

ASHLEY, YOUTH JUSTICE AND DETENTION COMMITTEE - LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, MET IN PARLIAMENT HOUSE, MELBOURNE ON THURSDAY 22 FEBRUARY 2007.

DISCUSSION WITH Mr JAMES WYND, YMCA.

CHAIR (Mr Hall) - Thank you for coming in, James. We keep it pretty informal and we appreciate you coming along to give your time to the committee. You have obviously had a look at our terms of reference.

Mr WYND - No, I haven't seen anything. I am coming in blind, but that is fine.

CHAIR - That is okay; just tell us what you do.

Mr WILKINSON - We are here to look at the detention centre and to see whether the rehabilitation programs in Tasmania can be improved or not and whether the training that carers and youth workers get is adequate. This is in an endeavour to ensure that people who come under the youth justice system have the best opportunity to rehabilitate themselves at a later stage or as soon as they come into that system. That is what it is all about.

Mr WYND - Let me tell you about the Victorian YMCA involvement in the juvenile justice system. We have been involved for 13 years now. It is a great relationship between us and DHS. Thirteen years ago we were contracted to run a recreation program for young offenders. We are the only agency that runs programs behind the walls of every single juvenile detention centre in Victoria and over that 13 years obviously we have progressed to where we sit now.

The YMCA have a philosophy, or one of our principles is developmental assets, so we work on a strength base regime where we look at young people's strengths, regardless of what area they are in - custodial and outside as well.

There are three main principles as to how we operate inside the walls. First of all, we have healthy choices. As you would know, a lot of the young offenders who come in have issues relating to health, nutrition and mental health. There is a lot of underlying issues for a young person, so we look at trying to build that up to start with. We run sport and recreation as a springboard. We use it only as a springboard to develop the young person's self-esteem so they can find their own feet. Pretty much in their life they have had knock-backs so we are there to try and get them above that.

The second arm is obviously mentoring. We look at mentoring personal support. We have 150 branches in Victoria, so we look at pre and post mentoring so we are moving throughout that spectrum. Our third arm, which we have started to get into, is education and employment. Throughout Victoria there is a leadership group. Forty of the top leaders of businesses go through this leadership program with one of our senior managers who is involved with this program. For this they have to do a community

project, therefore they all decided to target the juvenile centre and run a few bridge projects - this is big businesses getting a young person work ready.

CHAIR - That is good, James. They are all the areas we are looking at, but how do you go about coordination with other NGOs and Whitelion? Is there somebody overarching who says, 'We have all these service providers, we are running programs'. How does that all work?

Mr WYND - DHS is the umbrella. It covers all the service providers.

CHAIR - So there is not duplication going on.

Mr WYND - That is right. Whitelion would run a mentoring program and also look at an education program. That would probably happen in a Melbourne detention centre. There is a bridge project at Malmsbury, so there is that overriding umbrella to make sure there is no duplication. Also partnerships are a big thing, so we work together to make sure if we encounter somebody that Whitelion can deal with, we transit that young person across those two bodies.

CHAIR - And how long have YMCA been running the programs?

Mr WYND - We have been on site for 13 years. We are the only provider that runs the programs within the walls. Whitelion will come into the centre, look at their program and then come out. We run pretty much eight hours a day inside a detention centre. So if you can imagine, in a detention centre there is a swimming pool, basketball court and a gymnasium, YMCA is contracted to run that like a community centre. The environment we are creating is a community environment so that the young person understands what their expectations are out in the community and how that replicates inside.

About five years ago the YMCA didn't wear duress alarms. That was pretty much done by the youth workers in the detention centres and it wasn't compulsory to go to YMCA yet we had about a 90 per cent ratio of young people attending our classes because of the philosophies that we were trying to get through.

CHAIR - Okay. Do you operate in other States as well?

Mr WYND - Only in Victoria at the moment. We are looking at Western Australia currently.

CHAIR - Getting back to your programs, are they mandatory for residents to attend?

Mr WYND - No.

CHAIR - Not like education? Is education mandatory here?

Mr WYND - Yes, it is. There are TAFE courses inside which they have to go to. There are different types of programs. There are sections where a unit can come down and it is not mandatory but they are encouraged to come.

Then we have an open-unit policy; they are open between 4.30 and 6.30 and all the units can attend. Now, that opens up a lot of issues where the units are split by fences or the size of boys. There is a bit of conflict in that, so how do we then engage them as a whole and not have that conflict happen. That is something that we try and control, again bringing them through that community feel.

Mrs JAMIESON - You mentioned TAFE; what about junior school?

Mr WYND - There is some junior school going on at Parkville.

Mr CHAIR - We will find that out tomorrow.

Mr WYND - They will be able to be more specific.

Mr DEAN - You are contracted to do this?

Mr WYND - Yes, we are contracted by DHS.

Mr DEAN - Is it a long-term contract or does it come up every now and again?

Mr WYND - It just came up and we have now extended it for three years. It is normally a three to five-year contract.

Mrs JAMIESON - Fully funded?

Mr WYND - Yes.

Mr MARTIN - There is obviously an evaluation process. Is it possible to obtain the results of that?

Mr WYND - Yes, for sure.

Mr DEAN - Your staff who participate inside those walls, are they specially trained - as opposed to those outside - because they have a different clientele?

Mr WYND - Yes, exactly; it is a unique environment our workers are in. They are trained in developing young people. Most of them are youth workers but that is not our underlying philosophy; it is about building young people. They do not have to have a degree in criminology to be able to sit behind that. Youth workers inside deal with that. We have a totally different - as I say, a unique - environment where we are replicating community rather than an institution.

Mr DEAN - Do you believe that you are having success in getting some of those youths into program activity and sport? Are you able to measure that?

Mr WYND - Our evaluation process, yes. We have had great success in get young people back into health and fitness lifestyles so that they start not looking at drugs and alcohol and so on. With our current program through mentoring, the main thing is getting them into sport and recreation after they come out.

Mr DEAN - Are you trying to get a connection between there and the outside facilities?

Mr WYND - That is right and that is probably, again, from the unique position that the YMCA are in. If a young person shows signs that they can work under a community umbrella we then give them a free three-month membership in their area, because most of the time there is a YMCA out there. We also engage a worker out there to look after that young person for that period. Unfortunately the statistics will show that re-offending is still big. That is where this Bridge Project comes in, because when a young person comes out they go back into the same environment with the same reasons that put them there in the first place - lack of education and so on - and we are trying to address that. First of all we just looked at healthy choices, getting them back into a healthy state of mind, body and spirit. Now we are looking at stopping them re-offending. That is the evolving process.

Mr MARTIN - How long has that been going for?

Mr WYND - The Bridge project is virtually brand new.

Mrs JAMIESON - And that is separately funded?

Mr WYND - It is separately funded from the Department for Victorian Communities.

Mr WILKINSON - James, let's say I am inside, I have committed an offence, I have come to you, you have got me on a fitness program, a sporting-type program, I come out but I cannot get a job even though you have endeavoured to fit me with somebody but I cannot get a job. You believe it is worthwhile for me not to have idle hands so I continue to do the fitness work. I might get back in with some old mates and they say let's go down to the pub, but you are trying to say no, let us go to the gym. What do you do?

Mr WYND - That is a good question. If I had the answer we would have no re-offending.

Mr WILKINSON - Have you got people out there to endeavour to get me to come into the gym as opposed to the pub.

Mr WYND - We have support mechanisms through the Bridge Project. A young person who has just come out of the system will have parole officers, case managers and all that. We supply a support person along those lines to help them continue through that process.

Mr WILKINSON - You have my name and when I am getting out, and you would know who my probation officer or youth worker was; would you be working with that youth worker?

Mr WYND - Through the Bridge Project, yes. DHS have all those safety nets for that young person but unfortunately they fall through them. We are always enhancing that, using the system where we can utilise a bigger resource, and the bigger the resource the better the outcome.

Mr WILKINSON - That seems to be the problem. Once they get out and meet up with their families and peer group again, often they can go back to where they were even though they swore black and blue whilst inside that they wouldn't do that.

Mr WYND - That is where our mentoring personal support is coming into play. There are no positive role models out there so if we can get somebody who can contact you and say, 'How are you going? What's going on?', there is still a chance that you will go the right way, and that is going to be your choice. We are giving you options.

Mrs JAMIESON - Is there any length of time a person can be on the Bridge Project?

Mr WYND - The Bridge Project at the moment is a 16 to 20-week fully subsidised employment/training package. We are trying to get employers to commit to long-term employment. We are saying that if a young offender can show you in 16 to 20 weeks that they can fit into your agency then we would like you to continue that down the track.

Mrs JAMIESON - If, for any reason, that doesn't work out, can they rejoin the Bridge Project?

Mr WYND - Through the funding we can't, noting all the safety gaps that we were looking at if a young person pulls out and runs away and so on. Again, it is just having that pool of players that we can utilise as much as we can.

Mr DEAN - How close are you working with Whitelion? Whitelion are involved in this program as well. Do you have a close connection with them or not?

Mr WYND - Probably not so much. The Bridge Project is a bit of a unique program in that we target Malmsbury. Whitelion haven't been targeting Malmsbury. They have been targeting more Melbourne and Parkville, though they are up in Malmsbury doing some mentoring.

Mr DEAN - That's what they said, yes.

Mr WYND - Through our discussions with DHS they were more than happy for another project because they believe there are not enough resources out there. There is a big need but again we are being careful that we are not replicating something that is already out there without using partnerships. Also, the relationship takes a little while to build.

Mrs JAMIESON - Is the Bridge Project statewide or is it concentrated on particular areas?

Mr WYND - It is statewide, yes, so we target all agencies in the area where a young person from inside is going to end up. So if they are going back up to Swan Hill, we target business up there because we need to be servicing them and not leaving them on their own.

CHAIR - Are your workers accredited?

Mr WYND - They are all youth workers.

CHAIR - Do they do any formal course at all?

Mr WYND - Not for our juvenile area because I don't believe they need that. I think they need to have an understanding of youth development. That's when we bring in the developmental assets framework, because it is a measurable tool and it makes our staff work with intent.

Mrs JAMIESON - How much funding have you actually got for the three years?

Mr WYND - Bridge is for one year - \$240 000 - and that is to service 20 young people.

Mr MARTIN - That is from Juvenile Justice?

Mr WYND - From Malmsbury, yes. That is a high target for a program that is new. I believe we will, at least through evaluation, whether we get the 20 or not, be able to go back to the VBC and look at continuing that relationship

Mr MARTIN - The YMCA Tasmania don't seem to do anything like this.

Mr WYND - Yet. YMCA is a pretty big organisation. Each State runs independently of each other. You then have YMCA Australia who try to link it all, though each state is going have an individual basis of needs. In Victoria we run on a very recreational base, which would be 80 per cent, and then the rest is made up through Youth Services, Juvenile Justice, camping and student accommodation. If you go to Perth it would primarily be youth services and a smaller percentage of recreation. If you go to Queensland there is a totally different model. Tasmania will have its own model of what it needs to work with. Tasmania have come to us in regard to forensic care. We also work in the adult mental prisons and looked at modelling some of that.

Mr WILKINSON - Stuart Slade is involved?

Mr WYND - Yes, the CEO. He came and met us and one of our workers, looking for information. If I decide, say, I am going to run a new program and I know that the Northern Territory do it, then I contact them.

CHAIR - Do you see down the track a larger emphasis on post-release programs?

Mr WYND - I think there must be. Again, it is all about relationship building. You are definitely looking at, and this is the section I am working on, personal development and support. You get a positive role model inside or pre-release to work with that young client for a period of time and then, when it comes to that transition post-release, that same phase is still out there to support them. When they are falling through the gaps they may just go to that person. If there is no relationship, what happens to that young person? They are gone.

CHAIR - Do you think the department will recognise that and, if you get the contracts, there will be more money available for that post-release work?

Mr WYND - I believe that they understand that. This is what Whitelion do a lot of. We are now going to be mandated to look at specifics, so if a young person saw fitness as being

important we could mentor them in that way without duplicating Whitelion. Yes, I do believe that is the model. The model is healthy choices, personal development, get them through, and what is on the other side that can assist them.

CHAIR - So in Victoria, external providers are yourselves and Whitelion. Is there anybody else running programs?

Mr WYND - There is Inside Out.

CHAIR - They are contracted?

Mr WYND - Inside Out are contracted by DHS. Brosnan centre also protects young offenders in that transition phase. I do not know if they are contracted; I think they run independently.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would you have the capacity to subcontract if, say, you thought Whitelion could offer a better program - like a camp?

Mr WYND - It would have to be negotiated between the through DHS.

Mrs JAMIESON - Okay, so you do not have a parcel of money that you can use your initiative with?

Mr WYND - We do, through foundation Foundation Y, have money for benevolent work. If we saw a need we could access that fund.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you run camps for the kids?

Mr WYND - The YMCA in Victoria is a huge organisation and it runs five recreation camps, or we manage five camps. We have 150 sites now in Victoria and we run outdoor recreation and have the biggest youth student accommodation. So when you ask the question about utilising Whitelion, it is a big organisation that you can utilise, so the question is how do we combine the two to assist in the outcome for the young person.

Mr MARTIN - Given your experience with the juvenile justice system, the whole system in Victoria is supposed to be based on a rehabilitation model; is that done well enough in the centres?

Mr WYND - Yes, I believe that the young people get experience through their TAFEs and through the YMCA programs, which are unique. I do believe that they are being catered for there, but I do not think they are being catered for once they leave.

Mr MARTIN - That is the gap?

Mr WYND - It is. They go back to their same ways and there is no-one there to support them. They may have a case worker or a parole officer but when everyone is after the same thing and there are limited resources, it makes it hard for that young person.

Mr MARTIN - Twenty minutes a week with a parole officer.

CHAIR - We had some evidence from South Australia on Operation Flinders, an outward bound-type program; have you looked at any of those? Do you see any benefit in those and does the YMCA run any?

Mr WYND - We have not looked at those models probably because they have not come up. I think that anything that can help divert a young person is worth looking at.

CHAIR - There is no one doing that in Victoria, to your knowledge?

Mr WYND - Not to my knowledge but that does not mean they are not doing it. There are many people doing many things, but it is that whole thing about information sharing.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you have the capacity to run culturally specific programs?

Mr WYND - We do. Through the YMCA we also run many different types of program and we have networked them. You can utilise those programs and bring them in and adjust them. We have that process. We run a women's only stream in our adult prison and through that we run a few confidence programs and things like that.

Mr WILKINSON - Years ago there used to be churches and church groups; more people used to go to church and they could act as role models. A lot of those now are broken down, not just church groups but other groups as well. Therefore these young people on the fence could fall either way because often they have not got the role models and peer groups around them to set them and continue with them on the straight and narrow. How do you think that can be done? Can YMCA or another organisation do something there, maybe linking into a partnership with schools?

Mr WYND - Exactly. We run youth services on the outside. We run contracts with councils where we link in with pretty much every secondary school. It is about silos and how people operate. The issue is that there is one pool of funding and everyone is going for it, so no-one is working together to benefit young people. That is an issue that we have. One of our biggest contracts is out at Brimbank and we work very closely with our community. Everyone is having that same issue. We have to go to State governments; they give you funding but it is one year of funding - it is not recurrent. There is a battle. We have got to stop that happening so that people start working together. I think that has got to come from way up. Any working with young people is about relationship building and you cannot build a relationship in a year. It is a process. Then it is about getting a young person ready to work on their own and getting young people to work for young people. That is another model that we can work on.

Mr WILKINSON - YMCA is in partnership with the Clarence Council down in Hobart and they run the local swimming pool. Just because it is there does not mean that people are going to come along, so how do you get them to come along?

Mr WYND - That is probably one of the biggest questions we are asking our recreation managers. A community is not four walls; a community is what is around you. So if you are not networking with everybody and building those relationships then you are working in a silo. We challenge a lot of our youth services because it is the only way we survive. It is minimal funding, so how do we get to *x* amount of young people. We

cannot unless we are building great partnerships and working on those programs. So it is a philosophy-shift right throughout the YMCA.

CHAIR - What is the single biggest issue that is causing problems out there with young people? Is it drugs? Can you put a handle on it?

Mr WYND - I think when I was young the issues were pretty much the same. There's not much difference. One of the amplifiers of the issues is mobile phones. The communication a young person can get is pretty quick. There are always incidents but now I can get 50 or 100 people in a second, whereas before it took a while, so that amplifies a lot of things. Again, this is very negative in that we always seem to see the issues; we don't seem to see the successes. There are a lot of successes.

Mr MARTIN - Most young people are pretty good, aren't they.

Mr WYND - Exactly. The issues are boredom and awareness. As adults we don't know what is going on around the corner with our agencies, so how is a young person going to know that there is an agency there that could help them, and whether they want to be a part of that.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about family breakdowns?

Mr WYND - There are a lot of single parents. There are multicultural issues and a lot of underlying issues with trauma for young people trying to get families out here. There is a new shift in cultures. We are seeing a new generation coming through, born in Africa - that is one of our emerging populations in Victoria. We are now having programs specifically that can address that and assist them. Unfortunately, in the end the system lets them down because a young person who comes out as a refugee gets put into an English language for school for six months and then because they are 16 they get put into year 10 but have a grade 3 understanding. We are letting them down through the frustrations of failing school and not even understanding the system.

Mrs JAMIESON - What is your age limit?

Mr WYND - It is 12-25, but in Juvenile Justice because we have 10-21 for girls, and 10-14 for boys and then we work all the way up to 21.

Mrs JAMIESON - But you, as the YMCA, can have people to 25?

Mr WYND - No, the youth services of YMCA are just one component. We work through every single person, from day one through our What If program to 85 for our Active Adult program.

Mrs JAMIESON - Have you ever employed any of the kids who have come through your justice programs?

Mr WYND - Through this Bridge Project we have two. One of the biggest things when we were doing the Bridge Project was targeting the Lindsay Foxes and the big companies. We said, 'We are an employer'; the YMCA is now committing to employing these young people. We have two young people currently who are going through the system.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you have a formal chaplaincy?

Mr WYND - No.

Mrs JAMIESON - Is there any advantage in having one? There are a lot of kids questioning these days.

Mr WYND - There are lots of debates on that. Again, a chaplain is a great support for a young person and I don't see a problem with that, letting a young person find their own way. When we start dictating to the young person is when it starts getting a bit hazy. I don't disagree with it, but it is very much a relationship and again working in partnerships with schools and their chaplains.

Mr DEAN - I am interested to know how you became involved in the program? How long have you been there for?

Mr WYND - I have been in the YMCA for 10 years.

Mr DEAN - How long with the programs within Malmsbury and so on?

Mr WYND - I have been officially managing it for a year.

Mr DEAN - How long has it been operating?

Mr WYND - About 13 years.

Mr DEAN - Did DHS approach you or did you see a need for this sort of program?

Mr WYND - In all honesty we would never have seen a need inside because DHS run them. They saw a big need for young people. They had the facilities and didn't know how to run them. They saw the YMCA as having the expertise, the dialogue started and along came a contract. That is how the relationship has continued.

Mr MARTIN - Was there a tender process?

Mr WYND - I believe it was just, 'Here's a facility. Off you go'.

Mr DEAN - It is clearly seen as a very successful program for you because you continue to get the contract to provide the service. DHS obviously has done measurements or evaluations.

Mr WYND - Yes, and it has been a great relationship.

Mrs JAMIESON - Is transport a problem for the kids to get to programs? Is that covered under your Bridge Program?

Mr WYND - Transporting young people is an issue if they are not a main line or main road or whatever.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about if they wanted to continue with TAFE, because that can become an issue too? Would you have any capacity to help support their transport?

Mr WYND - We probably would from our own social conscience.

CHAIR - Thank you very much for coming, James. You have given us a good insight into your programs.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.