.

Ms KRUGER - It is quite high. To give you an idea of how it is successful or not successful, the referrals to the employment program in Launceston from June last year until now have probably been maybe 50 to 60 young people in total, but not all of those are from the centre; some come from other community groups. From the centre there were maybe 15.

Mr DEAN - We know that a lot of the youth at Ashley are out, back in, out, and back in. Obviously a lot of them have gone through your program and I guess they go back through the program when they come back in again, so is that helping at all? You say that they are engaging and being involved; I just wonder if they are fully engaging if that is occurring.

Ms KRUGER - I am sure you are all well aware that under the Youth Justice Act the maximum period that they can spend in detention is two years as a resident at Ashley. They can be sentenced for a longer period of time as a prisoner. Three months is basically the minimum that it can be reduced to but any sentence between three months and two years is halved, so they basically serve half of their sentence plus one day. Therefore if they are sentenced to six months then they serve three months plus one day. If they are only sentenced to two months they serve that entire two months. During that period their exposure to Whitelion, if they are in the centre for three months, would be one program a week and one visitation, so their exposure might be a total of three hours. If they are referred to the employment program then they might see me once a week. If it is a school holiday week then they might have another full day.

Given the amount of time we, our volunteers and our corporate supporters spend with the young people I believe that our successes are incredibly high in that the young people show a high amount of respect for Whitelion staff and volunteers. We are always addressed politely. We are always thanked for the time we spend in the centre and generally on release they will contact us. They will come to our office or they will call my phone or do whatever they want to do. I have guys who come into my office and say, 'Have you found me a job yet?' From the time we first met that young person, for them to develop the confidence to actually walk into a working person's office and say, 'Have you found me a job yet?' takes an incredible amount of strength.

Mr DEAN - It does.

Ms KRUGER - While they may end up back at the centre, every half an hour or hour of time they spend with a positive role model is still benefiting them. It might not benefit them totally in that they still end up back at the centre but it certainly does have an impact on their life.

Mr MARTIN - I would like some more information on the sort of work you are doing out there. You mentioned you have done your evaluation report. Could that be shared with the committee?

Ms KRUGER - It can be. The evaluation of the mentoring program is ongoing and the re-evaluation is occurring right now. I can certainly get you some previous information. The role-model program has also been formally evaluated by the University of Tasmania and is being published at the moment. We also have a formal evaluation of the employment program.

Mr MARRIS - I think we would be very interested in any of that information.

Ms KRUGER - That is fine.

Mr WILKINSON - The farm used to be worked, as I understand it, but doesn't appear to be now; is that right? What is the situation about the farm?

Ms KRUGER - To my knowledge, I don't think the farm has been worked on for several months - certainly not over the school holiday period. I believe the farm was being worked in the later months of 2006. I am not sure why it is not being utilised at the moment. From my point of view I would love to see more of that happening. In many ways I believe that can be more important than some of the education because young people are being given an opportunity to develop real-life skills that they can apply to their lives.

Mr WILKINSON - Have they spoken to you at all about their wish to work on the farm?

Ms KRUGER - The guys who have worked on the farm and who have been involved in the employment program have shown a very real desire to seek employment in that environment, so they obviously do enjoy it.

CHAIR - Just in regard to Aboriginal youth, do they engage in your programs or does the TAC tend to want to run their own programs with Aboriginal youth?

Ms KRUGER - I am not sure if the TAC runs its own programs or not. I am sure they probably do but we certainly do not differentiate between Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal people. We have a box on our forms that they can tick if they wish to, but other than for statistics it is of no relevance to anything we deliver.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for your evidence, Lindi. Some of us have already had some dealings with Whitelion and we know what you do, so the committee wishes Whitelion all the very best in the future.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.