

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASHLEY YOUTH JUSTICE AND DETENTION CENTRE IN TASMANIA MET IN THE RECEPTION ROOM, LAUNCESTON TOWN HALL, ON THURSDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2007.

Rev. Father TERRY YARD OF WESTBURY WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

Father YARD - My name is officially Father Terry Yard I am the Catholic parish priest for the Meander Valley parish, which incorporates Westbury and Deloraine mainly. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to say a few words to this committee. I hope that what I have to say will prove helpful. They are my observations.

I have had an interest in Ashley for over 50 years. I grew up in Deloraine and the Ashley home was very much part of the life of the town at that time, and I suppose to a certain extent it is today. I have been visiting the centre for six years, making fortnightly visits on Friday evening for a duration of usually about two hours. I go to the centre and I have a meal with some of the residents. Then I move into the four units, with no agenda, no programs, no expectations, just creating the possibility for these young people to speak with me if they wish. If they don't want to talk well that is fine; I don't impose myself in any way upon them. When it is appropriate, and when I am invited, I play cards with them. I play table tennis with them. They all know who I am. They have let me know that very definitely. I see myself as a sort of quasi chaplain. I am not officially appointed or anything but I see myself there for the ministers of the other churches as well. If a young person wants to have contact with one of their own ministers then I would arrange for that to happen.

I also spend some time with the youth workers and I have always found them to be very welcoming and cooperative. I spend a bit of time with them, trying to support them, recognising that they have a very challenging role to fulfil.

I have three major observations that I would like to present. The first is regarding the staff. I would say that, by and large, the staff are the greatest asset at the Ashley Youth Detention Centre. By and large they are very competent, very professional and very committed to a task which is very challenging and very difficult at times. I find them to be very compassionate and yet firm in maintaining discipline among the residents. They are very tolerant and very patient. I also notice that there is a mix of age and sex so that on any given shift there are workers who are young and older, male and female, and that, to me, seems a very healthy situation, particularly as most of the residents there are young men. But of course they are challenged by the variety of personalities and backgrounds and the specific needs of the young people they are dealing with.

The second thing is about the programs and there has been a bit said, I notice in the press, about the programs. Programs are a bit of a mystery to me because I don't have any inside knowledge as to what they are all about, but sometimes I will say to a resident, 'What did you do today?' and of course he says, 'Nothing'. Well, I suppose that is the obvious answer that you give at that age in your life. But then if I said, 'Well, you must have done something, did you have programs?' 'Yes'. 'What were they?' 'We had cooking and we had relaxation and exercises and we spent some time in the gym'. So I

started to question then, as others have, just how rehabilitative, if that is a word, these programs are and whether they really do assist these young people in their growth and prepare them for life after Ashley, and I would have to say that I have big questions about all that.

I would see that there is a tremendous need for constant review of the programs to see how effective they are in achieving the goals that they might have, but I would like to instance five programs or activities that I have come to know during the six years that I have been there which I consider to be very positive and helpful in enabling these young people to be prepared for life when they leave the centre.

Some years ago a group of boys went on a five-day trek with some policemen across the Western Tiers and that, to me, seemed an excellent opportunity for these young people to be challenged, to grow in their self esteem and also to perhaps change some of the ideas they might have had about the police, because they would be walking with them, talking with them, cooking with them and sharing life with them. I have only heard of that happening once but that is something that I really think would be a wonderful opportunity for these young people.

CHAIR - Was that Project Hahn or something similar?

Mr DEAN - It was Project Hahn and it happened in 2003; I was the Commander of Police at the time.

Father YARD - It was wonderful. The second one I would like to mention is a young chap who you probably know here in Launceston named Daniel Geale who is a young boxer - a champion boxer. He made a visit to the centre when I happened to be there and he gave a talk to the members of the community there on his motivation and goals and lifestyle and all that sort of thing, and how he was working towards becoming this great boxer. The young people were actually riveted by his words; they were gob-smacked, as they say today, and they were listening. Then we went to the gymnasium and he had a friend he had brought with him and they did a demonstration bout and I thought that was just absolutely wonderful because it was showing these young people that if you do have aggression and want to act in a violent way, there is a way of doing it that is disciplined and accepted and is creative for you and for the other person.

The third thing is that every year, some of the young people at the centre go to the craft fair at Deloraine, which is a big day in Deloraine, and help with the removal of the refuse.

CHAIR - A big three days.

Father YARD - A big three days - sorry. While the people there wouldn't really know who they were, the people on the committee and the people organising the fair would. They would know that these young people always do a sterling job of what would be a fairly menial task, but I suppose for them it's being out of the centre and they are being trusted to a certain extent. Their efforts are certainly appreciated by the committee, and I think that is a wonderful example of how these young people can be giving something back to the community, and I am sure they would be very happy to do that and would be rewarded for what they do.

The final one is that I have a brother who has a bodyworks business in Deloraine. One day I visited him and saw this young fellow working on a car there. I said to my brother, 'Who's that?', and he said, 'That's Wayne' - not his real name - 'Ashley have asked me to take him for a week for work experience'. I said, 'That's really great, how's he going?'. He said, 'He's terrific, really terrific. If I had a vacancy for an apprentice, I'd take him on straightaway'.

So these are the sorts of things that I think of when we talk about programs and rehabilitation. There is need for creativity in this area and we should be using opportunities that might arise within the local community. I know funding and security and all these things come into it, but all things considered, I think this is an excellent opportunity.

Mr MARTIN - Terry, how long ago was this story about your brother?

Father YARD - That would be probably two or three years ago.

The final thing is more on a personal note. I consider it a privilege to visit Ashley, and I am very grateful for the opportunity that I have. Visiting Ashley would be the most challenging and yet the most rewarding thing I do, and I am very grateful that I have had this opportunity. These young people teach me a lot about myself. They teach me about my vulnerability, about my space of hate and they ground me; they bring me down to earth and for a person in my profession, that's very important. They are transparent, by and large; if they are happy you know they are happy, if they are upset you know they are upset, and if they are sad you know they are sad.

But I would also say they are very long-suffering; some of them have been there a long time so they have had to endure a lot. Being a resident in Ashley is no bed of roses, as you would all be aware, but they have to endure that. By and large, they have a youthful spirit of fun about them, which I suppose has to be curbed at times, naturally, but nevertheless is indicative that these young people have something to offer in their enthusiasm and joyfulness.

I have noted that there have been visits to Ashley by Whitelion, and I don't know much about that except that one of the chaps who founded it, Glenn Manton, played for Carlton. I won't hold that against him.

Mr MARTIN - I'll forgive him for that.

Father YARD - I would say that it is great that they come and visit. I am not too sure exactly what their activities are, but I am sure that, like me, they would be enriched by their visits. In other words, the bottom line is not really what I am doing for them but what they're doing for me. I think for these young people to have that exposure in obviously a controlled and secure way is a wonderful thing and hopefully there will be more opportunities for these sorts of programs and even though they may not realise it and not be able to articulate it, I am sure they give them a sense that they are contributing something and that their presence is being appreciated. Thank you very much for listening.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, Terry, you brought up some very salient and good points, I might say. I would ask members of the committee if they would like to now address any questions or observations to you.

Mrs JAMIESON - Terry, would you see a role on a more permanent basis for the chaplaincy within Ashley itself, or do you think that is inappropriate?

Father YARD - Well, I am totally exhausted after two hours and I am glad to get home and watch the footy. I suppose yes, there would be on a part-time basis, because I have been very fortunate that I have had a lot of experience in industrial chaplaincy. I was chaplain of the Phoenix Foundry here for four or five years. I have been chaplain to Stanley Tools in Hobart. I have been chaplain of the Clarence Football Club. I have been chaplain to old people's homes and residences for disabled people.

Mrs JAMIESON - That is where I am coming from. Would you see a role for chaplaincy?

Father YARD - I would really, because I am doing that really. They do not realise it, but I find that in many ways I am ministering to the workers as much as I am ministering to the children, because they obviously need someone to share things with and of course they know that I am totally independent. I am not paid by Ashley. I am not on the staff or anything and similarly with these other chaplaincies that I had, so they sense that freedom and it gives me the freedom then to be able to do what I can. As you know, it is very stressful and I have experienced it all. I have not been physically attacked but I have been verbally abused and that is almost as bad at times.

Mrs JAMIESON - Have you had the chance or a reason to actually assist families in the community, for example, who have had students or remandees -

Father YARD - No, not really, but some of the residents there when I get talking to them and they tell me where they came from and what their name is and I ask them is their father named Peter and did he live in Cumberland Street, Warrane, I draw links then because I taught the boy's father when he was at high school.

Mrs JAMIESON - So coming from your church background, do you feel it is the correct thing to do to go and visit the family, for example?

Father YARD - Well, if I had the time, but I am not privy to all that. No-one tells me anything really. It takes me a while to get to know the names of the young people, but with only two hours a week there is not much chance of anything further really on that situation.

Mrs JAMIESON - I was just thinking of parish work itself, coming in from the other angle where you are supporting families, for example.

Father YARD - In the parish there is all that.

Mr MARTIN - Terry, I asked this question of someone else this morning. I have had a bit of experience over the years in my previous role at the Glenorchy Council in dealing with young people who went on to Ashley or had come out of Ashley and although you can't stereotype them all the same, in a lot of cases a common link amongst many of them is

that during their lives they have been shown very little respect by anyone and have experienced very little love from anyone. Do you think in Ashley they are shown enough respect by staff?

Father YARD - I would say yes, by and large. There are some staff there who I don't think act appropriately and I think they have problems themselves probably that causes them to do that, but I would say by and large there is a wonderful group of men and women out there of varying ages who really do bend over backwards to be compassionate and at the same time maintain the discipline, which is quite a challenge.

Mr MARTIN - I am pleased to hear you say they bend over trying to be compassionate as a general rule. We have had a lot of evidence that there is a bit of inconsistency, though, amongst the staff. Would you say that is a problem?

Father YARD - Do you mean with an individual staff member being very compassionate one minute and very severe the next minute?

Mr MARTIN - No, in the sense that some staff are like that and some are not, therefore there are mixed messages received from them.

Father YARD - Sometimes staff members do things that I consider to be inappropriate, like barking at the kid because he has his hat on in the dining room but invariably afterwards you will see that fellow joking with the kid. I find all that a bit hard to follow really. By and large I would say they are certainly very compassionate. I think there are some who perhaps, as I say, have problems of their own and they act them out a bit.

Mr WILKINSON - The major concern that you have is in relation to the programs. You believe that if they were beefed up to help more on the rehabilitation side of things the better it would be.

Father YARD - Oh, yes.

Mr WILKINSON - Were you at Ashley when they had the farm up and working?

Father YARD - No, that was six years ago. I remember when I was a kid at Deloraine that they had the farm. The young people worked on the farm but in recent years, since I've been there, that has not been the case.

Mr WILKINSON - Have you noticed that the clientele in Ashley has changed in any way over the past six years?

Father YARD - Yes, I would say that moving on those older, more troublesome ones has changed the place considerably, because when I first went there six years ago it was almost like going into a lion's den. Now that these more hardened ones have been moved on I think there is a better chance for the younger ones to flourish a bit. The atmosphere is much more convivial.

Mr WILKINSON - If these older ones are there they are the ones who may be bullying the younger ones but we have heard that there is presently no real place for them to go except Ashley. What do you say to a unit within Ashley or somewhere else to house

those people, or do you believe that makes them worse because they are in with similar people?

Father YARD - No matter how you differentiate between them there still would be awareness of these people being there. Perhaps in the eyes of some this is where you graduate to when you really start making your presence felt. So I would say it would be far better to be totally away from there.

Mrs JAMIESON - Since the fence went up, Terry, do you feel there is a different atmosphere within the community of Deloraine, perhaps from being shut out whereas once upon a time there was more community involvement?

Father YARD - I think in many ways it is like a bit of joke really. The people of Deloraine know it can be scaled in 30 seconds.

Mrs JAMIESON - We've been told it's under 14 seconds.

Laughter.

Father YARD - They would know. It was 30 seconds the day it was put up. One of the residents tried it out, apparently. There again, I don't know how threatened the Deloraine people are. You hear of instances and certainly you know of things happening with police chases and so on but I just wonder about it. After all, the kids were escaping from Ashley 50 years ago. If it was a cold night I remember my father saying there will be no Ashley boys out tonight. I don't think it has made the Deloraine people feel any more secure and yet I wonder how secure they feel they need to be.

CHAIR - So the fence wasn't up when you first started there?

Father YARD - Just when I first started going there.

CHAIR - It has been put to us by a couple of witnesses that perhaps it was better before the fence was there and it was just a secure unit. Do you have an opinion on that?

Father YARD - As I say, the fence is just window dressing in a way because the kids would know that if you get out of the unit then the fence is no problem. Even the concern about people dropping drugs over and jumping over from the outside doesn't seem to be a problem either.

CHAIR - When you do your visits of an evening, is that when the night shift staff have started?

Father YARD - The night shift starts at 3 o'clock and goes until 11 o'clock. I go from 5.15 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.

CHAIR - During those visits the private contractor, Platinum Security, is out there?

Father YARD - Yes, they are out there.

CHAIR - Have you had some dealings with those people, as well with as the Ashley youth workers?

Father YARD - Yes.

CHAIR - How have you found it?

Father YARD - Some I have got to know I would say are doing a sterling job. If I don't really know them, it is just a passing glance or a word, so I really can't get much of an idea of what the quality is. I would say that they would be at a disadvantage. I remember once talking to a bloke who was worried about whether he was going to get his hours up because he had a wife and two little kids.

Mr DEAN - Terry, what do you see as a way forward with Ashley? You've talked about some of the programs that you have some question mark over. If we were to say to you now, 'Where should Ashley go from here in the interests of those youths?', what would you say to us?

Father YARD - First of all, I don't know anything about the psychological and counselling processes that these young people are engaged in. That, to me, would be the first point; they need to have a person who would know their story and would be able to see what their real needs are. I do not even know whether that happens or not; I presume it does. You have to be looking for opportunities though I suppose there are limitations because of funding and so on. Those instances that I mentioned, apart from the police one they would require a lot of resources. I am sure if they came along to my brother and said, 'We've got this bloke; he's a pretty decent sort of fellow and he is really interested in cars. Would you take him for a week on work experience?', my brother would say yes. There would be other people in Deloraine and Westbury who would. I think it needs someone to explore all the possibilities. I am not thinking of big programs; I don't think that is the way out. It needs a bit more lateral thinking.

Mr DEAN - The word 'Ashley' now conjures up in the minds of people a fairly ordinary sort of place. I think most would agree with that. Do you believe it is probably time we started looking at a name change for Ashley to bring it back into modern society or to think differently about it?

Father YARD - It will always be Ashley, no matter what change you made.

CHAIR - Some years ago when I was mayor of Meander Valley, Minister Jackson did want a name change. I have to say there was a lot of resistance in the local community to that.

Father YARD - The people of Deloraine have grown up with Ashley and have seen all the changes. When I was a kid, there were Ashley boys almost adopted by Deloraine families. They would come on Saturday, do gardening, go to the pictures on Saturday night, have a roast dinner on Sunday and then they would be back to Ashley. It was a completely different situation. It has changed so much.

Mr WILKINSON - But then it was also a place for wards of the State.

Father YARD - I think there are still wards of the State at Ashley, aren't there?

Mr WILKINSON - I am not too sure about that; as I understand it they have to be actually sentenced or remanded.

Father YARD - I gather that some of them are virtually wards of the State because they have nowhere to go. They say that some of them re-offend so that they can get back because it is a community and secure.

Mrs JAMIESON - Yes, that is right, better than what they have at home. Given that you have a regular timetable for going in, what happens? Do you knock on the door or announce yourself and they let you in? Are you then searched at all? What happens?

Father YARD - I have to ring up the day before and book in. Then they come and get me and I go through the tunnel, and then I sign in. I am well known there and have been police-checked. I am triple certificated as far as the police go: I have an archdiocesan police check, an Ashley police check and a Hagley Farm School police check, so I am really checked out. I think they just trust me, I suppose, because they know me but I suppose if I wanted to I could bring in some cigarettes and things like that, couldn't I?

Mr MARTIN - One of the issues that is becoming of concern in the evidence presented to us is the fact that a large percent of the kids are on remand. They haven't been sentenced for anything and haven't had their day in court. Further to that, a lot of them are on remand for an extraordinary long period of time. In your conversations with the kids, has that been an issue?

Father YARD - Yes, I would say that in some instances they are on remand for a considerable amount of time.

Mr MARTIN - What impact does that have on the kids? Have they spoken to you about that?

Father YARD - Not really. I suppose it leaves them fairly insecure. They don't know how long they are going to be there because once they get sentenced it goes backwards, doesn't it. I would say it is fairly unjust that they be put in that position for an extended period of time.

Mr MARTIN - Yes. Finally, what would you say is the morale in the place? Firstly, amongst the kids but also amongst the staff.

Father YARD - I would say the morale is pretty good. Particularly in recent times I have noticed that they all seem pretty happy. They have their moments, of course, and perhaps I am not privy to that. There are kids in lock down and that is another thing that I think is just terrible. Whenever I go, if I notice that there is a kid in NAP, as they call it - non-association program - I always make sure that I go and see that kid because he is in a terrible situation. Some kids who have not been too pleased to see me out in the common room are very pleased to see me when I go to the toilet there, so that is another issue. I don't think locking kids up is necessarily rehabilitative. It is a bit like Port Arthur when they tried to ram religion down the convicts' throats with a sense that this would make them better people.

Mr WILKINSON - Can you give me a brief overview of what happens at Hagley Farm? Do you believe it would be more rehabilitative if some people presently in Ashley went to Hagley Farm School?

Father YARD - Hagley Farm School is a primary school with emphasis on the school rather than the farm. I think the farming part of it is just an environmental situation where children come from other schools and spend time there, but it is not really a farm school as such - and it is only for primary school kids.

Mrs JAMIESON - Terry, when you are on a NAP visit, do you have to have someone else in the room?

Father YARD - Oh, yes. I don't even go in. You can imagine that Catholic priests have all the protocols in the world about what we can do and can't do. I would never be with an inmate by myself. If I see on the board that someone is in NAP then I ask the team leader, 'Do you think it would be good if I could see them', and they would say, 'Oh, yes', or 'No, not him'. They would then unlock the door and I stay out in the corridor with the worker next to me.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, Terry.

Father YARD - Thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to come along.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.