

**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASHLEY YOUTH
DETENTION CENTRE MET AT THE CHARLES FERGUSSON BUILDING,
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND ON TUESDAY 22 MAY 2007.**

DISCUSSION WITH **Ms JILL POWER**, AREA MANAGER, BARNARDOS, NEW ZEALAND.

(There are two other female witnesses - we do not know their names, so we have referred to them as 'Witness' and 'Witness 2')

CHAIR (Mr Hall) - Welcome.

Ms POWER - I'm from foster care. We do foster care for Child, Youth and Family. We see that as a positive intervention with children and we are really passionate about this sort of work. So often it is undervalued and seen as just a dumping ground or a holding place and we see that some really good things can happen for children in foster care. We have a permanency program in foster care and guardianship, and we have short-term foster care.

CHAIR - That has been going for a long time?

Ms POWER - Yes. We used to have a program - 25 years ago it started - taking children who were at the harder end. Everything else had been tried and they had been through the system and so there wasn't a lot of hope that there would be guardianship of them. But we could find permanency for them and there was a lot of social work support. We were able to keep them out of the justice system.

CHAIR - And those foster parents are paid?

Ms POWER - No, they are not. They are volunteers, they are reimbursed and they were recruited specifically for the child that we were placing.

CHAIR - They are reimbursed in terms of -

Ms POWER - Children's needs - clothing and those sort of things. Nothing else.

Mr MARTIN - What is the number in care?

Ms POWER - The numbers are going right down because Child, Youth and Family are really pushing to have children stay in their own homes - this has always been the ideal - and sending children home or to family carers. That is their thrust even more now. We have always seen ourselves as last resort and our contracted numbers are going down.

Mr WILKINSON - That has happened in Tasmania over the past five or six years. The endeavour is, if possible, to take the child back into the family but that has caused problems. It seems to have caused problems for a couple of reasons. Some of the families can see that there is a monetary benefit to have the child back living with them.

I believe, and tell me if I'm wrong, that you can have a fairly clear idea of the families whose children are going to get into trouble. Certainly you can in Hobart. How can you get into those families where the families don't want you to be involved? Do you need an order of the court?

Ms POWER - You can help them if they come on board. We are a voluntary agency so we can only be in there if we have their permission and they want to work with us. Child, Youth and Family is a statutory agency and they can come in; they have a statutory right to be in there. They are the ones who take the children into care and then we provide the foster homes.

Mr WILKINSON - The focus is in getting the child back into the family. If the family can't care for the child do you then assist with the day-to-day requirements?

Ms POWER - The next port of call would be the wider family; they would try really hard to find wider family. Then they would come back to us later perhaps if they weren't successful in that. They would then say that the child does need permanency and ask if we have a family placement. We would find a permanent home with foster carers.

Mr WILKINSON - So it is only the permanency aspect that you're really concerned about?

Ms POWER - No, because they might be put into care on that day. We would provide short-term carers. They could be in care for quite a long time while a family is found for them to go to. The family will work on their issues and then they will be sent back to the family.

Mr WILKINSON - Do you give assistance to families that need help?

Ms POWER - No, not in that role; not in that contract. I see a real need for agencies to provide a lot more support for families to whom the children will return. These children require more than normal parenting. The family that they go to can be the most lovely family but there is often two or three of them and they come in with a whole lot of issues and they just tear that family apart. They have no support so it all breaks down. So that is another breakdown for that child.

Mrs JAMIESON - How often would you have two or three children from the one family going to another?

Ms POWER - Quite often.

Mrs JAMIESON - I am thinking of a single-parent situation. If that parent was taken into custody for whatever reason, would you have the capacity to put Barnardos people into the kids' home?

Ms POWER - We don't do that.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you see that as a need?

Ms POWER - I would see that as what the family are wanting to explore and do more of. It is a whole different way of care. I could see that we could train foster carers to go into people's homes, but that is a new way of doing it.

WITNESS - I worked for Child, Youth and Family until November last year. I worked there for 14 years. Child, Youth and Family used to do in-home work with offenders and children. We used to contract the Open Home Foundation to work with the family.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would they stay overnight or for a week or whatever?

WITNESS - Yes, it was a residential type of thing. There is one facility in Hamilton that the Salvation Army runs. It's called the Nest. I think there is a huge need to keep the family within their own home. There is a focus on keeping children in their community for schooling and so on.

Mr MARTIN - I notice in the profile that you do work with the Family Support Service. Can you tell me what sort of progress is being made?

WITNESS - We have four family support workers. We get referrals from special education centres and from schools, from public health nurses and from GPs. The families tend to be single mums with one or two children, right up to mum in bed with seven or eight children. It is right across the spectrum of age groups. We are only mandated to work with children up to the age of 17.

There is quite a long and complex assessment process that the families undergo with the social worker. They look at the family within their context and their community and then all the other needs of each of the children as well. It can take us up to five months to complete an assessment of a family if there is a number of children and a number of needs. The families we are working with now are really highly complex families. They are just under the radar of Child, Youth and Family. There are really high areas of need around neglect, truancy from school, drugs, alcohol, suicide, and parents with major mental health issues. We have made a number of notifications already this year in the Lower Hutt area.

Mr MARTIN - Is there a parent-mentoring program?

WITNESS - We do run parenting programs, which is an area where we see a huge need. I was at a meeting in one of the schools this afternoon and I was told they had 17 parents who were wanting a parenting program. It is a huge need.

Mr MARTIN - I have had an interest in this area for 13 or 14 years. From my local government background back then we recognised that you could identify kids at risk at an early stage.

CHAIR - With the philosophy of the Government, do you think that there is less call for your services?

WITNESS - I wouldn't think so. I supervised a team of social workers for eight years who were dealing with new-born babies that were removed at birth, right up to kids of 17.

There can be so much damage done in the first few months of life. One little boy of 15 months has had six placements. That child is extremely emotionally damaged.

Mrs JAMIESON - Knowing of that situation, is there any way that as an organisation you can support the family?

WITNESS - Yes, that's what I'm pushing. We would like to go in there and work with that family. Any outsider looking in would say, 'They're pretty strict' or 'They're pretty mean. That poor little boy.' They wouldn't have any understanding, standing outside, about what is driving those people crazy. So they won't get support from their own support systems and they won't get it from the agencies. This is what makes us really anxious and concerned because there is no knowledge of child development. I believe that social workers now are case workers ticking boxes. At Barnardos we see ourselves as social workers with an understanding of child development and those issues. I think that is where there has to be a lot more understanding of how to work with the family.

Mr MARTIN - Is anything going on in New Zealand in relation to addressing this issue?

WITNESS - People are talking a little bit about it now.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you offer a 24-hour phone contact for people?

WITNESS - Yes. For foster parents to do the job well they need to be really well supported.

Mrs JAMIESON - Over the years, have you had a chance to track whether kids who have gone through Barnardos at the early stage have ended up in the prison system?

WITNESS - We haven't done official research but we do have all of our paperwork for somebody to do that. We did a three-year pilot project which came up with some findings but the trouble was that it was a three-year period and children were still being referred in the last six months of the pilot so they were only being in care for about six months and you couldn't really evaluate it very well.

Mrs JAMIESON - I was thinking of people who might have been through the system about 20 years ago.

WITNESS - We keep in touch with some of those.

Mrs JAMIESON - I notice in regard to your early learning centres that you say that you provide affordable - does that mean that there is a fee attached to the early learning centres?

WITNESS - Yes. They are for children who are not necessarily at risk; they are children whose parents go out to work.

Mrs JAMIESON - It's like a childcare centre?

WITNESS - Yes.

Mrs JAMIESON - How many of those would you have dotted around the place?

WITNESS - Around New Zealand we have 22.

Mrs JAMIESON - In what other ways do you raise your money?

WITNESS - We get our money from donations and the business arm of Barnardos is early childhood so we have early learning centres. We have an early education program.

Mr WILKINSON - In order to benefit our system, when you can see that these people are going to be at risk is there a dot-point plan that you should implement? You need to have the ability to identify who's at risk. Therefore it seems to me that you have to have cooperation between the agencies. Is that the first step?

WITNESS - That's where it breaks down. It's quite expensive - it's been mooted here - to have every child identified. We also have a contract with Child, Youth and Family that where there's a notification against a family and it's at the lower end we go in and do an assessment to see what's going on. So we've seen a lot of families and if they want numbers of children at risk - and there are heaps and heaps - what are they going to do then?

Mr WILKINSON - That's what I'm saying. What should we be doing then? We should be doing that. There was a case in Tasmania about 10 years ago. Child Services realised parents were having trouble. In the end the father killed the child. Because of a communication breakdown - the kid was only about two years old - the child died.

WITNESS - That often happens in New Zealand too because we have a lot of agencies involved with a family and nobody's talking to each other. Barnardos has developed this integrated model where we are developing good relationships with other community agencies. We have regular meetings with court coordinators, with other NGOs, with Child, Youth and Family, with the police in the local areas so that we are getting a sense of what's happening.

CHAIR - That's all very well and fine and you're doing a tremendous job but should that really be your role, stretching your resources, or should it be the role of government to do that, to coordinate all those agencies?

WITNESS - We think NGOs do a brilliant job.

WITNESS 2 - I'm a social worker so I come from a different perspective.

CHAIR - That's all right.

WITNESS 2 - When I took up the team of social workers one of the things that struck me was the number of agencies involved with one child, all trying to do a little bit of something. My question is: why doesn't an organisation that does something well just get in there and do it? That's what's going to make the difference. Government gives us hundreds of contracts. We are all doing the same thing and we've all got little mishmash bits of a contract. Once the money runs out or the contract's reduced, everything falls to pieces.

CHAIR - That's an important point you've made.

Mrs JAMIESON - It happens all the time.

WITNESS - Barnardos also has a number of specialist family homes - we have two in Auckland and one in Wellington - and they are for young male sexual offenders. It is a live-in, therapeutic program for up to two years. The boys are from 12 to 16. That is an intensive program. It's very costly; it costs \$500 000 a year to run. It is intensive and it's excellent. It is high maintenance for all the staff that are involved because it's 24/7 care.

Mrs JAMIESON - How long has that been running?

WITNESS - I have no idea how long that has been running.

WITNESS 2 - Two years.

WITNESS - I have a home here in Wellington and I asked what happens to the boys when they leave, where they go. What research has been done to say what we've done with them to ensure that they don't sexually offend -

CHAIR - They've obviously committed an offence and the magistrate has said that rather than send them to a detention centre, they can come to you. Is that how it works?

WITNESS - No. They can only be charged over the age of 14 if it's a rape situation. Usually they've interfered with their siblings. We have cases where the fathers have actively encouraged their sons to have sex.

Mr WILKINSON - There's a sexual offenders program in Tasmania, which is fairly new. It's mainly for older people. But the jury's out as to whether it's successful or not. Is that the same here?

WITNESS - It is the same here. It's sad to say but we gauge our success on whether they sexually offend again. A lot of them will finish up in prison but it will be because they've assaulted someone or for another matter. It's very sad, isn't it.

The other problem we've had - and we talked about it this morning at a team meeting - is that at 17 we just say 'Bye, bye'.

Mrs JAMIESON - So you can't refer them on to another agency as a flag type of thing?

WITNESS - In reality they can still remain under the Guardianship Tribunal until they're 20. I feel very strongly about that. Unfortunately the dollar drives everything and often they'll discharge all the orders.

WITNESS 2 - There is also a lock-up facility. These boys are at the hard end of the spectrum. That's based in Christchurch. It is extremely well run. It's an excellent facility.

Mrs JAMIESON - Just going back to your ability to respond in an emergency situation, if a parent was taken into custody could the police or somebody ring -

WITNESS - The police would notify Child, Youth and Family.

Mrs JAMIESON - They do have the opportunity to respond if there were two or three kids, or even one, left at home?

WITNESS - Yes, if Child, Youth and Family didn't have anywhere for them they would ring us at Barnardos and we would place them that day. Most of our placements would be on-the-day placements. We don't get many that are planned placements. If they are going to go from short term - maybe it has been decided down the track that they need a permanent family foster home - we would review the whole situation and probably place them with a permanent care giver who is different from the one who took them on. We would make a slow transition, getting to know them and all that stuff, before they went to that care giver. We have the luxury then of knowing that it's happening but at the initial stage it doesn't work like that.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you ever have a Barnardos family day where all the kids in care have a picnic?

WITNESS - We have a children's day but that's usually for the preschoolers.

WITNESS 2 - We arrange for our foster parents to get together and we put on things for them. There would only be a few families at any one time that would be part of that because they are all scattered around, but yes we do, and we have support groups for foster parents as well.

WITNESS - We try to offer wrap-around services for children no matter what they come to us for so whether it's a child that comes to us for our social services or a child that comes to us for the care in education, our philosophy is that no child will ever be turned away. That was demonstrated quite recently when we had a boy who escaped from another city and came to Wellington. He had sexual offending in his past so we were able to take him into our home here just to care for him for a few days. We would get no financial reimbursement for that but we would never turn a child away who needed our help.

Mr MARTIN - What's your rule regarding physical abuse of a child? Is he immediately removed from home?

WITNESS - A lot of it depends on the investigation, the level of the abuse and the context around it. Even when you get them right through to the court system a lot of them get away with it anyway and they are discharged as using reasonable discipline.

WITNESS 2 - It's still a horrific experience for some families to have to be investigated and that goes on their record even if there's no charge. It's quite serious. We see a lot of families that we think should have been charged but what good would that do that family? It would probably do a lot more harm than good. They may be well-meaning people for whom it's a glitch, a hiccup, caused by stress and all sorts of things. It's a one-off occurrence. It's going to be a nightmare for authorities to police.

Mrs JAMIESON - Absolutely.

WITNESS - You will always get a hard core of people who just don't care but it's a horrible process.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about complaints about Barnardos? There are some streetwise kids out there who know their rights. Do you ever have any problems with that sort of situation or frivolous complaints about abuse?

WITNESS - Yes, we do.

Mrs JAMIESON - How do you handle that?

WITNESS 2 - We do in foster care too. There are children who have been through the system and there has been abuse and they will make allegations. There is now a program in New Zealand to set up and provide support; there is an 0800 number that you can ring and they will put you in contact with the nearest support person who will stand alongside you while you're going through that and ensure that it's done in a timely manner and that foster people are told what their rights are. That's a fairly new initiative in New Zealand. That's for anyone from any agency. It's been quite a significant issue for foster carers because it turns their world upside down. We have seen it in our own foster homes where teenagers have made allegations. It has to be investigated of course.

Mrs JAMIESON - Have any of the allegations been proven?

WITNESS 2 - Often not. They can be. The biggest problem has been that a process hasn't been followed. The child's been removed to a safe place but then nothing's been done; nothing's been taken any further and the foster carer has been left with that hanging over their head, not dealt with properly. Hopefully that can be tightened up and dealt with properly.

CHAIR - I may have missed it earlier. What is the genesis of Barnardos? Is it a church-based organisation?

Ms POWER - With the branding and marketing of Barnardos there are a lot of people in New Zealand still who think that Barnardos is just for poor, underprivileged people and orphans. We have not had orphanages in New Zealand for years and years. Tom Barnardos wasn't a doctor; they just called him a doctor. He picked up street kids and fed and housed them. It is a very sad story. One day he turned a boy away and the next day he found him dead and he made a commitment then never to turn a child away.

WITNESS - And he was before his time.

Ms POWER - He was absolutely before his time.

WITNESS - A lot of children were sent out from the UK to New Zealand and Australia because they thought that was the best thing for them. A lot of those people are older people now so we also have a councillor who is a designated adoptions councillor. They come to her and she will get their records from England. That is something Barnardos did really well; they kept very good records. Those people can be in their 70s and they are coming to her and she is getting all their information and they are finding out that they have brothers still alive, that they came into care for reasons other than those they

thought. They are finding out all sorts of amazing things. They have come and spoken to us and talked about their lives in care, in institutions and then with a person, and then into the Navy because Tom Barnardos believed that they should have the best opportunity. A lot of them were put into naval school. It is fascinating and interesting. So there is an old boys and girls network now.

Mr MARTIN - The same in Tasmania.

Ms POWER - But to answer your question, no we are not Christian based but we do have a set of values that we operate under.

Mr MARTIN - If your vision were to be achieved it would fix all of our problems. The children would grow up to be caring people and good parents.

Ms POWER - We are all passionate about what we do and we work for Barnardos because we enjoy what we do and we enjoy making a difference for the children and their families. You don't come to Barnardos if you want to earn big dollars, but it is somewhere we feel passionate about what we do. We have some gaps and we are looking currently at perhaps where we can get funding for programs for the over-17-year-olds: what can we do with them, how can we assist them and do a bit of follow-up with them.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would you ever consider, say, a youth hostel?

Ms POWER - Yes, we would.

WITNESS - We tried it, but it wasn't set up properly so it didn't succeed. One of the things that SIPS is just launching as a trial, a pilot, is an assessment home for youths. It is a three-month assessment live-in in the community. Barnardos tendered successfully for that project, so we will be starting that up within the next few months. That is going to be exciting for us.

Mrs JAMIESON - Where will that be located?

WITNESS - It is going to be located at Podyrua, in the low decile part of Podyrua. It will have house parents.

Mrs JAMIESON - Accommodating how many?

WITNESS - Six boys.

Ms POWER - And hopefully a group program to work with the family and the children to enable them to return home.

WITNESS - Yes, to integrate them back into their families.

Mrs JAMIESON - What would your assessment would include?

(Break in tape.)

Ms POWER - The idea is that young people who finish with us will stay connected to that foster family. They might want to race off initially but they have that base and they are still part of that family. That is the ideal. But where they have come to us quite late in life or close to 17 it is sometimes not that realistic that we will establish that for them. They will ring us - and I have been rung by them when they are 19 and 20 - and they are floundering around because things have not gone well. I have met with them or linked them up with somebody to board with, just because we had them for a few years and they know that they can come back to us at any time. The door is always open.

Mr MARTIN - Do you have stats on the average amount of time a child is in foster care?

Ms POWER - We have the stats there but we haven't put them together. Some of them have been in foster care for quite a long time, and that is good and not good. We pride ourselves on not having lots and lots of changes in placements.

Mr MARTIN - That's where I am leading.

Ms POWER - Even though I said before that this 14-month-old child's had five placements, it does count his own family and going there and back again and then going to hospital for some time.

Mr MARTIN - So the child was in care for 10 years?

Ms POWER - Yes.

Mr MARTIN - Anecdotally, how many homes?

Ms POWER - If they have stayed in care that long, we would see that as a permanent home and we would say that they have been in the care of that family for eight of those years - there might have been a couple of changes at the beginning. We would be really worried if their placements were always changing.

WITNESS - We see placement breakdowns as really serious and detrimental for a child.

Ms POWER - I think they are much more stable; they certainly are within the department.

Mr MARTIN - So the aim is to have them in the one family?

WITNESS - Yes. Maybe come into care short term because they come in an emergency. They come in, say, at the end of today and we can only match in a certain way. When the decision is finally made that they can't go home or they have tried at home and it doesn't work, we would then really try to match them with a family. We would try to tell that family everything we needed to. They get to know that family so we would be looking at whether they are the right match for them and putting all the supports in there. Once we made the commitment to that child we would be really holding them to that. We would not just be saying, 'You've been with that family for a couple of years so you can stay'. That needs to be assessed because they may not be the right family for that

child. Short term is so different to permanency, although those people might put their hand up first.

CHAIR - Thank you very much.