

**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.**

**PETER GODFREY**, WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mr Hall) - Welcome, Peter. If you would like to speak to your submission I will then invite members of the committee to ask you some questions.

**Mr GODFREY** - I have put in a submission because I have worked in a youth detention centre in New South Wales. I applied at Ashley for a job and was reasonably horrified by what I saw. I felt that it wouldn't be a safe place to work. It doesn't look like a workable place, the way I look at a detention centre.

**CHAIR** - Compared to what you'd been at in New South Wales?

**Mr GODFREY** - Yes. The fact that you have young kids mixed with older kids and girls is a weird mix that makes for chaos. The older kids hate the younger kids and they wind each other up really badly. We had a separate centre for kids up to 14 and a separate centre for girls, and the older kids, from 14 up, would be at our place.

**CHAIR** - That was in New South Wales? They were totally separate centres? They weren't segregated within the same centre?

**Mr GODFREY** - No, completely separate.

**CHAIR** - I suppose that is a bigger State and therefore you can do that.

**Mr GODFREY** - The problem is that the young kids learn all the tricks from the older kids. The older kids will teach them how to steal a VN Commodore and how to do this and that. They get all these bad influences from each other and it reinforces their program that says, 'I'm a little mongrel', which they run over and over again and spend all day trying to prove to you, that they are little mongrels.

I was a maintenance man for a year and on shift work as a youth worker. When I went to Ashley and walked around, the first thing I noticed was that it would have taken me 30 seconds as an old mongrel to get over that fence. I just thought, 'Who put that up?' It may as well not be there because in a way it just tells the kids, 'I'm a criminal and I'm dangerous, so therefore they have the fence to keep me in so I'd better try to get out'. Then they get hero status by getting out. That is about all they do. They go home, the police go and get them and bring them back, normally. I think the fence was put there to make the people of Deloraine feel good, not to keep the kids in.

The people were not very honest at the centre either. When we were walking around I said, 'You have a bit of trouble here?' 'Oh no, what makes you say that?' I said, 'Well, every door lock has been bent'. 'How did you notice that?' I said, 'Well, I am a youth worker. I did repair all this stuff when I was in my own centre'. There were things like

screws missing out of windows, which might not sound like a lot but if you have screws the kids scratch themselves and make tattoos and then you have a duty of care issue if they get an infection from this home-made tattoo. If someone objects to it, you are in strife and you have to wear it. There were a lot of things like that.

From a supervision point of view, it was horrendous. There were little corners and round the sides of buildings where the kids could hide. We had a few riots at our centre and we didn't have hidey holes like that.

**CHAIR** - We are talking about subsequent to the redevelopment of Ashley now. We are talking about the newer Ashley, if you like. How many years ago were you there?

**Mr GODFREY** - I think it was 2002, 2003 - somewhere around then.

**CHAIR** - So it was after the fence went up.

**Mr GODFREY** - Yes, after the fence was up. When you go inside and walk around, you'll see that some buildings have corners that kids can hide in. There was also the minimum security part where you could get on the roof. We had kids climb on roofs and chuck pool balls at workers to fight them off. The last thing you want is kids being able to get on roofs where you can't get them off. There were security issues like that. Either you treat the kids as prisoners, in which case you build a secure facility, or you try to counteract their attitude of 'I'm a little mongrel' by giving them more responsibility and treating them in an open facility. But something in between like that just seemed a dangerous place to me, as a worker.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Did you actually work at Ashley?

**Mr GODFREY** - No, I didn't take the job. It was too dangerous for me. I didn't feel safe to be there.

**CHAIR** - Did you have any observation of programs whilst you were there?

**Mr GODFREY** - No, I didn't see whether there were any programs going. I didn't know if they had a school or not.

**CHAIR** - So you were just doing maintenance there at the time?

**Mr GODFREY** - At Ashley? No, I went for a job. I was maintenance man at Acmena in northern New South Wales. I went to Ashley and did the interview and the orientation and walked around and had a look and said, 'Oh no, I couldn't work here'. It was just too dangerous.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Did you make that known to the management?

**Mr GODFREY** - I did actually. There were about six people at the interview and they went around the room asking, 'Why do you want to work here?'. I said, 'To tell you the truth, I don't think I do'. They asked me why and I told them that it was just not safe, that the layout was terrible and that I thought it would be a dangerous place to work. I said, 'I don't want to waste your time so I will leave now'. They were a bit shocked.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - I was going to say, 'Did you detect their attitude?'.

**Mr GODFREY** - They were fairly shocked about it. They just said, 'Thanks for your honesty'. I left; it was too much for me.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - And you have not thought about reapplying?

**Mr GODFREY** - Not unless the layout was changed. You should have a place where workers can get out of their office building and the building itself without having to go through where the kids are in case of a major riot or something like that. I didn't see that. I didn't see escape places or boltholes where the workers could slip outside the fence if everything went really bad. At times we had to do that. Our buildings were set up in a U and you could go out the back of the building and the kids couldn't get to the workers. They make weapons out of things you wouldn't believe. They snap a toothbrush off and scrape it on a brick wall and you have a really sharp weapon in seconds. They had heaps of stuff like that.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - So in New South Wales, did you have electronic surveillance?

**Mr GODFREY** - We had cameras and we had electronic door locks. I read about something in the paper that horrified me. When the fire happened at Ashley, somehow all the kids' doors were unlocked. I thought, 'What lunatic would do that?'. Once the kids learn that if they set the alarm off all the doors unlock, that is their escape. You have one worker at night, maybe, with 10 or 15 kids, and you haven't got a hope in hell of controlling that.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Did the kids in New South Wales have any sort of microchipping or electronic banding?

**Mr GODFREY** - No, they never got that far.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Would that be helpful at all?

**Mr GODFREY** - Possibly, but then you are reinforcing again 'I'm a little mongrel' too much. It is hard to know which way to go. The best time I ever had with the kids was when another worker and I took four of them to the beach camping. They behaved like normal youths.

**CHAIR** - I was going to ask you that question. It was Acmena, was it?

**Mr GODFREY** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Was that a low-risk or medium-risk facility? How was it categorised?

**Mr GODFREY** - It would have been medium because we had a high-security facility for dangerous kids in New South Wales as well. All the worst ones went there and we had the others. Any sort of level of crime - but if they misbehaved too much they went to the high-security facility.

**CHAIR** - By your observation there at that time, Peter, there were good structured programs in place to help rehabilitate?

**Mr GODFREY** - Nowhere near enough. We had a school in the centre and the kids could choose whether they went to school or not. Running programs was always a bone of contention - what you could do, where you could get the resources, whether the kids were interested as well. They did things like building a new extension to the gym and the kids built that, with a teacher who came in. Anything like that was great for them. Many wanted to work with me because I was the maintenance man and I had a box of tools, which to them was like a box of magic tricks. They just wanted to know how to do things and how to fix things. Programs were always very minimalist. We never had enough workers to run proper programs. They do need a lot of one-on-one stuff.

**CHAIR** - Were there any external contractors who came in to run any programs at all?

**Mr GODFREY** - The TAFE guy used to come in and do building. We had roughly a 70 per cent Aboriginal population so we had Aboriginal elders who came in and ran sports programs and things like that.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Culturally appropriate ones too, or not?

**Mr GODFREY** - Football and things like that. Often they would sit on the oval in a big circle and talk to them about what they were up to, what was appropriate, why they were pulling out of line with their own culture. That used to help a lot. There were people who came in and gave gym instruction.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Any farm work?

**Mr GODFREY** - No, we didn't do farm work. I used to take them outside working on the property. There was about 50 acres so we had quite a few trees and plantings outside. I would have the trusted ones out there mowing and weeding. We never had a farm, which would have been really useful. Anything to do with something that is bigger than them would be great. Animals would be fabulous, but we didn't have that.

**Mr WILKINSON** - There's quite a bit of literature about animals with disadvantaged children and children with disabilities and I suppose it is the same with detainees if they have a certain calming influence over them.

**Mr GODFREY** - To a degree, as well as the fact that they are bigger than them and it puts them in perspective as to where they are. They would often be fighting in their own ranks to be top dog and then top dog would be the toughest one of the lot. Often they were the ones who were in the centre all their lives and knew nothing else. I think animals would have helped them a lot. They were talking about getting a herd of cattle to run and helping the kids to work a bit with them as well at one stage. I don't know if they have yet or not.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Did you have music therapy, art, drama - structured therapy, I mean, not just as a mucking around thing?

**Mr GODFREY** - There were music classes where the teacher would come in and make a hell of a racket with them. You could have run some great classes but it was because everything had to be voluntary, you couldn't force them to do anything. You couldn't say, 'You've got to do anger management'. It was up to them. If they wanted to do it, fine. It would have benefited them heaps but there were some strange UN rights of the child that we run it by, which meant that they could not earn money and couldn't do jobs and things that would have given them some meaning. I think music therapy would be something that would be really good.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Did you ever notice any drug award systems and things like that?

**Mr GODFREY** - They used to call it 'cheeking'. That was how they brought drugs in because you weren't allowed to do full body searches so they would hide it between their cheeks and bring in pouches of tobacco with dope and cigarette lighters. On a couple of occasions needles were found in the visitors room, in the tray of the coke machine, that were left for people. You had to be really on watch when you were watching the visitors. They had contact visitors and they would often be sticking things under the table for them.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - So if you had a juvenile diabetic who required insulin injections daily -

**Mr GODFREY** - The nurse would have to do that. We had a nurse in the centre all day.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Any psych assessment of the kids?

**Mr GODFREY** - Yes, we had a psychologist who worked there every day.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Did they do an actual assessment of whether the child might have had an acquired brain damage, for example, or a mental health problem?

**Mr GODFREY** - He did that. We did have kids come in who were high functioning, autism-type kids. They didn't understand a lot of things that were going on and yet they had stabbed someone and so they had to come there. They were difficult to deal with.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Would they be segregated out into a different program at all?

**Mr GODFREY** - We only had two units of 15 kids in each. They had to be in there and we had to try to explain, as youth workers, that 'The other kids hate you and are going to give you a hard time. We can't actually punish them; they are punished already being here'. The psych, Michael, used to do as much as he could with them. You need a few different places in a way for that. You need a place to put the young kids who are psychologically damaged.

Drugs came in. We used to do a perimeter search every morning. The best way was tennis balls that they would cut, put the drug in and then throw it over the fence. Probably at Ashley you could just hand it through the fence without any trouble. We had to do a walk before the kids got up every morning, searching the yard to make sure no-one chucked anything over.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - What was the physical location? How far away from a town centre?

**Mr GODFREY** - Basically it was in the industrial area of south Grafton. When the kids escaped they would often go to Market Square in town and hang there and the police would go and get them and bring them back. We didn't have as many escapes as you do here. We only had a couple of minor places where they made mistakes when they designed it and they could get out fairly easily.

**CHAIR** - Did that have a security perimeter fence?

**Mr GODFREY** - Yes, a different sort of a fence to this one. The fence was mesh that faced downwards and then it had a great big drum on the top that was really difficult to get over without a rope or help. But there were two spots where they made a mess of the original design. If you got onto a roof you could crawl along one drum and get over the outside drum and down. We told the department about that and I pointed it out to the Director General and I think it took them until there was an escape eight months later to think about doing something about it.

If you look at escape, if you make it totally escape-proof it might be more dangerous for the workers. They are more likely to be taken hostage to get the keys. You are kind of better off having it in a big paddock somewhere in the middle of nowhere, where if they escape they will say, 'Oh, it's too big. I'm too scared'.

**CHAIR** - In your view, would that centre that you worked at in New South Wales been better without the fence and just having a secure unit in the middle of it?

**Mr GODFREY** - Yes, I think it may have been. They did have one centre in New South Wales that had 600 acres of land and no fence and they hardly had any escapes from that.

**CHAIR** - But probably in that case they were lower risk.

**Mr GODFREY** - Yes, they were lower risk. They were the same kids as we had but they were from the central coast.

Putting a fence around gives them a challenge. It is hard to decide which way you can go. We have gone from the old days where the old workers said if the kids got out of a line they would take them in a room, give them a bashing and pull them into line and let them out. Then they went from that to putting on the white gloves and being really soft, 'You'll be right. We'll be really lovely to you'. The kids don't know about that; they have never had it. You have to find a balance somewhere as to how you treat them. They are not there for being dux of the school, are they? They are there because they have been in trouble so many times that eventually society says, 'We're sick of this. We're just going to put you away for a while'. We didn't really rehabilitate many. They got to 18 and their hormones kicked in and they either got it together or they went to jail. Some got it together really well and became normal people and some went to jail.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Any become politicians?

**Mr GODFREY** - Not that I know of, but apparently there is quite a big list of crimes that politicians in the Federal Government have committed.

*Laughter.*

**Mrs JAMIESON** - We won't go down that track!

**CHAIR** - Mrs Jamieson was not concentrating.

*Laughter.*

**Mr MARTIN** - One of the comments you make in your written submission is about the mixing of different age groups and sexes. Do you reckon that's a problem?

**Mr GODFREY** - A massive problem. At one time we had one or two who were 10 and 11 in our centre because their family was there and they really wanted to be able to see them and they thought that might be an advantage to the kids. They just created chaos. They were like these naughty little kids running around. They wound everyone up. They wound all the workers and the kids up and the older kids got really sick of them and wanted them locked away. They used them as runners in a way, 'Go down and get my stuff or I'll bash you'. It was just like they were errand boys. It wasn't a good mix. It didn't work at all.

Having girls there would have been like poking an ant nest with a stick, I'm sure. The girls who came through our centre stayed in a secure, separate area. They just came through and went to Yasma - that was the girls' centre. I can't imagine it; it would have been hell to have them mixed. The girls I met I wouldn't have wanted in the centre; they were worse than the boys in a lot of ways.

**Mr MARTIN** - The other comment you make that is interesting is about the pecking order. Do you want to expand on that?

**Mr GODFREY** - Yes. The bigger the crime the more violent they were and they got up the order until you ended up with a top dog who had his little errand boys. He would say, 'Go and beat that bloke up', and he would go and do it because, if he didn't, he knew what would happen. The guy who was top dog amongst the kids didn't actually get into trouble ever because he was always making someone else do his dirty work for him and brings drugs in for them. Say, if they went out on a home visit, as soon as that kid came back there would be a huddle around him, 'Hand it over. Give it over', and he would have to hand over what he brought back in for them. It was all pressure and peer groups with the way they worked their way up the pecking order. In some ways that was encouraged by workers thinking, 'If I can control the top dog, I have more control over the place', but I think it would have been better to squash it every time and not have a pecking order allowed. Somehow they saw that was a better system, where they could speak to one guy and say, 'You better stop this rubbish', and he would stop and that would be it. It is a funny set-up.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - How long did your interview take? You have made some very astute observations - and quite a lot of them - if it was just a one-off visit.

**Mr GODFREY** - We were there for a whole day, I think - six or eight hours. We only went for a tour for an hour or two inside the 'zoo', as we would have called it. It doesn't take much when you are used to seeing things. I noticed they have those electronic locks here

on the front door. We had those at the front of our units at one stage and one kid, who weighed about 120 kilos, could just boot those doors open. They have only a little tiny metal pin that holds it. It looks really solid but one boot will break them. We had to replace them because they kicked them off. I fixed all that stuff so I got to notice it pretty quickly.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Are you aware of whether the department of Health has anything to do with the funding of the detention centres in New South Wales?

**CHAIR** - Who is the jurisdiction in New South Wales - Corrective Services?

**Mr GODFREY** - No, there was a separate department. It was the Juvenile Justice Department. We had them and our own director general and cluster managers. I think we had about six centres so each area had a director. There were youth workers in the towns.

**CHAIR** - So the bucket of money probably came from Justice, do you reckon?

**Mr GODFREY** - It would have been a fair bit of money. We weren't linked with the Justice department because that would have hooked us in too much with the adult prisons, so we had our own department.

**CHAIR** - Quite autonomous in that respect.

**Mr GODFREY** - Yes. They had their own budget, the whole lot.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much for your evidence, Peter. We appreciate you making your time available and doing the submission. I think having had that previous experience in another jurisdiction was very handy.

**Mr GODFREY** - It is good to know something from the inside.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**