

**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASHLEY YOUTH
DETENTION CENTRE MET IN COMMITTEE ROOM 2, PARLIAMENT HOUSE,
HOBART ON 9 MAY 2007.**

Mr JOHN CORVAN WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND
WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Hall) - I appreciate your time, John and thank you very much. We just wanted to speak to you because we have taken a lot of evidence. We have had around 70 submissions, I think, so far on this journey and we have had a lot of interest. We have been to Victoria and South Australia looking at detention centres, talking to stakeholders and also to the various departments.

Mr CORVAN - I am sorry I missed you; I was visiting South Australia when you were there.

CHAIR - When we were at Parkville.

Mr CORVAN - Yes, and also Lonsdale Street.

CHAIR - Yes, that was all very interesting. Bearing in mind that you were a former manager, the committee thought we would like to speak to you. We appreciate your time. We have your written submission, which was very good, thank you very much. I think members were impressed with that and, for that reason, we thought we would like to talk to you. I invite you to speak to that submission for a while and then we might have a question and answer session.

Mr CORVAN - Very briefly, I felt it somewhat essential that I put some thoughts on paper in regard to the inquiry, given that I had been down there for years. I have worked in youth justice for probably longer than I can remember. I spent eight years as a manager in Victoria before I went over to Tasmania where I spent two years at Ashley and loved it. It was an unfortunate set of family circumstances that led me to depart, even though it probably would not have been my preferred option. I would have loved to finish my career in Tasmania and in the youth justice system down there.

Ashley burnt a special place in me because I think part of it was that its history has been so chequered and so difficult and I thought that in the two years we were there we demonstrated the capacity for positive change in the centre. I think that was also partly due to the support that we had from staff and from the higher echelons of the Department of Health and Human Services. I think people forget that we are working with young people and that young people, particularly of the age group that are involved at Ashley, can be very difficult but they can also be very challenging and very enjoyable. Some of the successful transitions that young people make from being fairly stupid, dangerous, et cetera, can be very rewarding.

I do not expect that I know all the answers. I have the experiences in Victoria and experiences in Tasmania. I have done an enormous amount of research around youth offending and detention for young people and that is why I thought that I really needed to do something to try to raise some issues and try to help set Ashley on a path that might

hopefully lessen the burden and perhaps finish up with a quality service. That was the reasoning behind what I did. So I am happy to leave it at that.

CHAIR - Thanks for that John. Obviously you have been in two jurisdictions now. You have been in Victoria for a while now. What do you see as the main differences in the way that a detention centre is run? I do note, if I recall, that in your submission you talked about the diseconomies of scale in regard to Tasmania being such a small State and therefore in bigger States such as Victoria and New South Wales there is much more opportunity for flexibility in terms of client mix or whatever. Would like to comment on that, please?

Mr CORVAN - I think Youth Justice in and of itself is very small. It does not get the maximum benefits, as it would if it was, as I say, a corrections area, which is large enough to stand on its own in most jurisdictions.

Across Australia most of the youth justice jurisdictions are attached to health departments. Some are still attached to Department of Justice but, regardless of whatever it is, because it is so small, it tends to be seen a lesser light, tends not to attract the same funding. It only tends to attract the attention when things go wrong, such as kids jumping over the fence, staff assaults et cetera et cetera.

So in that respect the whole issue of youth justice suffers a little bit by being a very small part, as in Tasmania, of Health and Human Services. That department has issues such as health and child protection - there are much greater priorities than the welfare and wellbeing of young people who are locked up for being convicted of offences.

CHAIR - So increased funding is, in your view, pretty fundamental to improving things in that whole area?

Mr CORVAN - I really do not think it is just exclusively increased funding. Funding always helps but it is about how you use that funding. It is more attention to the needs of the service system, over and above funding. This area is last thought of when funding and other benefits are being dished out in larger departments. Because it is so small, it tends to come last.

Funding in itself is important but how you actually apply that funding when you get it is another significant issue and there needs to be a broader application across the youth justice community, across the areas of the custodial system, child protection services and adolescent mental health. There needs to be a much closer working relationship so that you have a core of kids who cross all of those program areas and some of the funding needs to be left flexible so that different areas within the same department can access it and use it to benefit.

CHAIR - Yes. John, you have obviously seen our terms of reference and just so we can keep the conversation on track, maybe we ought to talk about those as we go through them.

Mr CORVAN - Fair enough.

CHAIR - We might start with the current security arrangements and I think you have made a couple of comments about those. Would you like to make any further comments in that regard? You were there after the fire and the fence was up?

Mr CORVAN - Yes.

CHAIR - You weren't there before that?

Mr CORVAN - No.

CHAIR - Okay.

Mr CORVAN - In my belief and experience, and the sort of research I have done, although the security actually starts in, say, buildings, security is also about relationships between staff and clients. Engagement between staff and clients is a priority because if security is good kids feel safe in a custodial environment. Your real problems come when young people start to feel that they are not safe because once they are not safe they start doing silly things and those silly things include assaults, self-harm issues, attempts to escape and escapes.

The Ashley fence: when you look at an assessment of the secure perimeter for a custodial facility, the Ashley fence would probably rate very low on the scale. My estimate has always been that it takes less than 15 seconds for a kid to get over it if they really want to. For an average Ashley kid of 14, 15 or 16 years of age, the adrenalin is pumping, and they are over the fence and gone. The fence is not a deterrent to escape. The biggest deterrent, in that respect, is that Ashley is a long way from most places except the highway so getting over the fence, while it may not be difficult, is not the only issue. I think putting the fence up probably added to some of the problems and I do not think that a lot of thinking went into it. It is hardly a shift in thinking, in the transition from a boys' home to detention centre, to have a great big metal fence around the outside.

I think staff definitely need to be more active in regard to the security. It needs to become a little bit more of a priority in terms of training. I also think that the issue of supervision of staff needs to look at and focus on some of the security issues. There needs to be ongoing and regular security risk assessments of the precinct. The dynamics in the centre change every so often. The risk at the time the fence was built is completely different to the risk that is there now. There are other ways, other than building fences and increasing security and putting cameras in and doing all those sorts of things, that can be more effective.

The centre has to have a focus on better engagement with young people and staff so that the focus of kids is about going to school, about addressing their offending, about getting some therapeutic interventions, rather than trying to jump over the fence.

CHAIR - When we were in Victoria we went to Parkville, which obviously is pretty secure. We looked at all the security arrangements there, and they were pretty impressive in that respect. Has anybody ever got out of that?

Mr CORVAN - Yes, absolutely.

CHAIR - Oh, there you go. They tunnelled out, did they?

Mr CORVAN - I am actually working back in that system, and I tell you, if you knew what I knew at the moment you would not have said what you just said.

Laughter.

Mr CORVAN - I actually have to replace a significant percentage of the perimeter here because it is in a perilous and dangerous state. We have had escapes from both facilities here, behind the wall and behind the metal fence as you walk in.

CHAIR - Okay. The other centre we didn't visit was at Malmsbury. I understand that is an open centre, I believe, isn't it?

Mr CORVAN - It's a five-unit centre with three open units and two secure units, so they have the same fence around two or three units as you saw as you go into Parkville here.

Mrs JAMIESON - I was just interested in your comments in your report here saying that Ashley security has never met minimum standards for a custodial centre in comparison with other centres. On whom can we lay the blame, if you like, if you want to call it blame? Was it government cost-cutting that the fence didn't meet standards? One would anticipate that there's such a thing as duty of care. Would you care to comment at all?

Mr CORVAN - I don't know who to blame, sorry, and I'm not going to blame anybody. The assessment that's needed needs to be detailed; it needs to be done by someone who is really familiar with the territory. For a fence, for example, you need to have a security consultant who has a background in custodial-type security environments. Just looking at part of my work at the moment, the palisade fence gets a zero rating from security consultants when you talk about fence types. The highest rating is obviously a wall, and the perforated metal fence, as you saw at Parkville, probably fits somewhere in the middle. But the palisade fence is not deemed to be appropriate for a custodial environment.

Just on that, too, there is a committee set up in the Commonwealth Government concerning security equipment. They endorse products for use in various areas around security, and they certainly don't endorse the palisade fence at all.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about the use of electronic surveillance and even electric fences? I have seen mention made in different parts of information I have read here about the use of electric fences as deterrents.

Mr CORVAN - I have to say I was at Risdon about three weeks ago; they have an electric fence. I personally think that in a youth justice environment there is absolutely no place for electric fences. I absolutely believe that there is a place for improved perimeter detection systems, which includes alarms. There are various methods for perimeter detection. You can have infra-red cameras, you can have your taut wires, you can have the underground sensors. There are six or seven different things that you can put around the perimeter - microwave detection, and so on. Obviously you have to do a fairly significant assessment because the weather is a big factor at Deloraine at Ashley. So there are options there but certainly an electric fence, I think, is an absolute no-no.

Mrs JAMIESON - I would love to see a big, thick gorse bush all the way around it actually. Nothing gets through gorse bushes.

Mr CORVAN - There's actually something to that. There is a very big copycat factor in youth justice because of the client group and the immaturity. One kid does it and the message is out there that everybody else can do it, and they do try it.

Mrs JAMIESON - Have you any comment to make about people getting into the place - breaking in?

Mr CORVAN - That is one of the areas where absolutely your perimeter detection systems have to be improved. When I was at Ashley we had significant issues with people getting in but we couldn't prove it because we didn't have cameras or detection systems. What we had to do was rely on regular patrols from the police. We went to the police and we were getting some assistance with it but it wasn't easy to find anybody inside the centre, though we believed that they were coming in.

Mr MARTIN - I think you have covered it pretty well in your session on site security. I couldn't agree more. You have made the statement that there is a range of options for Ashley, and turning it into a fortress or prison is hopefully not on the agenda. That will create a punitive model that fails to address rehabilitation and leads to increased offending. Do you want to expand on that at all?

Mr CORVAN - I think if you're going to build 16-foot walls and put razor wire and electric fences in then you are sending the wrong message. I have no problems with improving security with things like perimeter detection systems, alarm monitoring et cetera. They are all definitely ways you can go, but they are not obvious, they are not intrusive and they're not sending the wrong type of message.

Mr MARTIN - So really the more important issue to address is the rehabilitation issue rather than the security issue.

Mr CORVAN - And the engagement between staff and young people.

Mr DEAN - You talked about video surveillance to deter outside people coming in and throwing stuff over the walls and things such as that. Has anybody, to your knowledge, made a submission to DHHS for funding or for that to occur?

Mr CORVAN - Off the top of my head I can't honestly say that I do. We raised the issue on a number of occasions. As I said, we actually went to the local police to get help with patrols and things like that because we were concerned. Again, I am not sure if there was a formal submission. I do know that there were issues raised at the time in regard to getting experts in because of the weather factor around the Deloraine area. We couldn't just go and get cameras et cetera; we would need to have a fairly detailed professional assessment done by experts.

Mr DEAN - That really answers it, I think. You are telling us fairly clearly that it needs to be at least looked at and considered.

Mr CORVAN - Yes.

Mrs JAMIESON - What was the way that you alerted the community to the fact that there had been some escapees?

Mr CORVAN - We notified the police of escapees, which I believe is the appropriate thing to do. Prior to my time, I believe there used to be a siren which was sounded every time someone disappeared from Ashley. I don't know if that was sending the right message to the community. It was certainly heightening the fear of the community and I don't think I would have supported that if it had been still in place.

Mrs JAMIESON - Did you not ring the immediate neighbours?

Mr CORVAN - The immediate neighbours were contacted as well. Staff from the centre visited the immediate neighbours in case they may have gone into some of the outbuildings and tried to hide there.

Mrs JAMIESON - You were happy with the amount of training the staff had regarding escapes?

Mr CORVAN - I would probably say I was never happy with the amount of training that staff had on the site, full stop.

CHAIR - John, we might move onto our term of reference 2, which is staff issues, including OH&S arrangements. You have made several comments, and I have to say we have had a lot of evidence from previous staff on the way they see things at Ashley at the moment. You have several sentences there - a few paragraphs, in fact - on staff so would you like to make any other comment there at this stage or just open it up to questions and answers?

Mr CORVAN - There are a lot of good people who work in Ashley. I just think that their image is tarnished by some of those who are much more difficult to manage.

Mr MARTIN - To start with, it seems to me that there is a fairly hierarchical staff structure there now. In your day, how many lines of management did you have from the youth worker up to you?

Mr CORVAN - There was a youth worker and a team leader. In the units, there was an operational coordinator who oversaw the whole shift, so they were responsible for everything that happened on their shift, and then there was the unit manager on Monday to Friday who basically looked after the major issues around operational policy, policy development, staffing, recruitment, retention and that sort of issue, and then there was an assistant manager who was not in the line but who worked with me on all the policy issues and stuff like that.

Mr MARTIN - Sorry, he was not in the line?

Mr CORVAN - No, the assistant manager position was not in the line.

Mr MARTIN - So you had a much flatter structure than there is today?

Mr CORVAN - I will be honest, I am not sure what is actually there at the moment. I know there have been some changes.

Mr MARTIN - One of the problems that have identified by staff that have given evidence is the lack of feedback from management. Did you have a system in place when you were there?

Mr CORVAN - Did I have a system in place?

Mr MARTIN - Yes. If a youth worker, for example, had an issue or complaint, what was your system for that complaint getting up to you and then getting your response back to the youth worker?

Mr CORVAN - Good question. We had a number of forums - I had regular forums with the staff around organisational structure. With any changes we would organise forums with staff. We had regular meetings. I would attend staff meetings in the units where possible - mind you, at times it was not all that possible - and I was a frequent and regular visitor to every single unit during shifts when I was there so, basically, I made sure that I was around and about and talking to staff, talking to young people actually in their units.

Mr MARTIN - How often did you do that?

Mr CORVAN - As often as possible because I am probably more of a hands-on manager than a lot of people who work in this system. As manager of Ashley and manager here, I make a big effort to make sure I know each individual kid, staff and the local issues - the current issues around units - and I would make sure that I would always give people the opportunity to talk to me when I was doing the visits. I would go to the school and things like that as well.

Mr MARTIN - So you would have known the names of all of the kids in there?

Mr CORVAN - Absolutely.

Mr MARTIN - Did you?

Mr CORVAN - And every single one of them would have known who I was, and it is the same here.

CHAIR - Yes, I did note that when we walked around Parkville, the operations management - I cannot think of his name at the moment - knew all the kids and they knew him, I have to say.

Mr CORVAN - The big thing when I went over to Ashley was that I became Mr Corvan which I basically did not have a great deal of faith in. I prefer to be called John. That was a big shock for the kids when I used to tell them that my name was John and not Mr Corvan but that is an old thing in Ashley. That has been going on for years.

Mr MARTIN - Has it? One of the other issues that has been raised is in relation to the girls unit and the staffing of that after hours. We have been told that occasionally it is possible for one male youth worker to be in charge of the female unit. Did that happen in your day?

Mr CORVAN - No. I tell you what, we might have had three girls there, we might have had three staff on nights and one or two of them may have been male but there was always a female staff in the female unit.

Mr MARTIN - You made some comments about the Platinum staff. Can you expand on that a little bit? You were saying that there is an external agency. Do you think that's a good idea or not?

Mr CORVAN - No, but, is probably my answer. To clarify that, it is the issue around recruitment and retention of staff. There are difficulties in recruiting staff, and actually there are huge difficulties in maintaining a casual pool in that particular location. We had Chubb in place before I got there. Platinum were doing bits and pieces when Chubb couldn't pick up, and within the first three to four months I was there, I booted Chubb off site for very unprofessional practices.

I would prefer to use neither, I would prefer to have a casual pool completely owned and operated by Ashley, but the reality is we tried that. I got to the stage where I wasn't using any of them for a period of time, once we did the restructure, and yet there are some genuine absences, don't get me wrong. Not every staff member who doesn't come to work is just slacking. But you need to have the appropriate levels of staff on site.

I would say that of the current Ashley staff, when I left there were probably 15, maybe 20 who had been recruited from the service providers who are permanent staff. So they fulfil a casual role, and the thing is that at Ashley we, including myself, probably used and abused their goodwill in the sense that we could ring them up at seven o'clock in the morning because we were short, and we would have someone there by 8.30 a.m., whereas with a casual pool it is very hard to do that.

Mr MARTIN - Given the location, and so on, do you think it's possible to get a pool of casual staff there? I can understand the difficulty. Do you think there's a solution to that?

Mr CORVAN - We've tried. I don't know that there is a solution. I looked at the option of running buses out of Launceston and out of Devonport to encourage people to go and to reduce the cost for people to get to and from work but it just wasn't practical. In the couple of years I've been away, it has got more expensive to drive to and from work. There are probably other things that could be tried, but we tried a lot of things to recruit locally but we just weren't able to do it. Let me just say, too, in that I think some of the publicity that surrounds Ashley is also a significant contributor to good people not wanting to work there.

Mr MARTIN - One of the problems with the contract workers is the lack of training that they have; basically, it is a one-day induction, from memory. Do you think there's any solution to that issue?

Mr CORVAN - The solution is that Ashley recruits and trains enough of its own people, and looks at a sort of permanent casual pool probably where you guarantee people x number of shifts per week, fortnight, month. I think one of the things about the recruitment of casuals is that if you can't guarantee people work they go and look somewhere else where they are guaranteed an income. That's the big thing. I think you have to look at a change of attitude and a change of a process where you can actually guarantee some work. I would prefer honestly never to use Platinum, Chubb, or anybody like that, but unfortunately, given the circumstances, there were times when there was no choice.

When I first went to Ashley, Chubb were providing 23 and 24 people to work on shifts per day, and that was enormous. The vast majority of people when I went there were Chubb people, and there was a completely different arrangement in place in terms of the work that was required. With the training that is provided to the current providers, rather than what was in place when I went there, there is certainly much more detail and there is a greater expectation. Certainly we developed a process at Ashley when I was there that if someone just wasn't up to it, we rang Platinum and said, 'Get them off site, we're not having them'. My understanding is that is still in place.

Mr MARTIN - Do you think it would be better to take all the remandees out of Ashley and dedicate the site to the detention of a relatively small number of persistent repeat offenders?

Mr CORVAN - Sorry, I may have missed the first part of that question.

Mr MARTIN - Do you think it would be better to take all of the remandees out of Ashley and dedicate the site to the detention of the persistent, hard-core group?

Mr CORVAN - Ideally in a youth justice system you would separate remand kids from sentenced kids. You just don't have the economies to do it in Ashley or in Tasmania. I think, again, the management of individual young people needs to be looked at. I would prefer to have remandees separate but, given that you have only really got three units there, it is very difficult, and given that the majority of the kids in the system have traditionally been remandees. I think the issue is about process in the young people's court and attending to legal matters in a quicker fashion and then you would be better able to manage the issue on site because you would have quicker flow-through. Young people sitting in remand for months not knowing what's happening to them is the most frustrating thing in the world.

Mr MARTIN - I find that appalling.

Mr CORVAN - It is disgusting. I will tell you - and I'm not boasting about the jurisdiction that I am working in currently - it wouldn't happen here. We would have county court judges who run the Children's Court and the Children's Court magistrates screaming from the rooftops if some of the things were happening over here that were allowed to happen in Tasmania.

Mr MARTIN - There has been a pretty strong amount of evidence given to us that most of the high-profile problems that have been in the media that have led to this committee have been caused by a small group of 'hard-core' young people and that if you took them

out of Ashley and put them somewhere else, you would fix the problems and that would leave the younger kids at Ashley.

Mr CORVAN - There's absolutely no doubt that there has been a small percentage of kids in Ashley in recent years who have caused the majority of the problems. I was there for around two years and I transferred five young people to prison. I had absolutely no regrets about it. I had gone through a thorough assessment process and the transfer to prison was one way. I would never do this lightly but at the time there were young people who were completely out of control, who were dangerous to other young people and to staff. Ashley is not a really secure environment and they needed to be in a secure environment. Ashley didn't have the resources to manage them. Yes, it is appropriate to transfer people. I would prefer that there was an independent mechanism in place in Tasmania, such as a possible youth arm of the Parole Board which makes the assessment and the decision based on all of the information and allowing the young person and the young person's representatives to put forward counter arguments so that there's some safety and security in the process. But there is no doubt that youth detention centres will always have young people who will go way beyond the boundaries, be dangerous to other kids and staff and with whom basically you try everything and ultimately there may be no choice other than to transfer them to prison.

Mr MARTIN - Do you think that this group of hard-core ones that we are talking about are capable of still being rehabilitated?

Mr CORVAN - Absolutely. I will be honest – of the five young people I transferred to prison in my time, I think four of them had first come into Ashley when they were 11 or 12, so they had basically grown up in Ashley.

Mr MARTIN - Well, the system is not working in that case, is it?

Mr CORVAN - No. If you go into Ashley at a really young age you have to learn very quickly to be able to survive because it's the worst environment to put young people in - the best school in the world for learning the wrong things.

Mrs JAMIESON - John, I noticed in your comments that you were saying workers compensation and sick leave at Ashley requires ongoing attention. Were you suggesting that it is an unsafe environment? What prompted you to make that comment?

Mr CORVAN - I think the high level of workers compensation is periodic. When the numbers of clients are high then often the workers comp claims and the sick leave is correspondingly high as well. In terms of the attention, the systems management - DHHS management and Ashley management, Youth Justice management - need to pay a little bit more attention to this so that when the numbers are clearly starting to escalate they put plans in place to support staff better.

One of the things I am a strong believer in is that you get your senior staff out in the environment so they are managing it a little better, being more proactive to prevent claims and absenteeism.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you think it was also tied to the degree of difficulty of the different clients coming in, rather than the actual numbers?

Mr CORVAN - When I started at Ashley there were 27 active workers compensation claims, and on the day I left there was one. That was because we were proactive in how we provided support to staff and provided programs that young people could be engaged in. We changed the focus from having an us-and-them attitude to getting staff out of the office to work with young people rather than sitting there with the door closed or locked.

Mrs JAMIESON - So you had an active policy of supporting your staff?

Mr CORVAN - Absolutely and being there and encouraging them to do things with kids.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you think there was ever a chance, or even in the future, of staff who felt they were working in an unsafe environment who could then make a claim back on the Government for workers compensation in the future because they had a unsafe workplace?

Mr CORVAN - No I don't think so. There have been a number of significant legal judgments handed down here. People can claim it is an unsafe environment because there are young offenders, but the reality is that the young offenders are generally there before the staff so there is an expectation that you are going to work with young people who may not be perfect.

Mr DEAN - You have talked about the absenteeism and the sickness of staff. The evidence that we are being given is consistent with that still being a real problem at Ashley. I think you are saying that staffing problems, not having enough staff there, is one reason for this. But are there other reasons? There must be other reasons why that is occurring because when absenteeism is an issue it is an indication of other problems, isn't it?

Mr CORVAN - Take the name 'Ashley' out of the equation. It is an institution. It has its own culture, and most institutional cultures do have very high sick leave and very high absenteeism.

Mr DEAN - I accept that. I have read through your comments here where I think you were making changes in this regard. What were you doing to change that culture, John, and what do we need to do at Ashley to change that?

Mr CORVAN - For example, the daytime shifts run from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., and then 3 p.m. to 11 p.m. I constantly, on my trips, was encouraging people to get out of the office. There was, and probably still is, a real culture about staff sitting in the office, the doors locked and they supervised kids from that distance. My approach was to get them out of the office and get them doing things with kids in small groups. It did not matter what it was, whether it was taking them out and kicking the football or having a game of cricket. Take them to the gymnasium, take them to the pool - all those things. Those are active engagements. What I used to say to the staff was get busy and do things. The kids will be happier, you will be happier and before you know it, you are going home and you realise, 'Oh gee, I have had a good day'. Do that instead of sitting in the office, reading your paper, picking your nose, doing all those silly things. That does not build a relationship.

Mr DEAN - Are you saying to us now that they need to go back to that now, to get the staff probably more active than what they are doing there, and that will probably have an impact?

Mr CORVAN - Yes. I am saying that is the way with every institutional environment, working with young people. Young people are full of energy. They have to be busy, actively engaged physically, mentally. Challenge them and keep them going. Then when they go to bed at night they think, 'I have had a good day'. I am not sure exactly what is going on at the moment, but I can imagine that there has been a bit of retreat into the offices and people need to get out of them. The supervisors, coordinators and the managers all need to be making sure that they are singing from the same tune and getting the staff out.

Mr DEAN - In a lot of organisations there is a system of whereby, once of member has a certain number of days off in a year of sick leave - the police service was, I think, about six days - they had to be spoken to see what the problems were or if there were any issues, medical issues et cetera. Is there any such thing at Ashley?

Mr CORVAN - We had a couple of informal processes for absenteeism. I don't know if the department were really fully aware of it but we used to send flowers to everybody who was involved in a serious incident where they had time off, just to say that everybody at Ashley is thinking of you. That was actually very successful. For people who had extended periods of time off following incidents, we actually made sure that they were contacted, they were offered EAP counselling, they came back, and it was discussed. Some people who were struggling back into the environment were supported through lighter duties, but often that was tied in with workers comp. In terms of the day-to-day stuff, we would touch base with people who were struggling, pull them out, give them something else to do. It's a local management issue, I think, in some cases. There is no formal process, that is what I'm saying, but we were aware of it and tried to support staff through fairly difficult times.

Mr DEAN - Do you believe in hindsight there ought to be a formal process in place?

Mr CORVAN - There should be, yes.

Mr DEAN - We have been given quite an amount of evidence that staff there are very inconsistent with the way they apply the laws and the rules of the establishment, and that is impacting on a lot of the staff. They do things differently. Some do what is considered to be the wrong thing, others pull the inmates up for that, and that is in itself impacting on the morale of staff. Was that a problem when you were there?

Mr CORVAN - That was one of the reasons I introduced the operational coordinator positions to run each shift, because it was easier to get consistency from regular forums with those three people, and drive the message down so that they were really clear with the staff about what was needed for a shift. In institutional environments you always get, 'This shift lets me do this and that shift lets me do that'. That was probably one of the specific reasons for putting in the operational coordinators to run each shift.

Mr DEAN - John, you mentioned the economies of scale, and that's why things are different at Ashley. Do you believe that, just because of the economy of scale, we shouldn't give

the youths at Ashley the same sort of chance that youths, say, in South Australia or Victoria would have?

Mr CORVAN - No, absolutely not, but I would say that probably per head there is probably more spent on Ashley than there is in Victoria or South Australia. I know that for a fact. There is more money spent per head at Ashley per client than there is anywhere in the whole country, other than the ACT.

Mr DEAN - I don't think it's the money I am talking about. You were saying that because of the economy of scale you can really only afford to have this one centre, rather than have separate areas for youths who are on remand, and 11- and 12-year-olds separated from 15- and 16-year-olds, and from 18- and 19-year-olds. That's where I'm coming from.

Mr CORVAN - If I were doing a risk assessment on the whole Tasmanian youth justice system, one of the things I would consider is how much money is the Tasmanian Government going to spend in the next five, 10 or 15 years to maintain Ashley and all the associated difficulties and problems, and the new problems that come along. Can you spend the money and get it right, because sometimes it actually may be cheaper to look at a greenfield option and start afresh. Sometimes you can pour money in retrospectively; sometimes it's a waste of time and sometimes it's not. You need to balance those options when you are making decisions about the longer-term future. I think that's one of the things that have been missing in terms of any assessment or planning for the future. It is not about the next 12 months; you should actually be looking at maybe the next 12 years.

Mr DEAN - I agree with that.

CHAIR - John, in your submission you were critical of the Director of Youth Justice, the deputy secretary and the departmental secretary, all of whom have been very successful in previous jobs but none of whom have youth justice experience. Would you like to expand on that a bit? It is obviously a concern to you otherwise you wouldn't have raised that issue.

Mr CORVAN - I was bit frustrated. I think there's probably a little bit of facetiousness in my comments, which probably are not totally appropriate.

But people are moved from other areas of the department - and it happens in lots of jurisdictions in this field; people get shifted from mental health, to child protection, to disability and to whatever. When you have to focus on a service in an environment such as Ashley, I think, if you are looking at getting someone to run Youth Justice and particularly Ashley, you should be looking for someone who has really good youth justice credentials. I think it is ridiculous to move people around just because they are either unwanted somewhere else or surplus or whatever. It is a specialist program that needs specialised people who have the experience. My understanding, when I wrote this, was that I certainly did not see any of the secretary, deputy secretary or director positions in the paper - and I look at the paper every week. I think that is unfortunate for Ashley and for Youth Justice.

CHAIR - That is a good question for us tomorrow, something along that line.

Mrs JAMIESON - To follow on from that, John, I am just wondering about the recruitment of staff. Does it include the assessment of suitability with psychological profiling and would you follow that process in Victoria, for example? Who does the profiling and do you think it is successful sometimes, all the time or every now and again?

Mr CORVAN - Psychometric testing as part of the recruitment process is sometimes a bit of a hit and miss affair. When I went to Ashley it was in place and it was conducted by a psychologist in Fairfield in Victoria, which is one of the suburbs away from Parkville. It was very hit and miss, to the point where we had real concerns about it. We were paying a lot of money for each assessment and, to be fair, it probably caused us greater concern. Some of their assessments were completely inappropriate. We do not use it in Victoria. A number of States do use it. But I think it is starting to lose its popularity.

Mrs JAMIESON - How do you assess the aptitude, if you like, of staff to work in a place like Ashley?

Mr CORVAN - The best way to do it is to have really experienced staff sitting on an interview panel, people who are experienced operationally in terms of managing the position that is being interviewed, people who have some very good intuitive skills and people who have some really strong personal attributes who are looking someone similar. It is a formal process and the people who are doing interviews need to be trained and need to be experienced people, rather than just ringing up an interview panel because you have to interview 10 or 15 people.

When I did the restructure at Ashley I sat on the interview panel for the vast majority of positions that we were appointing to and it was really hard work. But part of that was around trying to share my experience with other senior people who were part of panels with me and making sure that we had a consistent approach to doing the job.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about the sort of person who has a good sense of commonsense and love of people and yet might not have the qualifications? Would you encourage them to go on and do training?

Mr CORVAN - Absolutely. I think that your personal attributes and your skills and the very fact that you might like young people should get you in the door before someone who has a certificate 4 qualification but does not like young people or whatever. So personal qualities, I think, have to be viewed a little bit higher.

Mr MARTIN - On this point, we have heard evidence provided to us and I suppose from my observation of a lot of the staff, there is a real inconsistency along the lines that you have been talking about. You have mentioned the conflicting roles of the youth worker versus the guard-type role. To me, there have two types of people who have come to give evidence. Some were quite passionate about their desire to help the young people, and they fit my definition of 'youth worker'. Others were a little bit thuggish in their attitude towards young people. Do you have any magical solution for how you overcome that?

Mr CORVAN - I think, Terry, you are looking for people in the middle of those two types you just described. The overpassionate are just as dangerous as the thug, in my view. You are looking for someone who has a balanced approach, who knows that they can have a professional but distant relationship with young people.

They will work and do their best for young people but, at the same time, they are able to say to young people, 'Excuse me, behaviour', and deal with the difficult situations, the difficult behaviour. We need people who have the skills to de-escalate a situation rather than those who put an arm around them and get them to cry on their shoulder or, on the other hand, drag them off to an isolation room. The people who have that balance of skills are the people you really want.

Mr MARTIN - If it were impossible to get those sorts of people, is there any possibility you could split the role so you had guards and youth workers?

Mr CORVAN - You could split it, but you're going to create two sets of problems.

Mr MARTIN - What are they?

Mr CORVAN - The security people then become security people and nothing to do with young people and the youth workers don't have security so therefore they're not worried about the fact that a window or a door is broken. You do not have a large enough organisation to be able to split the functions. Splitting the functions in that sort of environment is difficult and could be potentially very dangerous because you need to have one organisational structure in a place like Ashley. While you might have an argument that says that the security people keep it safe, yes that might be an argument but my view is that it is around what goes on. You don't have enough young people or staff to split the functions completely. There's no reason why a good youth worker cannot fulfil the dual functions.

Mr MARTIN - Fair enough. One of the recommendations you have made is to review the Ashley staff induction package in comparison to what other jurisdictions do on the mainland. How does yours differ in Victoria compared to what you know it is in Tasmania?

Mr CORVAN - I am not sure what it is at the moment. When I was at Ashley I had a 28-day induction for new staff. Long and expensive but, in terms of how you train to develop a quality work force, I think you need to put the investment in at the start. Over here it is probably 20 days at the moment. One of the centres may have 20 and one of the others may have 15, that sort of thing. It depends too on the demand that pertains. You can have six staff resign in a week so you are really under the pump in terms of getting people on board. You need to employ staff on the basis of having some really clearly defined competencies, be rigorous in your selection process, but you also need to have that intuition that doesn't just give someone an 'A' because they have a qualification or because they have worked in another custodial environment for 15 years. It is honestly very difficult. I have been caught; I have interviewed people who I thought were going to be fantastic and they turned out to be problems. It is not easy. It is hard work. That is one of the things about induction. The induction should also be a sorting-out process. You need to challenge people in their thinking through the induction so that the really unsuitable people, who may have got through an interview, don't get through the induction.

CHAIR - We will now move to our third term of reference, which is education and training for residents. John, in travelling to South Australia and Victoria, the committee had a

good chance to observe what was happening there in terms of schooling and programs. I have to say the education component of it and the hours that residents were mandated to attend was pretty impressive compared to what is happening currently at Ashley. You were there from 2002 to 2004, from memory. Was there anything that stymied the hours that residents had to attend or were they attending more than they are now? Would you like to elaborate on that?

Mr CORVAN - I designed that school with the principal and I was very proud of it. When I went to Ashley they were going to put the school in the current administration building and put the management team out in the car park. I said no basically. That whole school cost less than \$400 000. When we opened the school it was fantastic. It had a great principal, great staff, everybody was really keen and the kids loved it. We did not have one single piece of damage in the first year - we did not have a piece of graffiti on the wall and all those sorts of things. We ran some programs during the day and ran some in the evening. It was very active and, yes, you can argue it was new but there was a real enthusiasm from the staff on both sides. I know Steve, who was the principal, left shortly after I did and that was a pity because Steve was really good for that school and good for the centre. We had a really active program/timetable - we really encouraged kids to get over there and get involved. The kids did, and they respected it.

CHAIR - Yes, I can appreciate all that but was it mandatory for those of school age to attend?

Mr CORVAN - Yes.

CHAIR - It was?

Mr CORVAN - Yes.

CHAIR - And for how many hours a week?

Mr CORVAN - Now you are challenging my memory - I honestly cannot say.

CHAIR - Okay.

Mr CORVAN - Normal schooling.

Mr MARTIN - Normal schooling?

Mr CORVAN - We tried to make it as normal as possible.

Mr MARTIN - It is down to about 13 hours a week at the moment.

Mr CORVAN - Right.

Mrs JAMIESON - And not all of that is education, as in classroom education. Some of it is physical education and other activities.

Mr CORVAN - We ran classes in the units as well. Sometimes when the numbers were high and we did not have enough space in the classroom so we ran some classes in the units.

That was part of having the real active engagement - kids wanted to do things, were encouraged to do things so you had to make sure that you organised things for them to do.

Mrs JAMIESON - So in your experience, John, was there a fairly high degree of illiteracy?

Mr CORVAN - Oh, enormous.

Mrs JAMIESON - So do you think more could be done to bring up the literacy and numeracy skills? It is difficult, I know, because some of these kids are drop-outs anyway and to engage them is not easy. Have you any bright ideas?

Mr CORVAN - To answer your question, yes, absolutely more can be done and should be done, and it is not just an Education responsibility. That was one of the things we tried to get our youth worker staff to do in the units as well.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would you use more technology, because that seems to be the 'in' thing with students these days, of course, or do you think that is a soft, easy cop-out?

Mr CORVAN - Technology within reason, as I have said several times. It is one of my absolutes in the business that your relationship between staff and kids is important so, yes, use the technology but do not ignore the role of the staff.

Mrs JAMIESON - No, and the use of mentors in the classrooms?

Mr CORVAN - Absolutely, I am into mentors big time. I think that is really important in lots of things in Ashley and in community just as well.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about Aboriginal education, culturally and all the other issues that come with it?

Mr CORVAN - Yes, absolutely. What I think you need to look at - and I am talking just from the Ashley experience - was the fact that we had some serious difficulties dealing with the Aboriginal support agencies. I could never come to terms with the fact that of all the kids who claimed Aboriginality, not all were accepted and provided a service. That was an issue for us to be satisfactorily resolved with the TAC.

Mrs JAMIESON - So who actually assessed the detainee as being of Aboriginal decent?

Mr CORVAN - Young people who came into the centre were asked, as part of the assessment, if they were Aboriginal and if a young person claimed to be Aboriginal, that was fine by us, we treated them as Aboriginal, but the TAC would make a further assessment and probably more than 50 per cent of those kids were deemed not to be Aboriginal.

Mrs JAMIESON - That is interesting.

Mr CORVAN - Therefore they were not provided a service from the TAC and therefore their education suffered.

Mrs JAMIESON - Right. So they would not have been eligible to use Clarke Island, for example?

Mr CORVAN - Correct.

Mrs JAMIESON - How many, while you were there, John, actually used Clarke Island as part of their cultural deterrent?

Mr CORVAN - Far too many, in my book. I tried to have the relationship stopped. I tried to have the funding to Clarke Island stopped for a period of time. An assessment was done on the benefits and/or other of Clarke Island and I was basically told from the department that the arrangement was to stay in place.

Mrs JAMIESON - Any further expansion on those comments?

Mr CORVAN - My duty of care to young people in custody, I believe, extended to Clarke Island and despite my best efforts I would have never been able to find out what young people were doing over there. I believed that they were actually engaged in some very serious, dangerous activities such as running after two-metre tiger snakes and killing them and those sorts of things. That was just one of many, many concerns I had, but unfortunately I did not get any support in government.

I believe in the value of Clarke Island, don't get me wrong, but I believed that it needed to have some structure built around it and some accountability, and then I would have fully supported it again. That's what I wanted to do, and that's what should be in place for Clarke Island.

Mrs JAMIESON - Have you any idea of what the cost of running the program over there was while you were at Ashley?

Mr CORVAN - Youth Justice was giving them \$120 000 a year and we were paying the air fares for every individual who went over. We were also paying for the bedding and clothing for every individual who went over because nothing ever came back. They used to refer to it as Club Med. That may not be true but that was the impression they gave me. I could never get an answer out of them, that's why I went to the director and said, 'I think we need to pull the pin', but we got knocked back.

CHAIR - John, particularly in Melbourne we saw evidence of a lot of good programs and in your view that is a very important part of rehabilitation. In your time there were there many programs and could they have been better? In your opinion, was it a matter of funding or is there a limiting factor at Ashley at the moment?

Mr CORVAN - We struggle to get good staff to work on case-management improvements. We would advertise frequently when I was there, looking at senior program people or senior case-management people, and we got a couple and there are some really good case management and program people there at the moment.

I am very strongly of the view that Ashley is not the be-all and end-all for the work with these young people. Most of these young people are involved in some way, shape or form with community services at case management level. They are involved with child

protection, they are involved with community, Youth Justice and all that sort of stuff, and I believe that what we need is a fairly seamless process around management that challenges young people's behaviours, their offending behaviours, and a continuous framework that extends through community and custody with these young people. So we can't ensure that if there is something identified in an assessment in the community when a kid is 14 and they come into Ashley at 15 we can pick that up so that specialist services can be engaged. Engaging specialist services for Ashley was very difficult but it needs to be continuous and it needs to involve all the players in a young person's life, which are child protection, Youth Justice, Ashley, education, all those sorts of things - mentors. It is not easy, and it is not easy for a lot of community people to come to Ashley because sometimes it is too far, too long, too hard.

Mr MARTIN - John, I couldn't agree more with that. When we were in Melbourne evidence was provided by White Lion, and I was fairly impressed with what they seemed to be doing there. Would you agree with the value of what they are doing?

Mr CORVAN - I think I mentioned White Lion somewhere in my submission. I actually brought White Lion over, after me. I had White Lion here and I brought them over and helped get them some funding to set up in Tasmania. Their impact on Ashley was enormous.

Mr MARTIN - They seem to be underfunded, though, compared to what is happening in Victoria, so therefore the level of services is so much less.

Mr CORVAN - Yes. The role models and mentoring program that they have there has suffered from shortage of funding. But they have done a lot of work over there that has been very positive and they have had a huge impact on a lot of young people in Tasmania. We got them over not just for Ashley but also for the community and so on every visit they went to schools as well as Ashley. That sort of mentoring has to be in place; it is really beneficial for young people and should be funded appropriately.

Mrs JAMIESON - John, you mentioned in your submission -

'Investing in young people - the behavioural development program is an excellent model but lacks commitment from staff.'

What was the behavioural development program?

Mr CORVAN - We had a couple of senior practice consultants who, in consultation with senior staff, myself and a number of other people, put together the behavioural management program based on young people's performance in the unit during the week. Each young person was assessed at the end of each shift by staff and the whole process was supposed to be recorded, but sometimes it was really difficult. There were occasions when I would quite reasonably suggest that staff sabotaged young people just because they didn't like them and so they marked them at a lesser level than they should have. It caused a bit of tension, but it was a great program, and I think it is still in place, as a central review each week, which was really good. Young people had the opportunity to participate as well, so it was really healthy.

Mr MARTIN - John, you have obviously read David Fanning's report, the Commissioner for Children's report.

Mr CORVAN - I think I did, yes.

Mr MARTIN - You have made mention of it.

Mr CORVAN - Yes. David did a few things when he was down there.

Mr MARTIN - You seem to be strongly supporting David's recommendations. Is that a fair comment to make?

Mr CORVAN - Oh, yes. David Fanning was a fantastic appointment as Commissioner for Children and his departure was very unfortunate for Tasmania. They were very commonsense recommendations and need to be acted on. I would expand the commissioner's role to have a more active role in monitoring not just Ashley but all the services.

Mr DEAN - John, do you believe that enough use was made of the farm during your time, and has that changed, to your knowledge?

Mr CORVAN - No. We made very little use of the farm; it had started to drift off. Because of the number of escapes, and so on, when I was there, there was a real emphasis on making sure that kids weren't out and about so the opportunities were reduced for kids to run away from the farm. We did use it, we did some of the community work and those sorts of things, but again when I was there we had some fairly significant assessments around the risk of young people. A lot of it was down to kids' behaviour as part of that assessment. It was only always a small number of kids who would have been assessed as suitable to be engaged in external activities.

Mr DEAN - It is interesting because we did speak to an ex-inmate of Ashley who said that he would have liked to be engaged in more farming pursuits but was not able to do so because of what you have said. I just wonder whether or not they ought to be going back to the drawing board in regard to that and accept that there will be one escape every now and again, or a couple.

Mr CORVAN - In regard to the staff issues, if the staff could prove to me that their level of engagement and supervision of young people inside was really good, then I would be very happy to trust them outside, but I think they need to earn the right first, to demonstrate their right to be able to take kids out.

Mr DEAN - I don't think that's a challenge, that they need to do that; they've got the point system, haven't they?

Mr CORVAN - It's part of that behaviour management system we are talking about.

Mr DEAN - John, in Adelaide you would probably be aware of it, and it is probably the case in Victoria as well, there is no such thing as school holidays in these detention centres. I think they have four to five days off a year only, and that schooling and the education

part continues through those school holiday periods. Did that happen with you at Ashley, or do you believe it should happen?

Mr CORVAN - I certainly don't think that school holidays are in place here. There are other program providers engaged to run programs during school holidays, but in Victoria, and to my understanding throughout the rest of Australia, they do the same. Once there are school holidays, they bring other people in to do it. We did that at Ashley as well and that's what it should be.

Mr DEAN - So you don't agree that the education should continue for the whole period?

Mr CORVAN - It is not that I don't agree, it would be great if you had it for 50 weeks of the year, but unfortunately the way the teaching set-up is, they are entitled to *x* amount of holidays. So you basically have to prepare and run some alternative programs that are going to benefit the kids in the time that they are going to be there.

Mr DEAN - I will just rephrase what I asked you. Do you believe it would be in the best interests of the youth at Ashley for schooling to continue, not for 365 days but, say, for 360 days a year?

Mr CORVAN - Yes.

Mr DEAN - It was mentioned to us that there is a place for taking youth off site, having them go into, say, an engineering firm at Deloraine or to some other mechanical firm somewhere else. Do you believe there is a place for that to happen with some of the youth?

Mr CORVAN - Absolutely. I think it is a priority. Young people need to be given the opportunity to experience that transition before they are released. A work-release-type program before release is enormously important for settling young people into a new routine outside of the custodial environment and it really does help assist the transition back to what we would describe as normality.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about the more formal use of drama and music as therapies and/or education?

Mr CORVAN - I am a big believer in it but again it is one of those areas that needs to fit into schedules. Can it be funded, is there a framework for the program and can people demonstrate the benefits? I have absolutely no problem with using alternative-type programs, none whatsoever, as long as I can see a benefit in it. One of the things we did at Ashley was run a massage course for the kids. Again, a bit like the role models from White Lion, there were lots of raised eyebrows when I first raised that, but we had huge success with it.

Mr MARTIN - The YMCA also seems to do a fair bit of work in Melbourne. How important do you think their work is compared to, say, White Lion?

Mr CORVAN - I think they all have their place; they all provide a good service. They are similar but different services, and they have their place. Any service that can provide a level of health, fitness and support in a positive way for young people in custody, and

can continue that relationship post-release, has to be in the kids' and the community's best interest.

Mrs JAMIESON - So you'd see that as part of, say, case management while they are in Ashley and then have the same case manager maybe even following the release of the detainee into the community.

Mr CORVAN - I am not sure about the practicalities of following them out, but the plan and the processes need to follow them out.

CHAIR - We will now move to alternative methods of sentencing for young offenders.

Mr DEAN - Do you believe that there is another way of working with youth in the sentencing process? Do you think there are other opportunities there?

Mr CORVAN - I'm really frustrated by the process rather than a lot of other things that are peripheral to it. I believe that the Youth Justice Act provides a reasonable basis for working with young people. I believe that the problems are generated from the length of time that it takes from the kid being arrested and charged to being sentenced. That is what needs to be looked at rather than the content of the legislation, in my view. You can always tidy legislation up around sentences, hierarchies, options and things like that but I think the Youth Justice Act of Tasmania is a solid piece of work. I just think the processes associated with implementing it are dodgy.

Mr DEAN - One issue has been raised with us about remanding in custody of youth. Hobart is a good example where, if a youth comes before a justice of the peace late at night, when they remand them in custody to appear before the court the next morning they must be transported back to Ashley, then put in a car at some unearthly hour of the morning and brought back down to Hobart. Were you aware of that?

Mr CORVAN - Yes and there were a number of occasions where I authorised a young person to stay in the Hobart Remand Centre because there was a separate bed and a level of supervision that we were satisfied with. That was, again, an informal process to manage a young person who had been arrested late at night and who was due back in court the early the next morning. It is not healthy for young people to arrive at Ashley at 11 p.m. and be dragged out of bed at 5 a.m. to go back to court.

Mr DEAN - When you say that was an informal process, would you have arranged that through the police or would you have to do that through the court?

Mr CORVAN - Through the remand centre manager.

Mr DEAN - So you were able to do that in your position of Ashley?

Mr CORVAN - Yes, in my position of Ashley.

Mr DEAN - That has been raised as a real concern.

Mr CORVAN - It is ridiculous that there is not a capacity in Hobart to hold kids for overnight remand in circumstances where they are going to be in a car for five hours in an eight or 10-hour period. It is ridiculous.

Mr DEAN - There have been other issues raised about alternative methods of sentencing. We have spoken to people who are hands-on and who are saying that there ought to be opportunities for weekend detention of youth, probably at Ashley, and probably some other opportunities for extending that to house custody. Did you see any role there? Have you ever looked at that?

Mr CORVAN - Yes, I have looked at weekend detention and it is totally inappropriate for young people. Never underestimate the damage that can be done to a young person in a custodial environment in less than two days. It can be enormous. I do not believe youth detention is appropriate for young people. Home detention has potential, but again needs to have a community support and supervision aspect that needs to be looked at very hard before you make a decision to go down that track.

CHAIR - You talked about the fact that it was ridiculous that there was not a facility for remand in Hobart. Should that be in the current Hobart Remand Centre? Should there be something established there?

Mr CORVAN - Yes. I think you could gazette one of the rooms for an overnight stay. It is simply gazetted as a youth detention centre for an overnight stay. The kids can stay in there during the day when they are waiting to go to court. It is not a big problem to gazette it for an overnight stay, as long as there is a level of supervision that meets the standards expected from the Youth Justice Act.

Mr MARTIN - Are there other forms of alternative sentencing that you think are appropriate?

Mr CORVAN - When I was there at Ashley I used to think that you should send them to Victoria. There are always options. I think the options are there in the legislation. It is about how quickly you get to the stage where you can plan it. That is the problem for me.

Mr MARTIN - We have heard evidence that some kids are on remand for nine months before their day in court, which just staggers me.

Mr CORVAN - That blows my mind. I had a young person of 15 years of age who had an intellectual disability and a mental-health illness and who spent eight months with us at Ashley, despite our best efforts. He walked out of the court on the day of sentencing with a probation order, which was all he was ever going to get.

Mr MARTIN - I understand that cannot happen in Victoria under your legislation; is that right?

Mr CORVAN - It should not happen over there either. I would not happen here because this system is probably a little bit more sophisticated. The County Court judge who runs the children's court would never have tolerated it.

Mr MARTIN - You just mentioned the magic word. You have a children's court over there.

Mr CORVAN - You have a youth court but you do not have specialist magistrates. That is the difference.

Mr MARTIN - That is what I meant.

Mr CORVAN - You need specialist magistrates.

Mr MARTIN - That is the big difference between Victoria and Tasmania, isn't it?

Mr CORVAN - I need to be careful. I'm not trying to have a go at people but the magistrates who sit and change hats in the same court during the day are not the best people often to make a decision about young people. They need specialist training, updates and a really clear understanding of the resources available in the community, the issues affecting young people. It is not just as simple as an adult court, in my view.

CHAIR - John, some of us have had the opportunity to speak to Jennifer Bowles - I don't know whether you know her or not -

Mr CORVAN - Yes.

CHAIR - and it was very enlightening. She also talked about the interventionary steps between a kid first getting into trouble and before they are put on remand, and it seemed to be that there were a couple of additional steps that occurred in Victoria where there was much more effort made to get somebody back on track. That is interesting and something we probably should reflect in our report, I think.

Mr CORVAN - Yes, certainly. Early intervention works with these young people.

Mrs JAMIESON - Just to follow on from the early intervention and assessment, would there be any role at all for a halfway house, particularly for kids who are just picked up overnight maybe because they are homeless and there is nowhere else to put them so they stick them in Ashley, for example?

Mr CORVAN - Well, they shouldn't be sticking them in Ashley. The law doesn't allow it, but there aren't specialist magistrates. They break the spirit of the law by putting those kids in Ashley.

Mrs JAMIESON - In your opinion, would there be any role for a halfway house maybe that is located in the three regions just so that kids don't have to travel too far, that maybe has a house parent and looks like a normal home and the kids can go in for the night until they are sorted out the next day?

Mr CORVAN - You have to look at who owns the kids. I am not being difficult about this; I think there are issues when you look at the protective factors involved and you look at the kids offending. Who do these kids belong to? I believe that the worst thing you can do to any kid is lock them up in a custodial environment.

Mrs JAMIESON - Yes, that is why I am talking about an ordinary family home type of situation.

Mr CORVAN - But run by whom?

Mrs JAMIESON - Qualified and authorised staff.

Mr CORVAN - We got, and I am sure Ashley still gets, lots of adolescents coming through the door late at night simply because there is no placement for them in the community. In my time the vast majority of those kids were involved with Child and Family Services. There were child protection issues. I would like to see Child Protection take some responsibility for some of the issues at Ashley as well because they have caused a lot of the problems.

Mrs JAMIESON - I understand that at least 60 per cent of them are under the Government's umbrella.

Mr CORVAN - Yes, and I would like to see some options prior to custody.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would you care to comment also on the assessment? As you mentioned earlier, quite a number of the kids who come into remand possibly have an intellectual disability, acquired brain damage or mental health problems that have never really been assessed. They may even be deaf from being abused. Would you care to comment on the need for an adequate assessment?

Mr CORVAN - You have to know what you are dealing with when you get young people in. That is the difficulty too. Sometimes when you get those kids, particularly late at night, the assessment may not happen for two or three days. I think resources need to be allocated to make sure that young people are assessed as soon as possible after they walk through the door. There is a process at Ashley, as there is now in most centres, where kids are put on a series of observations based on the initial assessment. So every kid who comes in goes onto random observations. If there are concerns, that observation can be up to every four minutes or 10 minutes or, if it is really bad, constant so there is someone with the kid all the time. That is how staff in the centres manage kids in the initial stages. There needs to be a professional assessment after that. Health personnel need to see the kid as quickly as possible if there are issues. Ashley now has a psychologist, which is fantastic. The whole time I was there I kept advertising but could never get one. Then there is the ongoing involvement of health-care professionals from the community in terms of coming in and seeing kids to deal with identified issues. All those sorts of things need to be really part of an assessment and case management plan for kids.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about early intervention at a much earlier stage, pre-Ashley, before kids are even picked up? We know we have a fairly large problem out there with children who are coming up through the ranks of drug-addicted parents or drug-involved parents, grandparents or whatever. What about picking these kids up and flagging them at an earlier stage, even from utero onwards?

Mr CORVAN - How early do you start this?

Mrs JAMIESON - That is right. But what we try to do, obviously, is prevent kids from going into the remand situation.

Mr CORVAN - Yes. The education system in Tasmania, I believe, has a really good schooling support network. I think at the end of my submission I talked about services that need to be involved around courts - police coming, youth justice, custodial and so on. Add education to that. Any of those players can get involved at any stage with a young person, and the earlier the better. I have absolutely no problem with that.

Mrs JAMIESON - That is where I am coming from.

Mr CORVAN - I think education is really an important player in bringing people in. Education often identifies a lot of the early issues with these kids.

Mrs JAMIESON - I just wondered, John, if you have any working knowledge of the Finnish, Scottish or New Zealand systems at all?

Mr CORVAN - Canada has a really good model. New Zealand has really progressive legislation, a really good approach to doing business. The Youth Justice Board in the United Kingdom have really transformed the whole system in the UK in a very positive manner and they have a really good service. Their web site is a huge resource for people like yourself to look at. Ireland has a really good system at the moment but I'm not going back there to work.

CHAIR - John, thank you very much for your time; we really appreciate it and your written submission.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.