

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASHLEY YOUTH JUSTICE AND DETENTION CENTRE IN TASMANIA MET IN THE RECEPTION ROOM, LAUNCESTON TOWN HALL, ON THURSDAY, 15 FEBRUARY 2007.

Mr JUSTIN STEVENSON WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

Mr STEVENSON - I was employed at Ashley as one of these so-called security guards who were incompetent to do their job.

CHAIR (Mr Hall) - Were you with Platinum?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes. There are things that Brian McClifty brought up yesterday that I was going to bring up about the staff bringing in drugs and smokes. I can back that up and say it does happen. The reason I believe that does happen is that staff are frightened of the majority of kids out there because the kids actually run Ashley, not the staff. The kids have the staff so bluffed that to protect themselves they bring in these things for the kids.

Regarding the incompetence of security guards who have to fill in shifts, if it wasn't for those security guards who filled in the shifts there would not be enough workers at Ashley to even run a youth detention centre because on occasions we have had 80 per cent of security workers from Platinum to 20 per cent of youth workers from Ashley.

CHAIR - Night shift more than day shift?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes, but on day shift, too, I have experienced it.

Mr WILKINSON - So sometimes 80:20 security?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would that happen very often, though?

Mr STEVENSON - In the three-month period I worked there I probably saw it five times.

CHAIR - What was the reason for that, do you think? Were there people on leave at the time?

Mr STEVENSON - It was people on leave or blowing shifts. A lot of shift-blowing goes on by the government-employed workers.

Mr DEAN - What do you mean by that?

Mr STEVENSON - Not turning up for work, ringing in saying they are sick.

Mr DEAN - To get employment for others?

Mr STEVENSON - No, they ring to say they are sick or something and not turning up for their shift. They are rostered on to work so in order to cover their shift the security company has to cover it. A lot of that goes on daily with the government-employed workers at Ashley. You can guarantee in one shift that four to five government employees will not turn up for work because of stress, flu et cetera.

CHAIR - Do you think that is beyond the pale, more than should be accepted as a standard?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes, I do. If it was any other work force the amount of time some people have spent away from work would mean they wouldn't be in the job.

Another thing I would like to point out is that they say that the security guards who work there are incompetent at their jobs. The point I would like to put across is that the government workers, before they are even sent out to work in Ashley Youth Detention Centre, are given three weeks training in a classroom. They are taught how to handle situations, all the legal ramifications of working at Ashley, everything. An action security guard goes there for one day and is given about seven hours' training and he is sent in on the job.

Mr MARTIN - That's really the point that a lot of people have been making, that you don't get enough training.

Mr WILKINSON - It is like anything, isn't it? There are good security people and bad ones, good government people working and there are bad government people; good members of Parliament and bad members of Parliament. Wherever we look in society I think you can get good and bad.

Mr STEVENSON - I would agree with that, yes.

Mrs JAMIESON - Just to clarify, that seven hours is an actual orientation to Ashley's protocols and safety. You have your security training and then you get the seven hours on top that of specifically for Ashley.

Mr STEVENSON - That's right. Your security training is not specifically training for Ashley.

Mrs JAMIESON - Yes; you've got your security training, so you're registered for that.

Mr STEVENSON - Yes, your security training is probably as a patrolman or in any other sort of field of security work. On top of what you've already done in the security industry you get a seven-hour induction.

Mrs JAMIESON - So that is seven hours on the job, not seven hours in the classroom like the others are getting for three months?

Mr STEVENSON - No, it is actually seven hours in a classroom. They take you to Ashley and there's a separate building not in the actual youth detention centre. There's a house as you drive in on the right hand side, and you do the training in that house on the way up to Ashley. So it is actually classroom training for seven hours. You are taken into

Ashley on that day and taken around and shown how the actual cell doors work, because there are two different styles of doors inside and you have to know how you have to lock them down. You get taught the alarm system. You have heard how someone didn't use the alarm stop-doors-open properly on the alarm system. You do get shown that. Other than that, it is very basic. You are shown how to turn the water off because they set the sprinklers off all the time. They have sprinklers in their room and the detainees flick towels onto the sprinklers and set them off all the time, which floods their room. That is how they get out half the time because once that sets off the alarm system, if you don't lock those stop doors down in 90 seconds then it opens up every single door in that block.

Mr WILKINSON - So a fair recommendation, Justin, would be that if the Government continue, and it looks like they will continue, to use security workers then those security workers should go through the same induction period as the government workers?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes, that is what I believe should happen. I got put into a situation out there where I was assaulted by a detainee; my head was held up against a willow tree. Having not had the proper training that maybe I should have had, having an Ashley guard with me and eight children, and having a kid assaulting me and pushing my head up against an oak tree, I reacted by throwing two punches. I had to see the nurse out there and it is in the statement that I made, but because I threw two punches when I should apparently have - how do I say this -

Mrs JAMIESON - Taken a beating.

Mr STEVENSON - No, I should have restrained the child. I have now lost my job over it; because of that incident I now do not have a job. Ashley Youth Detention Centre rang Platinum and said they did not want me back on site because of that incident, and because I was not allowed back into Ashley the boss of Platinum Security rang me and said, 'I've got no more work for you either'. However he did because he advertised in the paper two days later. He sacked me.

Then his mother wanted me charged with common assault, and because the management of Ashley was so frightened of his mother - and she is a lunatic herself - they wanted me out of the scene. Because I was on a contract, I was very easy to push out of the scene, and it was all just swept under the carpet.

I doubt whether they have even kept any records of this assault or anything because all that happened in this assault was that I was told not to come back on the Ashley site and then my boss said I no longer had a job.

Mr WILKINSON - Did those two punches that you threw stop the incident?

Mr STEVENSON - No, they did not stop the incident but the other guard who could have prevented the incident finally got off his backside and came in and split the incident up and then when he had the incident split up he dropped his hands and then the kid flung forward at me and just put a head butt straight across the bridge of my nose. I had blood streaming out of my nose everywhere. The other guard could have prevented it. If they are as well trained as they say, this guard could have prevented this from happening. All he had to do, when this kid started arguing with me and we just had each other in a grip,

was come in and split it up before it got to the stage where he pushed me into a tree. Had that happened, I probably would still have a job, but he let it go to a situation where it all blew out of control.

Mr DEAN - When was this incident?

Mr STEVENSON - It was Friday 12 January this year and I got sacked on Saturday 13 January.

Mrs JAMIESON - When you started your employment with Platinum were you made aware of the fact that if there was an incident that you were involved in out there and was sacked from Ashley, that that might then also jeopardise your job with Platinum?

Mr STEVENSON - No, but it was explained to you that you could be put off the Ashley Youth Detention site. They also do the court transfers for the kids all around the State. It was explained to you that you would not be able to do that or work at Ashley again but you were still allowed to partake in any of the patrol work and any other security work that the company had.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you mind saying why you think you might have been sacked then from Platinum?

Mr STEVENSON - I have no idea. That is in dispute in another matter at the moment.

Mrs JAMIESON - Okay.

Mr STEVENSON - I honestly can't answer it because I don't know.

Mrs JAMIESON - It just seems odd.

Mr STEVENSON - As I said, a few days after he put me off he advertised for a patrolman. I can't answer your question because I don't know.

Mr WILKINSON - It interests me this actual incident because what I want to know is whether there are many incidents like this that take place or many incidents like this that you can see brewing? Are there adequate controls for stopping those incidents?

Mr STEVENSON - Every day you go to work, as I said, the kids control the whole thing and especially the bigger kids - the 17, 18 and, to a certain degree, the 16 year olds. You have certain times when they are all allowed out together and you might have, say, 10 kids to probably three guards but if you have, say, 10 17 or 18 year olds to three guards it is a difficult situation. You have to remember that these kids are not worried about smashing a glass and stabbing it in your throat or anything like that. They are not kids who have done petty crimes; there are kids in there for major crime and they don't care. If they can get hold of something and do it to you, they will use intimidation on your every single day.

Mr WILKINSON - Like what?

Mr STEVENSON - Like coming up to you and telling you that they are going to slit your throat, physically standing there and sparring with you and trying to get you to fire up with them. They will try to grab hold of you. They will physically try stuff like that on with you every single day knowing that you are not allowed to do anything back to them. That is where the whole system is wrong. These kids know that you can't do anything to them. They know the system inside out. They will tell you the rules of the Ashley Youth Detention Centre because they know them inside out.

Mr WILKINSON - Why do the older ones run the place? What happens that makes you allege that they run the place?

Mr STEVENSON - They will all back each other, so there is a group mentality and once that happens, half the guards out there and the youth workers are frightened of them. When there are seven or eight or maybe 10 17 and 18 year olds in a group together, the guards become frightened. I am not saying all of them are, but a lot of guards are frightened of the kids.

Mr WILKINSON - As a result of that what happens?

Mr STEVENSON - As a result of that the kids know the guards who are frightened of them - they can work that out themselves. So they know which guards they can manipulate and start to stand over. If they think they can get over you or they think you are afraid, they will stand over you without a doubt in the world.

Mr WILKINSON - There has been some suggestion that threats will be made to your family or your acquaintances on the outside and that these people have the ability to carry out those threats on the outside because of the people they know. Is there much of that happening in there?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes, virtually every single day it happens. You go to a shift and it's torture all day long. The crap you have to put up with from these kids is unbelievable. What you've got to tolerate and try to put up with without losing your cool, because they know you're not supposed to do that, is incredible. It is absolutely incredible.

Mr WILKINSON - With that training and when you were employed by Platinum, were you told that you might have to work at Ashley as well?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes. You were virtually employed by Platinum on the understanding that you'd work at Ashley and you'd do transfers to and from Ashley. So, yes, it was explained to you.

Mr WILKINSON - With this training that they go through, the three-week training and you go through the one-day training, have you said to anybody else, 'Look, I think we need more training to cope with this'? If you have, what has the reply been?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes, you will get a bit of an understanding and they will just say, 'Yes, I agree with', you but you'll find that a lot of the Ashley staff are not prepared to help too much if you are a security guard. There is a bit of friction between the two factions and they don't really like security guards coming in there and doing the job.

You can ask them a question and sometimes they will deliberately lead you up the garden path to make you look bad - they will deliberately tell you to do something wrong. They know that they are telling you to do it wrong but it is making the security firm and the worker look stupid. There are workers at Ashley who delight in setting up contract security labours they love it, absolutely delight in it.

Mr WILKINSON - Like what? Have you got an example?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes - let me think about it. I would have but it will take me a while to think of it.

CHAIR - We will move on.

Mrs JAMIESON - Justin, if you had any complaints or you wanted to make a grievance known to Ashley would you go through Platinum first and then to maybe hope that that was carried through to Ashley or would you go directly to Ashley?

Mr STEVENSON - We were virtually always instructed that if we had problems we went to our management at Platinum and it was supposedly to be sorted out through that course of action, but I don't know whether it was taken any further once you went to management of Platinum.

Mrs JAMIESON - Who was there for you then if you felt you had a problem that wasn't being dealt with? Or did you just carry it off to work the next day again?

Mr STEVENSON - Yes, you had to virtually deal with it I would suggest.

Mrs JAMIESON - Go home and belt the kids up! So there wasn't any mentor for you as such?

Mr STEVENSON - Not really. You could go to your management at Platinum but because he was a contractor and the contract is up for renewal at this stage, as you probably know, at this stage he is more interested in getting his contract back than rocking the boat with Ashley, so the last thing he wants to deal with at this point in time is workers' complaints about Ashley.

Mrs JAMIESON - Okay, thank you.

CHAIR - Justin, we are running out of time so I will ask if there are any further questions.

Mr DEAN - Just a quick one. You made the comment I think that you doubted if there would be any paperwork in existence on your incident, what paperwork did you do yourself on it? What did you have to do?

Mr STEVENSON - I made an actual statement on the day it happened. Ashley required a statement from me and so there was a statement from me, a statement from the detainee involved and a statement from the other guard involved. I had to go and see the nurse so there is the nurse's report. As I said, my nose wasn't broken but it was bleeding and there were lumps on the back of my head from where the kid had pushed me into the tree.

Mr DEAN - Right, but you haven't said anything more other than that?

Mr STEVENSON - No, I requested a copy of my statement and Ashley's response to me was, 'Why do you want that?' and because his mother had already threatened an assault charge against me, I said, 'In case they come back with an assault charge'. He said, 'Well, if they come back with an assault charge against you we'll make the paperwork available'.

Mrs JAMIESON - So you weren't automatically offered a duplicate of your statement?

Mr STEVENSON - I know what I wrote in my statement but they have never released it to me. I have asked for a copy of his statement but they haven't released it.

Mr DEAN - Have you made any complaints yourself whilst you have been employed there - any other complaints?

Mr STEVENSON - What do you mean, sorry?

Mr DEAN - Had you ever made any other complaints through Platinum or to anybody else of any other incidents or any other -

Mr STEVENSON - Only talk, like sitting around the lunch table talking with other workers, but I have not actually put in formal complaints or anything, no.

Mr DEAN - To your knowledge, do you know of any other Platinum employees or other employees that have made official complaints?

Mr STEVENSON - No, I don't because unfortunately most of them would be too frightened to. The reason I say most of the would be too frightened to is that security work is only a fairly small industry and some of them - and I'm not being nasty to them - probably wouldn't get any work in any other field. They have been in the game for a lot of years and they are too frightened to rock the boat.

Mr DEAN - Just to confirm one thing, Mr Chairman. During that seven-hour training period you have, which is quite obviously an intense training period, from what you are saying, are you given any detail or any training on how to respond to an incident like the one you have referred to?

Mr STEVENSON - No, that is where I got into trouble. If I had actually been trained in how to restrain, I might have been able to do it. I still don't know whether I would have been able to restrain in that particular incident, but I may have been able to handle it differently. But no, I was never taught to do that.

Mr DEAN - You have said that you need the same training as the others and I accept that but are you saying that even the seven-hour training you are given leaves a lot to be desired?

Mr STEVENSON - It leaves a hell of a lot to be desired. Even the Ashley staff would back you up on this that you were virtually taught nothing.

Mr DEAN - Did you raise that? Has that been raised to your knowledge that that training -

Mr STEVENSON - Only amongst staff members. You might have three of you working in one unit and there might be one Platinum worker to two youth workers and amongst yourselves you would raise it all the time. You would say, 'I have never been shown that' and the Ashley youth worker would say, 'Well, you should have been'. You would say, 'I never have been taught that' and you tell them those sorts of things all the time.

Mrs JAMIESON - Further to that then, would it not be assumed as a security worker you might have been trained in manual handling and anybody who offended against you? Is that not part of your actual security training?

Mr STEVENSON - What do you mean by manual handling?

Mrs JAMIESON - Confrontation and fisticuffs and how to subdue somebody without breaking an arm. Surely you would be taught a certain amount of -

Mr STEVENSON - No, I haven't.

Mrs JAMIESON - Within your security training?

Mr STEVENSON - No, I haven't.

Mrs JAMIESON - Oh right, okay.

Mr STEVENSON - In my security training all I have actually been taught is how to do patrol work on a patrol system and a bit of static guard work and then I was thrown into what I was doing at Ashley. But how to actually do that as part of my training? No, I have never been taught it in my life.

CHAIR - Okay, unfortunately we are running out of time, any further questions at all? Thank you very much. Anything you would like to say to finish off with, Justin, before you go?

Mr STEVENSON - No, I think I have covered it all.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for coming in and enlightening us with that evidence.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW