

ASHLEY, YOUTH JUSTICE AND DETENTION COMMITTEE - LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, MET IN THE TERRACE ROOM, 2ND FLOOR, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, ADELAIDE ON WEDNESDAY 21 FEBRUARY 2007.

DISCUSSION WITH Ms MARY LINDEMAN, FORMER UNIVERSITY LECTURER AND SOCIAL WORKER.

CHAIR (Mr Hall) - Welcome Ms Lindeman. Perhaps you would like to give us some idea of your background.

Ms LINDEMAN - I did prepare a one-page resume on my work since retirement. My fancy CV is on some back-up disc somewhere, so I sat down and wrote this out from memory - it will give you a rough idea. I guess I would like to say at first that I am a bit long in the tooth, as I have been retired for a while. I have worked most of my working career with children and families, and then was teaching at the university. I came here and worked in community welfare. Then I was teaching and again primarily in group work and working with children. Over the years I was involved in a number of programs here. Please ask any questions at any time.

I guess one thing I want to stress about my background is it was primarily in the mid-west of the United States, which is quite different from New York City, Los Angeles and places that get a lot of high profile. I guess we were rural, and I think you can identify with that.

CHAIR - Most of us have been to the mid-west anyway.

Ms LINDEMAN - So you know Iowa has the reputation like Radar Riley, who was supposed to be kind of dumb and naïve.

As far as programs go, I just want to talk in general about programs. I am definitely against one size fits all - especially when you find out you're not an 'all'. That's one of the real points I wanted to make. I think you need a whole number of programs - which program for whom. With some of the group work programs I have been involved in, youngsters would come in and then they would be assigned to certain groups. It became quite apparent that group leaders chose the ones that they felt they could work with, and I think that's fair enough. We have certain skills with different types of youngsters, and if that's a mismatch it's bad for everybody, particularly the kids.

I talk about a lot of different programs, I am very strong on diversionary programs before we put kids into care and lock them up. I don't know what your situation is in Tasmania, but I would probably maintain the same. When I first came here I was asked by some of these leaders in community welfare working with Vaughan House, which is now defunct, how many girls in the State I thought should be locked up. I said, 'About three.' I think at the time there were something like 40. Some were locked up for the crime of having their parents beat them up. That was the state of affairs then. I think there are some kids that are just so out of control that we don't know what to do with them. But I

think a lot of them are put into secure care by the community - probably more out of frustration. Some of these families are pretty worn out too.

Mr WILKINSON - What type of diversionary projects do you believe are most appropriate? I know you say it is not a one size fits all. But there has to be, I suppose, some basics that have to occur with these programs.

Ms LINDEMAN - Yes. My bias is to group programs. But I am the first one to say that there are some youngsters who are not ready for group. They are so damaged and their interpersonal relationships still have to be on the one-to-one basis. I worked in kind of home school a very open campus. Just to give you an idea: in 1970 they built all the cottages at the cost of \$1 million per cottage, so you can get an idea what our facilities were like! We said the one thing that we were missing was a golf course and tennis court. We had a lake, boats, horses and people would call up and say, 'I want to bring my kid out to show them where they might end up'. I don't think so. I don't think you would like the look of this.

There are some youngsters who are so socially undeveloped. With group programs, if you do it right in schools, you can con the kids into thinking they have been chosen for the school. If you are going to have a centre where they have to report four nights a week, talking groups are relatively useless unless you have them involved in some activities also. So you could have what I would call a 'life space interview' and you could have activities that help them build confidence and have fun. A lot of these kids do not know how to have fun without hurting themselves or other people. It is a really important skill. So you do not play poison ball, a game where you hit somebody and they are out.

Mr WILKINSON - Brandings?

Ms LINDEMAN - Yes, we have different names for it. Poison ball is what they call it here - I have heard any number of names. When I graduated from high school, three quarters of us had started kindergarten together. But if you take a group of kids who do not feel good about each other and are angry, then it is not a good game. It does not build confidence.

One of things that stresses me about that kind of thing is that right now we have an awful lot of programs on TV that celebrate distrust and tricking people out - who is the mole in the group? - and it really worries me. I cannot stand watching much of any of them because it really rewards people behaving badly. I am afraid that a lot of young people will get into groups and think along those lines.

Mr DEAN - I can't stand watching those programs either.

Ms LINDEMAN - It offends my sense of decency and fairness.

Mrs JAMIESON - Did you have any comment to make about those so-called 'boot camps' and 'brat camps'?

Ms LINDEMAN - My answer is no - if you look at some of the research and the literature of the US. I have prepared a list of books and I know that one of them addressed that issue

and it is a very biased set of books. The main author is a fellow by the name of Larry Brentrow. Larry and I trained together. That is one of the advantages I always felt I had.

My first training was a summer between the years of graduate school, and we actually had hands-on work. I always felt that was an advantage as a teacher or a supervisor - I could get out there and do the job. Some of my colleagues were in a similar position, but they were scared to get out there because they never had the hands-on work to expose themselves to the staff or the trainees. If you have some confidence in yourself, it obviously shows that you can demonstrate how you try to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

You were asking what kind of programs there are. The people who are really committed to them will sell the program or not sell the program. I would be asking them just exactly what is your population and who are you aiming for. Early on a lot of us had bitter experience of indulging in what I call the 'saviour syndrome' - the belief that we can save them all. I believe strongly sometimes we are not the right people at the right place at the right time, and you end up sacrificing the rest of the kids trying to deal with one. It's just not a match.

I stress that very much because I think kids get into the lock-step system of a centre where they can come and muck around and have a group meeting and this sort of stuff; then they move to some more organised type of care, right through the unsecured care and they just graduate right up the ladder.

One of the things I feel very strongly about is that often these kids get into the lock-step system because they are in a program that isn't the right place, the right time and the right people. It is not a right fit. So we say that the kid has failed, not us. The kid has failed, therefore he needs a step up the ladder. I have had some fairly good success - I will use an example of an American Indian girl I had at the county home school who was getting worse. On record she had no history of violence. Street information told me a little bit else, and it just wasn't on. One of my main rules is nobody hitting anybody; whether it is kid to kid, staff to kid, or kid to staff, I press charges.

When I was talking to her parents, they brought this up, and I said, 'I agree with you, and I want her out of the program because we're not doing right by her'. I could take the case back to court any time I wanted to, but I suggested that the parents do it themselves. I put them onto what I considered the best legal aid because I said, 'That will give you some status with the daughter that you're standing up for her'. Also, American Indian people don't have a lot of faith in the system, and rightfully so. So I had her returned home, and even after I left Minnesota I had a friend that kept in touch, but this girl was never heard of again in the system. I think sometimes probably all it takes is for the kid to know that there will be consequences to their behaviour, so they think, 'I had either learn how to get by with this or stop it.'

I have had a number of youngsters who did that. A boy who made wonderful progress in the program, a terrific kid called Beaver. Two days before he was to be released, he ran away. I then told the probation officers to not track him, not to go to his parents' home because it was being watched by federal drug agents. This kid came from a very criminal family. So we waited the decent time, reported him as a runaway and six weeks later I wrote a letter to the courts recommending that he be dropped from the court services. So

if he ever got into trouble again it started all over. The only time I heard from him was when I was building a new home. I went out every day to see that they were doing the right job, and guess who was there working on building my house? It was Beaver.

Mr WILKINSON - Leave it to Beaver!

Laughter.

Ms LINDEMAN - He said, 'I saw your name on the work thing and I wondered if that was you.' So of course I took him out for a hamburger and that kind of thing and he said, 'Thank you for not running after me.' He had made something of himself. So I think we really have to look at that possibility. I think we were so afraid that the kid will think they got by with something. Well, maybe they did. Like Beaver was able to get by, not quite going out the front door and not quite doing it the way we wanted. But I do think that sometimes kids need to get by with something and all of us in adulthood realise our parents knew a lot more than we thought they knew, especially when you live in a small town. As an aside, someone once said to me, 'You mean you never skipped school? I said, 'I lived in a town 780 people and my father had the hardware store, where would I go?' The pub was right next to his store. I would never have reached the main street without a phone call saying, 'Guess who I saw running down the street here?'

I will get back to foster care for adolescents. You were talking about boot camp. I am a great believer in some of these outward-bound type programs. However, when we started with Outward Bound, we broke with them because we wanted to have our group meetings as part of the program and you had to follow their way. But before you do any of these things, our rules were that nobody could go with the kids on this kind of program. We used the American/Canadian boundary water areas, where you can go by canoe all the way through and you have to go out with everything you have taken in. Backpacks are searched and then are weighed according to your bodyweight and so on.

We had one group get into real trouble. I witnessed the group the night before and I called one of my superiors and I said that they should not go, those kids were not in control. The staff had a flare gun and we paid big money to have a helicopter come in to take some of them out. So it is really important that the group is what I call under instructional control. Like with my dog - when I say no, it hangs its head and when I say come, it comes. If you take wild bunch of kids on something like that, unless you have one-to-one staff you can be in real trouble.

Do you have foster care for adolescents? I am not a real fan of it. Adolescence is the time that you are trying to break away from the family rather than indulge in warm, fuzzy family life. You wake up and you have pretty decent parents. I do not know about you, but I had really good solid parents. But I woke up one day when I was about 13 or 14 and my parents had turned dumb overnight.

CHAIR - As they do.

Ms LINDEMAN - It's a shocker. You think, what happened to these people? But I was able to get over it. We had a special foster care program for adolescents in Sioux City. It was well financed. I am just going to say that because any parliamentary committee, whether it is on roads or traffic or the water system, will always say, what we need is more

finance. It is true for a lot of welfare programs and they are done on the cheap and their corners are cut so it is bound to fail.

There really is such a place as Sioux City. It is a town of about 18 000 people in the midst of a very rural area. The four north-west counties of Iowa are very heavily Dutch Christian Reform, very, very strict Calvinistic people who made fantastic foster parents because they were very forgiving of an outsider's child's behaviour whereas with their own kids they were not. Also they were very clear about their boundaries and about what their beliefs were. We had no trouble placing our Catholic youngster. If that Catholic youngster thought he was going to miss mass he had another think coming because he would be driven to the nearest Catholic church.

The case worker involved would have no more than 10 youngsters. The foster parents were organised into their own foster parents support group. Staff attended when invited. The youngsters who seemed to do well in that program are youngsters who had very little family contact, if any at all, for a number of years. We had twin boys who were half American Indian but were very identified with the white society; their Indian side had never really been developed. I think the father was dead and the mother had gone. We placed him in a home where they had four other adolescents. I do not know how people put up with six adolescents in a house but they sure were a wonderful family.

Sometimes it is just plain dumb luck. We had a young lass and she was the sole survivor of a car accident; her two brothers and her parents were all killed. She had shocking injuries so she could not go to the funeral; she was 13 and she was a mess. At the same time we had a couple on a farm who came in to apply to be foster parents and who were suffering from the empty nest syndrome. Their third daughter had gone off to university. It was a match made in heaven. None of the girl's extended family wanted her or could have her. This couple raised girls, this girl had grown up on a farm, she was placed on a farm, she was quite suicidal but the parents knew that. I learned more from those foster parents than I ever contributed to it. It is good sensible upbringing and they did not go to pieces when a plate of food went flying to the wall. It was, 'Up to your room and when you get ready you can come down and clean it up'. There is a love factor in that and it is nice to see how it was meant to be. Those are my thoughts on foster care with adolescents. You have to keep the case load down because if there is a crisis it is already over.

The one other point I wanted to make concerns overseas programs. I just heard something on the news the other day; some people from somewhere in Australia were going to look at a program in New York City and South Carolina. I thought, God, not again. They get a Churchill Scholarship or something and go take a peep at a program that is working well. It has happened to me in the United States and I said, 'Don't go trying to repeat this because this group is ready to go', but of course they did and they made a big mush of it. There is no concern for the demography. When I think of New York City, the program I utilised most I adapted from a Highfields program. Highfields in New Jersey takes the roughest, toughest, meanest kids off New York City. If I copied that program directly to working with kids in the mid-west or in South Australia, perhaps, it just would not be appropriate. We are talking about kids who are toting guns at three years of age. That is what I am afraid happens with this program or whatever. It would be the same in South Carolina. People think, there are black kids, and we have black people in Australia, but black American culture is unique in the world. If you want to

compare anything then compare the American Indian and the Aboriginal people; there is much more in common with these cultures. I just have to say that, as an American, when I hear of where some of these people go to. In the mid-west we used to take programs from large cities and adapt them to our small-town people.

Things go in cycles and we will always have naughty kids, and right now in South Australia we have this gang thing going. It goes in about 20-year cycles - you get a really bad patch. Everybody gets up on law and order. One of the things that is happening in the United States and has been happening for a long time, and I am sorry to see it here, is treating adolescents as adults under the law. Kids as young as 12 are being put into the prison system. If you do that then you just have to admit you are throwing the kid on the scrap heap of society.

Mr WILKINSON - So the question would be, what do you do with them?

Ms LINDEMAN - Depends what the offence was.

Mrs JAMIESON - If they had done an adult type of crime, for example?

Ms LINDEMAN - Let us take murder. I have had kids in my open program that have committed murder.

Mr WILKINSON - Murder is an assault gone wrong, really.

Ms LINDEMAN - There was one kid I worked with who was so weird. That brings up another thing: we also have this crossover between mental illness and delinquency. That is a tough one because the correctional system does not want to deal with it and the mental health system does not want to deal with it because they say the kids are acting up and we cannot handle that. We want nice docile, depressed kids.

Mr DEAN - What do you mean by prison? Do you mean they go into a juvenile home?

Ms LINDEMAN - No, I am talking about adult prison, hard-time adult prison.

Mr DEAN - Okay, I want to get that clear because does not happen here.

Ms LINDEMAN - Yes, but they are talking about. I would be like taking a 13 to 14 year old and putting them in Yatala. That is the end and there is no hope.

Mr WILKINSON - No, that does not happen here.

Ms LINDEMAN - Watch out for it, though, because when you get into law and order cycles sometimes people come up with some very interesting ideas. People get angry and sometimes there are bizarre situations.

Mr WILKINSON - It is a lynch-mob mentality, isn't it?

Ms LINDEMAN - Yes, but if somebody killed a member of my family I do not think I would be real warm and fuzzy and understanding about it.

Mr DEAN - A good example of that was the two young people in Britain who murdered a young child. A lot of people wanted them locked up forever and the keys thrown away.

Ms LINDEMAN - The same thing happened in Norway or Sweden and I have seen a documentary comparing how those two were handled. The mother in Scandinavia lived in public housing but it was a different kind of public housing than these huge things. They had somebody with the kids all the time and there was not that kind of mob mentality. That was a very expensive way to deal with those boys, as they were under supervision constantly.

Martin Bryant is a real classic when I think of somebody who has real mental health issues and acting-out issues, even before the awful thing had happened there. I think probably locking somebody like him up is the only kind of community response you can have but it sure is not going to help him. He is pretty mixed up young man. Those things will happen and nobody has an answer for those.

CHAIR - Thanks very much, Lindy; obviously you have drawn on all your life experiences. I noticed from your CV that you were a chemist earlier on.

Ms LINDEMAN - I started out in chemistry and mathematics, but I have never regretted that, though. The discipline and thinking and the problem-solving has served me well through the years.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.