

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

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DISCUSSION WITH **Mr JOHN SHEPHERD**, OPERATION FLINDERS.

**CHAIR** (Mr Hall) - Welcome, John, and thank you very much for coming along to talk to us. Operation Flinders is a program that we have heard about in Tasmania; it has been successful and that was the reason we have asked you to come along and talk to us about it. We will do is invite you to describe the operation to us and your impressions, and then members can ask any questions.

**Mr SHEPHERD** - The program has been running in South Australia for about 13 years. It was set up by a woman by the name of Pam Murray-White, who was a school teacher. She went into the army for a time and when she came out she appreciated that some of the things that she saw while working with young people in the army might work with young people having trouble at school.

She went back to teaching in the education department, at a place where they dealt with kids who were having difficulty. She got a whole bunch of her mates from her army and police days to help her to set up this program called Operation Flinders. Initially, there was a lot of support from the army - in fact it was all support from the army; in fact it was almost like an army camp - army rations, army trucks, army radios, the whole shooting match.

After about a couple of years the army looked at how much this thing was costing, and resolved that it really wasn't something they could do. Therefore they resolved that they should move away from it. That is no criticism of the army because that's not what the army do - they are not meant to be out running programs for young offenders.

She went and saw a mate of mine who was then the judge in the Youth Court, Kingsley Newman, and said she had problems and that the program was running well. I was at that stage running a program called SA Great, which was a State promotional program; I had left the police force eight years earlier. I could see some merit in her program, so I set up a foundation. I convinced some mates of mine that they ought to build a sort of formless foundation. It was the usual story - one meeting a month, it won't take a lot of your time, all that sort of stuff.

I got a whole bunch of business leaders and people from government, and we set up a foundation to support Pam's work. When Pam left the army, she had gone to Bali and had a holiday and got very badly sunburned; she came back and discovered a melanoma. The cancer subsequently went through her body, it recurred and on 30 August 1995 Pam died. At that stage I was chairman. I stood down as chairman and took over as executive director.

The program runs up in the far north Flinders Ranges in South Australia, about 650 kilometres north of Adelaide. It is beautiful, hilly ranges, and a long way away from -

**CHAIR** - How many kilometres?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - About 680 kilometres north of Adelaide.

**CHAIR** - Whereabouts?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - At a place called Warraweena Station, which is not a station, it's a conservation park. It used to be a station, they've had the stock -

**CHAIR** - Is that north of Wilpena?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Yes, it is. As you are going up, you go right through a little town called Parachilna, which is famous for its hotel. Further, I have a vested interest; I am the chairman of the progress association there, so I have give that a plug. Then you drive up towards Leigh Creek, which is where the coal mines are, and there's a little place called Beltana. You turn right and we're 32 kilometres into the east from there. It is very pretty country.

We run what we call four exercises a year, four times we go up there. Each time we go we take about 90 young people and about 70 staff, so there are about 160 of us on the ground for each exercise we call. You will notice a lot of the stuff I am talking about has army and police overtones because the people who are involved - probably about 75 per cent of them - are army or police people and the rest of them are from a whole range of occupations.

The kids arrive in three lots. We have three teams arrive over three days, and then they stay for eight days and they come back. So three teams arrive Tuesday, three on Wednesday, three on Thursday, then the three teams leave on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday because we are not trying to deal with 90 kids all at once. They arrive on the side of the road, when they arrive they are met. They travel up in a bus with two counsellors, and the counsellors come from the organisation that the kids come from so there is actually a link.

The kids come from a range of places. Starting at the higher level, we have kids from what is called Families SA in South Australia. That is the organisation which looks after kids who are on orders, under the guardianship of a minister, and those sorts of things. So I guess you would say they are probably high risk or young offenders group; probably about 15 per cent of our kids are those. Then we go down one step and we've got kids from what are called behavioural learning centres. In South Australia, kids who are having real difficulties in conventional school systems are moved out for a term and put into these behavioural learning centres. So we take a group of those, and they are probably about 10 per cent of our kids.

The rest of the kids are from schools, and they are kids who are identified by this counsellor and the school as being those who, unless there is some intervention, will end up in trouble. Our kids are 14 to 18 years. Sometimes we take 13 year olds, but not very

often. About 32 per cent of the kids we take away are female and 10 per cent of the kids we take away are Aboriginal, which is obviously over-representative of the number of Aboriginals in our community.

Over the eight days the kids walk about 120 kilometres. They carry everything on their back. Most days that they come into the station. The kids will walk around the station. The station is based in the middle. At the station we have an exercise commander, a 2IC, an operations officer who runs an operations room there with radios. Each team carries two radios and we are in constant contact with them. We have two ambulance officers from SA Ambulance and one of them is a paramedic. We have a radio technician. We have a yardman who keeps things around the station running and myself. That is pretty much it. I am not involved in the actual running of the program. I step back because I have people who are lieutenant colonels and deputy commissioners who volunteer to do the role and I figure they are much more skilled than I am at that sort of stuff.

Out in the field we have nine teams. Each team has a team leader and an assistant team leader - the assistant team leader is someone who is learning to be a team leader - two counsellors and sometimes what we call a peer group mentor or a PGM and that is a young person who has done the program and is invited to come back and act as a role model for the other kids. That is a great source of support because he or she can say to the kids, 'I know what you're going through as I was here six, 12 or whatever months ago'. Kids are met on the side of the road, they are given a backpack and in their backpack they have a groundsheet, a sleeping bag, what is called a hoochie, which is a small single person tent, a KFS set - knife, fork and spoon - a set of dixies, some water bottles, a poncho and that is pretty much it.

Mum packs seven sets of everything and we have to carry all that so they will take maybe one or two changes, put it in the back and off they go. Over the eight days they walk from stand to stand - the stands are located about 20 kilometres apart - and the kids navigate across country with a map and compass. When I say the kids do, it the team leader who is out in the front pretty much leads the team. He or she is responsible for the movement of the team. The counsellors look after the kids and work with them and talk through the issues they have. At each stand there is a ration box and there is enough food for the kids for dinner that night, breakfast the next day and lunch and that is pretty important because they have to walk there to get their food. Basically, if you do not make it, no tucker.

There are a number of set stands and one of the stands is an Aboriginal stand. We work on the land of the Adnyamathanha in the far north Flinders Ranges and we have a senior member of that tribe and a junior member and the kids spend a day and a bit with that person usually learning about Aboriginal culture and also bush tucker and how they relate to the land. They learn all about the culture. It is wonderful because a lot of white kids have no appreciation of what the Aboriginal culture is about and, sadly, a lot of the Aboriginal kids who come up there are urban Aborigines and likewise do not understand the culture. So it is good for both sides and it is put in a really good sense; there is none of this 'it's all your fault' stuff; it is very much about the beauty of the land and the great culture that they have.

The kids then spend a day and a bit abseiling - we have an abseiling site and the kids walk into that. They also discover an old guy who happens to be out there who is a

bushman and he spends a day with them talking about how to survive in the bush. He shows them how to navigate, how to cook, collect water, trap animals and all the skills you need in the bush and also tells them a bit of a story about the past up there. They are not quite sure whether he belongs to us or not and he is quite an unusual fellow. It is very much about getting these kids to activate their imagination. It is about play and the kids get swept away with this thing. It cannot be real but they want to believe it and so they talk about this fellow Mick that they meet out in the bush.

I guess basically that is the whole thing. Over the eight days they have to navigate. They learn about living out in the bush for themselves. They sleep on the ground under the stars. There are no tents. At each stand as well as a ration box there is water and what we call common stores, so there is tea, coffee, sugar, hand-cleaning stuff and so on.

**CHAIR** - What months of the year does that run?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - We run four times a year - April and then again in late May, then in July and then again in September - four exercises a year. The kids are spread over about 380 square kilometres so you can imagine the logistics involved are quite significant.

We have our own radio network so they can talk to us the whole time. The kids have a feeling of isolation out there but if anything there is quite a net around them. They do all kind of things, quite bizarre stuff - run away, self-harm. The first three days are really challenging. We have the storming, norming, forming and grieving process. The first three or four days they go through the storming, where they do anything to get away. Most of our young people are classic avoiders, in that they will do anything to have to avoid facing up to the reality of whatever they have done. On Operation Flinders you cannot avoid it. Quite simply, if they break into somebody's house down here in town or wherever they come from, the reality is that they generally do not face any consequences. They might go to court but they do not see the relevance. Whereas up there we have a rule that you face up to your consequences. So, for example, if you sit down and don't walk then we all sit down. They say, 'What about dinner?', and I say, "Don't ask me, ask him." So we might sit there for the day. I have to tell you, by next morning there is a lot of pressure on you to walk.

We have a rule that says no swearing. You are not allowed to use certain words. I will not shock with what they are. If you do it, it is 10 push-ups, but it is not just you, it is the whole team, including the team leader. So at the end of the day, we are tired, we arrive at base camp and all we want to do is set up, have tea and crash into bed, but no, we have to do 70 push-ups because you swore seven times. It is about gaining appreciation of the fact that whatever you do impacts not just on you but also on others. So it is remarkable to watch the change. I have seen kids who arrive up there and every second word is swear word. Within three days they learn to appreciate the fact that whatever you do impacts on others. So that is one of the lessons they learn.

They also learn to work as team and the importance of working as a team. Generally they are very singular and so having to work as a team is a bit of a challenge to them, but they realise suddenly that things will work better if they work that way. We have set down rules and there are consequences. It is interesting because the kids will object to them. I was never like this and nor, I suspect, were any of you, but as a young person, if you are given a set of rules you will try to find a hole in it. If they can find one chink in

our armour they will widen it out, so we say, 'This is the way it is guys' and that is the way it is. Our leaders are consistent and strong, whereas in life they have generally found that people they have dealt with are inconsistent. On one hand they will give them a whack behind the ear and on the other hand they are giving them \$50. In fact kids like to have a boundary so that they know what the bounds are.

So in the storming phase they try all that stuff, sitting down and so on, then the norming phase comes on and they think this isn't too bad. Then in the forming phase they are really enjoying it. Suddenly all the troubles they have had at home are no longer there. They know what they have to do. They have to get up in the morning, get the billy on, pack your backpack, get the map out, all that stuff, and you can see them change. Then the grieving phase, which are usually the last days. The last night is pretty sad because they realise they have to face all the issues they have left behind.

We had a team of young blokes last year who all sat down on day two and said, 'That is it, this is where we are staying or we are going home.' We said, 'You are not going home'. We removed the food and said, 'Okay, I guess it is going to be a long, hungry wait'. We don't refuse them water; you get plenty of water but no food. After 24 hours they decided that it was perhaps sensible not to stay there. On the last day they refused to get out of their sleeping bags because they did not want to go home. So there was a turnabout.

Our program has been evaluated and in that folder is an executive summary of both evaluations we have had done. Back in the year 2001, the Attorney-General here in South Australia funded an evaluation of our program. It found at that time we led the world in what we do and that 89 per cent of our practices are world's best practice. So we are right at the forefront of this work.

**Mr DEAN** - How are you funded now John?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Currently it is a really interesting matrix in that about one quarter of money comes from the State Government. They give about \$210 000 a year and the other \$800 000 I raise from the community. It is hard work but it is interesting because the corporate community in South Australia is very good if they can see value in it. The whole time I am up there I am hosting visitors. We bring up all our corporate sponsors. They don't walk with the kids but we take them out and show them what it is. We have sponsors who have been with us for years. The Adelaide Bank, for example, had a strict rule they do not under any circumstances fund organisations year in, year out. This year we received our tenth lot of funding of \$15 000. Then they gave us another \$35 000 at the end of last year. I think that is a valid point. If you can be seen by the corporate sector as doing a job, then they will fund you; it is as simple as that. Our valuations, I guess, prove conclusively that the young people who did our program made significant changes whilst they were on the program, and that change was sustained 12 weeks out.

The second evaluation also showed that young people who do our program are more inclined to stay at school. I have a briefing paper in there for you. It indicates that for every year you keep a young person at school the more likely they are to earn money and the less likely they are to be an impact on the Government.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - What happens about following up the kids? Once they finish camp are they formally referred to any particular community organisation?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - At this stage we are involved in negotiations with our government. Basically the two councils who come up with the kids then go back to the organisation that the kids come from. They conduct some informal follow-up. In other words, they go back, check out how the kids are going and those sorts of things. We have just put a proposal to the South Australian Government that we want some funding to do some formal mentoring programs. Also within our system we have things called 'chapters'. This came about because one of the local members of parliament from the riverland said, 'John, that's fine. You're dealing with kids who are at school and you are dealing with kids and families, but there is a whole bunch of kids in the community who have left school, who are causing all sorts of trouble in my town who can't get access to your program. How can you do it?'. I said, 'You have to find the money first'. So she went and organised the councils and others and they raised \$15 000, which is what it costs to send a group of 10 kids on our program. Then when the kids came back they organised a mentoring program. We don't claim to be all things, nor do we claim that our program works on every kid either. They brought together TAFE, the local youth groups et cetera and provided individual outlets for these kids if they had individual problems.

Currently we have six chapters - five in South Australia, one in Albury-Wodonga. They send teams over every year and they have a mentoring program for the kids, but they are the only kids who get that personal mentoring. We are talking to the State Government about us being provided with some funding to facilitate mentoring when the kids come back, particularly the Aboriginal kids. As you may or may not know, in this State we have quite a significant problem with a group of young Aboriginal people who are causing problems. We have put a proposal to our Social Inclusion Unit that we develop a mentoring program for these kids. Most of the Aboriginal kids we work with idolise sports people; they mostly idolise AFL footballers. We have had a look at some research that says these kids relate very well with these people, so we are putting a proposal to develop this program. I am seeing them on Friday morning about taking it to the next step, because we believe that it is important. We have never claimed to be able to do the follow-up. We are very good up in the bush, in fact we are excellent, but when it comes to the stuff down here nobody else is doing it. That is causing the State Government some considerable grief. We are keen to do that so that when the kids come back they will be given some mentoring. We don't do it for them because we have learnt that they have to want to do it. If you do it for them they will give it away because it's too easy.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - And you should focus on what you are good at anyway.

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Yes, so we take them to the door, show them the opportunities, give them assistance but we don't do it for them.

**Mr WILKINSON** - The Governor-General came out a couple of years ago and was talking about the boot camps and a better way of sentencing. Obviously this is not a boot camp but it is a bit like it.

**Mr SHEPHERD** - I whacked him around the ears over it. I thought, 'Here we go'. He invited me to see him and I thought he was going to whack me around the ears but he said, 'I appreciate, John, that boot camps don't work'. Evidence proves conclusively that

boot camps do not work. In fact, in America people who come out of boot camps offend at a far greater rate than those that have not. They are much better at it, they are fitter and they are much more organised because they have been in a boot camp. It is a reality. So our program is not a boot camp and we shy away from that word because our program is not about marching kids around and dehumanising them. They remain individuals and are given all the things that an individual needs. They are a team; it is important that they be a team but it is certainly not a boot camp.

**Mr WILKINSON** - I think it is a terrific idea. You have just spoken about follow-up. The kids have obviously enjoyed it to the extent that they do not want to get out of their sleeping bags. Once it is finished, what next? They have gone through what may be a life-changing experience but for a lot of the kids they say, 'What next? I go back into the same old drag that I've been in prior to coming up'.

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Yes, that is true. If you have a look at the research document I have on 25 young people who had done the program, they all said that it was one of the most important things that had ever happened in their life. I am not going to suggest that at the end of our program all of the kids suddenly make a change; they do not, sometimes it does not happen at all. Sometimes we go and visit our kids in jail but with others suddenly something will click in and these kids will say that it had an impact on their lives. Certainly some of them go back to where they came from. I remember I once went to a school for a reunion, because we always have a reunion with the team leader. We go and meet the parents and mum gets to lift the backpack and so on. On this occasion the whole team had been suspended from the school for a fortnight. How embarrassing is that. They had come back so full of themselves they had taken up on others. They wore their dog tags with pride. I went back some two months later and they had all sorted themselves out; several had got jobs and others were back at school so it is a long-term thing, so your point is very valid.

These kids are on the cusp. When they arrive their heads are down, shoulders are drooped, no eye contact, no self-esteem, no self-confidence. At the end of it you cannot shut them up - 'When I get home I'm going to do this'. Suddenly, they have a future. Most of our young people are what I call 'one-pace' or 'three-second kids'. Their whole life is the next pace they take or the next three seconds. They do not have any plans other than that. It is very hard for us to understand, we who have all got plans for our lives. They come up there and you watch the change over the eight days. Suddenly on the eighth day you are talking about what they are going to do when they get home: 'I'm going to go back and sort out the problems I have with mum'. We get some feedback from the kids as to what they are going to do, and generally it is to go and sort out the problems they have with mum or dad, teacher and so on, so they all have ambitions. The issue is they do not have any support for that. Often they go back into poor circumstances and we hope they have the resilience to pull through. We are hoping with this mentoring program that we will be able to provide support in real terms. Currently the chapters do that. Our six chapters do provide a mentoring program with the kids but the rest do not.

**CHAIR** - Have you ever had any kids that have come through McGill or Cavan, or have been through the system, and you have taken them on board?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - In the early days I got the job of driving the kids up. I had been a policeman for 25 years and I thought I had heard it all, but there was a group of little girls in the back of the bus who gave my wife and I quite a good education on the seven-hour trip in the bus. One of them was a real feral. She now serves on our clinic advisory committee. She has just married and within three years she will be Dr Airlie Wood. She has finished her psychology degree and she is doing her doctorate. She works for us and continues to provide us with clinical support. I said to her one day, 'What are you going to be when you finish all this?'. She said, 'I wouldn't mind being executive director of Operation Flinders', so I am casting my eye over my shoulder from time to time. We have probably about 30 or 40 kids who are our peer-group mentors and who come along. Once they reach 19 they are told to go away, so they go away and get some life experience. We have three or four kids who are what we call assistant team leaders and who we hope one day will be team leaders and complete the circle.

**CHAIR** - What I am getting at is you have had kids

**CHAIR** - So you had kids who had been in remand and from there have progressed, and that has really helped with their rehabilitation.

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Yes, it has.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Is there is a medical screening?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Each child has to have a medical check before they come up

**Mrs JAMIESON** - If you had an insulin-dependant diabetic, or an epileptic, could you take them?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Yes, we can; we deal with that. All of our team leaders have senior first aid certificates. All of our ambulance officers get a medical report on the kids so they know exactly what their conditions are. We have contact with the Royal Flying Doctor Service. We have what is called a Royal Flying Doctor Service box up there. It has a real mixture of about 400 drugs. You could have a really great time if you got the keys to that. We can actually dispense drugs and generally the teacher or the counsellors with them have been trained on what to do when it comes to perhaps providing the kids with that sort of thing.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - And kids who might have an intellectual disability?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - We do a program in August every year called Project Eucalypt where we take groups of intellectually disabled kids, usually only four teams. That program is completely different to our Operation Flinders in that it is not about breaking the cycle; this one's about giving them self-esteem and self-confidence. That's a wonderful program that works really well because these kids often have been well looked after and loved by their mum and dad but they have no self-esteem or self-confidence. I could tell you some heartbreaking stories about the changes those kids have made.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - And mixing of girls and boys?



**Mr SHEPHERD** - Yes. We have some rules about that. We never take an equal number of boys and girls because that's when you get the assumption that there's, say, 10 of us and therefore five couples. We send a letter to the parents telling them it's a mixed team. When they are up there if there is any sort of touching then it's, 'You get up the front, you go to the back and leave them alone'. So we are very much about making sure there is no hanky-panky. Girls stay there, boys stay there, and there is always a female counsellor or team leader of the team. We have about 70 team leaders and they take us up on their annual leave. They don't work for us full time; we only have two full-time staff. They come up and do one or two trips a year. We have 12 or 14 females; a couple are police officers, teachers and all sorts of people.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Do you do campfire songs and things like that at night?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - It depends upon what stage of life they are at. Sometimes they go straight to bed, but we sit around and talk about things. I have to say we're not into sitting down hugging and telling me how you feel about things. The chairman of Project Hahn came over and had a look at the program. He and I went to Canada where there were some 100 organisations from around the world who do this sort of work. I guess I felt like a fish out of water because no matter where you are, they were sitting down and hugging and telling about how you feel and how I feel about you and why I feel it. Australian kids aren't like that. Ours is a program about doing stuff. Our kids are in trouble because they're doers; they are not internalisers, they're externalisers. If you sit down and say, 'Why do you reckon you are?', they've been down that track and you watch the screen come down over their eyes. Our kids are doers; they like to be out walking, doing something, so we do what we call exploring the metaphor. In other words, they learn lessons up there that we hope they will think relate to back home. A young Aboriginal kid had abseiled down a cliff. It took him a while to get down to the bottom and he was pretty frightened by the whole thing. He said, 'That was great; that was better than drugs'. We let it go at that. I had an American guy telling us how to do this stuff because Americans know how to do everything, as we all know. I told him that story and he said, 'John, what a great opportunity to say to that young man, "You're right because drugs destroy your brain." '. I said, 'No, as soon as I start to do that I take that decision away from him'. We let kids, if they make a decision, keep that decision. If you say to me, 'You're overweight', I am going to say, 'Nick off'. But if I make the decision to go on a diet, then I own it and I will do it. So it is on Operation Flinders. Kids make decisions, we let them own the decision and we don't take it away from them. We support it but we don't take it away from them.

Another aspect is that we have a lot of disclosures, which is pretty sad, where kids disclose what's happening and what's happened to them. These kids have generally not had anybody they can relate to on an ongoing basis, so they will form a relationship with the team leader who is consistent, strong and somebody they can believe in and they will often make disclosures. On the last two exercises, we have had young people come up and tell us that they have been raped or sexually assaulted by somebody in their family. So I think that is a very sad thing but it is reflective of the relationship these kids suddenly have with these people who work with us.

**Mr WILKINSON** - What do you do with that when you get those disclosures?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - We have an obligation to the State. We have a mandated notification process. In fact all our staff are doing training on that this year. We are obligated, as soon as practicable; to report it and then if the kids are going back into that situation, this government organisation makes sure that does not happen. Then they will follow it through. One of the kids made a disclosure up in the riverland; they went and arrested his uncle and the matter is now before the court.

**Mr DEAN** - Just tell me about the selection process for these kids to go into the program - is the Education Department involved in that as well?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Families SA have counsellors. We call them all counsellors: some of them are youth workers who are not necessarily counsellors in the strictest form but they usually work with the kids and they know these kids. They make the decision about which kids will go. For example, on this trip we have coming up, we have a team coming from Whyalla. Whyalla Families SA have identified 10 kids in the community who they think would be suitable for the program. Because we have been going for 13 years, most of our counsellors - and again I use the word advisedly - have some idea of what the program and the kind of kids that the program works best on. We do not ever kids 18 and kids 14 because the 18-year-old kids beat up on the 14-year-old kids and life is hell out there with that sort of stuff going on. In the behavioural learning centres there are usually only 10 kids in the place and eight teachers. So they will send a whole team up of either boys or girls. In the Education department system each school these days has a least one counsellor - depending upon the size of the school they might have two. They identify kids who they think would benefit from the program and they nominate. Every year they put an application in. Last year we turned away 15 teams because we did not have enough spaces to run them all on the program

**Mrs JAMIESON** - The cost?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - It is about \$1 500 per child.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Who then pays for that?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - We find the sponsorship or the Government. For the Government's \$200 000, we give them an agreed 100 places. The rest of the places I find sponsorship for. So the Adelaide Bank will pay \$15 000 and they get a team of kids.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - So the local council, for example, could sponsor the kids?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - That is usually through the chapter system. The chapter might involve, for example, a winery in the Barossa Valley and the local Rotary Club will put money in. When they've got their \$15 000, they can sponsor a team.

**CHAIR** - How valuable, John, do you think it would be to have the current remandees and/or people in detention to have a program set up, say in Tasmania, for those people to go out on an ongoing basis or at different periods to do something like this?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - I think it has value. You would have to be careful about the age group of these people. We took a group of people who were on parole, young men who were 20 plus, and they nearly killed my team leader because they were extremely fit. They

wanted to climb every hill and at the end of it he was absolutely exhausted. Although the team leaders are all relatively fit guys, these guys in jail do not do anything other than get fit. So every hill, they wanted to climb and the poor old leader, who is ex-detective sergeant, was absolutely stuffed!

**CHAIR** - I was referring to youth in this instance.

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Yes, it has some real merit. The only think I caution you about is that if kids are set up and it seen to be a sentencing option then you have a real problem because every step they take they see as punishment. They have to go up with the right attitude. We have had kids sent up there and unfortunately the counsellor said, 'Either you do that or you go on Operation Flinders.' When they arrive it is very difficult to get the mindset to change that this is not a sentencing option scheme in fact.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Would there be a downside to the program, apart from funding of course? But is there anything on the negative side of the equation? It has been very positive and I certainly endorse what you are saying. But is there a downside at all in anything that could be done differently maybe?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - As I say, we have always been under this cloud about follow-up and in fact it is not a downside, it is about resolving the issues. It is very challenging work. I have talked about the \$15 000 and several committee members have obviously taken that on board.

But you have to appreciate that you have to have the best system and support to ensure that if anything does go wrong you are not looking at serious trouble, so we have four-wheel drives, radios and all that sort of stuff. But from the point of view of the counselling and the follow-up, if anything, that has been where we have not been able to fulfil our demands and we are hoping that we will be able to do that.

Downside, no. It is a program that brings the community together so the Government do not have to bear the whole thing. For every \$1 the South Australian Government puts in, I raise \$4. That is a darn good deal. You tell me any government enterprise that can do that sort of stuff. Over the year 382 kids do the program and I am not going to claim that every one of those 382 kids makes a change but certainly our report validates that a lot of them do make a change.

**Mr WILKINSON** - What are the stats on that? The average stats of change?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - You are a parliamentarian - all I ask is how many kids do not reoffend at the end of it. I have no idea and proving that is not going to prove anything to you. If you have a look at our evaluation, what I have done is put an executive summary and then for those who are more determined I have actually put on to CD a complete copy of both evaluations so that you can check it through if you like. What it basically says is that when they did our evaluation they found that kids who had high at-risk levels at the start of the program improved as they did the program. Their at-risk factors dropped and were sustained for 12 weeks out and that is the measure they use. Offending behaviours prove absolutely nothing as far as they are concerned because once they leave the program anything could happen - this is the evaluation I was given by these experts.

They might have a nasty experience with drugs and give away drugs and that has nothing to do with us.

I would have loved them to have come out and said at the end of it that x number of kids did not offend because I would have gone to every politician. But they say our evaluation is sound and I have had reports from around the world that it is very accurate. So all I can say to you is have a look at our evaluation process, which proves conclusively that the program works.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - John, are kids allowed to come back onto the program?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - No, it is only one trip or as a PGM.

**CHAIR** - John, thank you very much. What you have told us has been terrific.

**Mr SHEPHERD** - In the folder for you I have a copy of the evaluation, a copy of our magazine - we have just produced our tenth year edition and the one before that - a briefing paper about the program and, as I have already said, a CD which has both the evaluations in full plus an executive summary.

**CHAIR** - When does your next program start?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - The next program starts on 30 April.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Can you run one for politicians?

**Mr SHEPHERD** - No, I'm afraid not! But we have a lot of visitors come up.

**CHAIR** - That is a question I was going to ask; it might be of interest to see it in operation.

**Mr SHEPHERD** - Sure. We had members of our own select committee come up two or three years ago to have a look at the program. So yes, certainly you are welcome to. It is a matter of contacting me. We have a lot of visitors which is good. Visitors do not live out, you do not spend time walking with the kids because we do not put people in and out of a team, but you certainly get an opportunity to see the program. I apologise that our web site is down currently but it will be up within a fortnight.

**CHAIR** - Thank you very much for talking to us.

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**