

**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASHLEY, YOUTH DETENTION AND JUSTICE MET IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL, PARLIAMENT HOUSE, HOBART ON MONDAY 26 MARCH 2007.**

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**Mr RALPH BECK**, OPERATIONS MANAGER, ASHLEY YOUTH DETENTION CENTRE WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

**CHAIR** (Mr Hall) - Welcome, Ralph and thanks very much for coming down and giving evidence to the committee. As you know, and would have seen, we have been going on and off for a few weeks now talking to different stakeholders and taking statements or getting evidence from them. So what I might do is invite you to describe your position description at Ashley and how long you have worked and all that sort of thing and elaborate in any way that you like in terms of the operations. If you would like to do that I will then invite members to ask you questions.

**Mr BECK** - I started at Ashley roughly 12 years ago, in August 1995. I started as a casual youth worker for about three months and then became a permanent youth worker. I was in that role for roughly three years and then due to family circumstances I had to take a year of leave without pay and move up to my family in Queensland. While I was up there I worked at John Oxley Youth Detention Centre and once the situation with my family was resolved I moved back to Tasmania and back to Ashley, where I picked up where I left off as a youth worker.

Shortly after that, I gained a team leader's position in first an acting and then substantive capacity for approximately three years, and then moved into the role I am in now, which is operations manager; I was acting in that for a couple of years before I gained it on a permanent basis, and that is where I am at now.

As operations manager, obviously, as the title suggests, I manage the day-to-day operations. With Ashley being operational 24/7, the staff is made up of shift workers on primarily three shifts throughout the day, with morning and afternoon shift and two night shifts. As I mentioned before, it is made up of youth workers and team leaders and there is an operations coordinator on each team. So they are the workers and I as operations manager work a nine-to-five position and oversee all of that. That is it broadly, and I will wait for your questions.

**CHAIR** - So you have been there 12 years, Ralph?

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - Apart from one year up in Queensland - and I might ask you a little bit about that year you had in a moment - but what fundamental changes have you noticed in your time at Ashley? You have had different roles, obviously, so how long have you been the supervisor?

**Mr BECK** - I have been in my current position roughly five or six years. I acted in it for some time before that.

**CHAIR** - Yes, okay.

[3.45 p.m.]

**Mr BECK** - Obviously there have been some fairly significant changes over the 12 years since I first stepped on site, when there was no fence and it was still operating under the old Welfare Act 1960. That was a fairly significant change in 2000 with the proclamation of the Youth Justice Act 1977.

**CHAIR** - From an operational point of view, did the centre operate in a better manner? We have looked at evidence that suggests that maybe it did before the fence was put up. I know that the secure unit was burnt down and so there were lots of issues with that.

**Mr BECK** - Yes, it is a difficult question to answer. Personally I think the centre runs much better now than it did then, although there were some benefits back then, prior to the fence, where we were able to do a little more out on the farm.

But we still, as part of our behaviour development scheme - provided you meet all the criteria and are in the right category - you can progress from programs inside the fence to those back out on the yard. So the same opportunities are still there and, arguably, even though we might not have as much access to the farm as we did in the past, the quality of that time out there is of a higher standard than it was back then. Back then a youth worker would have one or a group of young people for the day and they would walk around and pull ragwort or hoe thistles or something like that, and it was work and it was doing something but it did not really mean anything at the end of the day.

**Mr MARTIN** - So what sort of better thing happens now?

**Mr BECK** - We are able to link what happens on the farm. There are some actual learning outcomes for young people, whether it be animal husbandry or fence-building, that type of thing.

**Mr MARTIN** - How much time in a week would a young person be out on the farm?

**Mr BECK** - Those who are eligible would spend anything from two to three days a week but, as I said before, a young person needs to meet certain criteria before they are eligible to go outside the fence.

**Mr MARTIN** - It's the green card.

**Mr BECK** - It can be either yellow or green.

**Mr MARTIN** - Roughly what percentage of young people at any given time would be in green or yellow - a ballpark figure?

**Mr BECK** - Off-the-top, probably 50-50. But it does not automatically mean that a young person who is in yellow or green is eligible. There are some other criteria as well, in terms of whether or not they have been sentenced, how long they have been there and what their charges are.

**Mr MARTIN** - So does the farm actually produce things for sale?

**Mr BECK** - It does.

**Mr MARTIN** - And that helps fund Ashley, does it?

**Mr BECK** - It generates enough money, for things like maintenance on fences and fertiliser and bits and pieces, to keep the farm ticking over.

**Mr MARTIN** - So the farm breaks even?

**Mr BECK** - I could not tell you.

**CHAIR** - Isn't it true that it is leased to one of the employees?

**Mr BECK** - There is an arrangement that Ashley has with Phil Skipper and Phil Skipper is our site safety and security officer. An arrangement was made with the previous manager. Phil Skipper manages about 20 head of Ashley cattle and the pay-off for him is that he gets to run an equal amount of cattle for himself.

**Mr WILKINSON** - We were told by a number of people that the farm is not used, but you are saying that that is not right, it is used.

**Mr BECK** - The farm is used. Sure, there are some who would like the farm used more, but we have an obligation to manage the risks that young people present and until they meet the criteria and we believe that the risk is acceptable then they cannot go beyond the fence. So, yes, there certainly short periods of time where there may not be anyone on site eligible.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Do you have any documentation on how often the farm is used? For example, Jim Wilkinson has the green card and is able to work on the farm today, and therefore you could work out how many hours per day the farm is used. I ask because it is contrary to the evidence that we have at the moment. Everybody says no, it is just not used any more.

**Mr BECK** - I am sure the programs unit would have some evidence on young people's individual program sheets which would highlight that. It is certainly not used all day every day.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Has it been used over the last month?

**Mr BECK** - Absolutely. For the last two weeks it has had three young people out there for two or three full days a week.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Who oversees the people out on the farm? How many people would they have overseeing them? And apart from their green and yellow cards are they accredited when they leave Ashley as having done 'x' number of hours on the farm?

**Mr BECK** - We are still not quite there with the accreditation, with linking the learning outcomes to some accreditation through the Ashley school, but that is in progress.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - There is an intention to do that?

**Mr BECK** - Absolutely. As far as supervision for young people on the farm, that is the role of the youth workers and with pretty much the same ratio applying, which is three to one.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - So if two or three of us were going to go out the farm would you have to employ another staff member to oversee the youth going out on to the farm, because otherwise you would have them inside?

**Mr BECK** - Not necessarily, it depends on the day and what is going on. Technically if one staff member is working on the farm and he is taking three young people out there the ratio remains the same. But we do go through periods where maybe only one young person is eligible, so you have one-on-one and that can affect the ratio inside the fence. As far as staff resident ratios go, our average has been mid to low twenties for some time, so the ratio is pretty good. Each shift has 14 on it. From last year we have another 9 to 5 support officer position and that position has a supervisory role as well. So there can be anything up to 15 on a shift through the day.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - So does the staff person who accompanies the youth out on to the farm have to have any farming experience or are they just there to make sure -

**Mr BECK** - Some do and some don't.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - That would have to change if you are going to have them accredited.

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Thank you, Mr Beck.

**Mr MARTIN** - What sort of activities other than cattle do you run on the farm?

**Mr BECK** - Up to this point it has been primarily programs to do with farm maintenance - bits of fencing and stuff like that. More recently we have started to develop some worm farms and also a vegetable garden.

**Mr MARTIN** - That would have been commonplace 10 or 15 years ago? The evidence that has been provided to the Committee is that there was a whole range of farming activities being conducted on the farm 15 or 20 years ago, whereas today, we were told, it is just running cattle.

**Mr BECK** - As I said initially, way back when there was no fence and no criteria and we were all on the 80 acres, there tended to be more going on on the farm because there was less happening on site through the school, and there were other programs that we delivered on site. When I first started, apart from school, there was no music or psychologist or relaxation therapist - all of those programs that we now have on site. Although they are not on the farm and fencing or pulling ragwort as often, I think they are involved in more productive programs.

**Mr MARTIN** - Further to that I was pleased to hear that there are programs based on the farm to help them in later life. You mentioned animal husbandry, but what other programs is the farm being used for to help young people.

**Mr BECK** - Currently?

**Mr MARTIN** - Yes.

**Mr BECK** - That is about it.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - There is no mechanics, tractor repairs?

**Mr BECK** - No.

**CHAIR** - Is the farm offered as a reward for good behaviour?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, it is one of the incentives linked to being in the yellow and green category. As we said earlier, if you are yellow or green and meet some other criteria then you are eligible for programs outside the fence, so in that sense, yes, it is a reward.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Such as? What is the range of incentives that could be offered? You could say, 'Johnny has been a good boy. He has a green card now. He can go farming.' What else can he do?

**Mr BECK** - There are a number of activities that we do off site. We do things in the community: deliver wood, clean up the Apex hut, look after the roundabout down the road and keep the grass down, the information bay. When a young person becomes eligible, the first thing we do is start them on the farm. Once they have completed two or three successful programs on the farm, where we have them nice and close and can monitor how they are going to respond outside the gate, then we would start to look at programs like the Apex hut.

**CHAIR** - How often would you go up to the Apex hut? I know the one you are talking about.

**Mr BECK** - It depends on how often it has been used.

**CHAIR** - A fair bit of the evidence we have had suggests that the programs are not as good as they used to be. Has the attitude towards programs changed much over the years?

**Mr BECK** - The attitude from staff members?

**CHAIR** - Yes, in terms of providing really good programs for residents; has that changed much over the years? Are there more programs now than there used to be? Are there better programs than there used to be or, conversely, are they not as good as they used to be?

**Mr BECK** - Program-wise we are in a better place now than we were before. Yes, you could argue that more was happening on the farm but I suppose it is the value you place on the

farm program up against the music program, the drug and alcohol counselling and the sessions with the psychologist.

**CHAIR** - If you are saying there are better programs now, what are the programs that motivate the detainees? Is it the farm work or is it education or social programs? Which ones do you think are the better ones?

**Mr BECK** - Different individuals respond to different things. For some it is music, for some it is education and attending the school, for some it is the farm, for some it is relaxation therapy. I suppose what would be seen as the biggest incentive for young people is being involved in programs in the community, outside the fence.

[4.00 p.m.]

**CHAIR** - How often does that happen?

**Mr BECK** - As I said, over the last two weeks we have had three people outside the gate for three days a week each week.

**Mr WILKINSON** - That is on the farm?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, on the farm.

**Mr WILKINSON** - But not out in the actual community itself, down in Deloraine, helping in a cake store or whatever it might be.

**Mr BECK** - No. Well, in the last couple of weeks there was a trip to the Apex hut, but as for whether there was any other activity, I could not tell you off-the-top of my head.

**Mr MARTIN** - We were told that back in the old days -

**Mr BECK** - Everything was always better back then.

**Mr MARTIN** - Yes, that's right, the good old days - there used to be a lot more interaction between the young people and the local community. They used to go to the craft show and help out there.

**Mr BECK** - We still do that.

**Mr MARTIN** - But in much smaller numbers. I think last year there was just one.

**CHAIR** - I don't think they have, not in the last year - that didn't happen for the last craft fair.

**Mr MARTIN** - There might be one young person.

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Mr MARTIN** - Whereas there used to be groups of youths.

**Mr BECK** - We have been represented every year and, you are right, there was only one last year. But we normally have two or three and on occasions we have had four involved in the craft fair over that four-day period.

**CHAIR** - We will keep focused on farming programs at the moment.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Would you see any value in increasing the amount of activity that the youth are directed towards in Ashley, on the farm itself? Would you get more funding or more whatever is required? In other words, you are getting a meaningful deployment.

**Mr BECK** - I am all for more activity in all program areas, and that includes the farm.

**Mr MARTIN** - You mentioned that the change in the act has made a fundamental change in the way Ashley is run, but the Youth Justice Act is based on a restorative justice model which means that there is supposed to be a lot of attention paid to the rehabilitation of young people and, thus, that is where the programs become important. We are told that the school-aged children do not spend more than 10 hours a week in school. Do you think that is enough if they are to be rehabilitated?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, it is about 10 hours a week, as you say, for compulsory school-aged students, and that is actual classroom time. There are a number of other activities that young people are involved in through out the day - sport and recreation, and the like - which would be part of a normal curriculum. So I would say that the actual figure would be somewhat more than that.

**Mr MARTIN** - We are told they spend a lot of time on sport and rec compared to other parts of the curriculum. Is that a fair comment?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, I think it is fair to say that sport and rec does feature on the program sheet quite a bit, but it is also a program that the young people enjoy and it is a positive one.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - But, surely, if it is mandatory that they go to school they should have more actual classroom education.

**Mr BECK** - Absolutely. On one hand, it is easy to say that and on the other, the majority of young people at Ashley have not been attending school in the community and sometimes that 2-3 hours a day that they do spend at the school can be much more productive than if we were to enforce a full day of actual sit-down classroom time.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - If they muck up because they don't want to go to class, what happens then?

**Mr BECK** - What generally happens if a young person, as you say, mucks up and has to be taken back to the unit, before the young person goes back to school there will be a meeting with them and usually the teacher involved and the principal, they would sit down and talk about the issues, resolve them and start again.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - How long could they be out of the classroom situation? For the rest of the week, maybe, if they mucked up on Tuesday?

**Mr BECK** - We would be talking days; it could be less than a day, but if you are talking maximum it could be days.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Could I get back to the farm?

**Mr BECK** - The farm is important.

**Mr WILKINSON** - It is interesting and that is why we asked you to come, because it is different to the evidence we've heard, and we needed to get that balance.

**Mr BECK** - Sorry, what part is different?

**Mr WILKINSON** - The fact that the vast majority of the evidence was that the farm was not being used any more and you are saying, 'No, that is not right', and that in fact it is being used.

**Mr BECK** - It is being used. As I said, it is not being used as often as it was 12 years ago, but it has been in place for a number of years.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Sure. Have you noticed that recently there has been an increase in programs outside on the farm, such as the worm farms, the vegetable patch, things like that?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, all those are very recent.

**Mr WILKINSON** - How recent? How long have they been in action?

**Mr BECK** - A couple of months.

**Mr WILKINSON** - In relation to the school, because some questions were asked on that, a number of people were saying there should be 30 hours a week of school. We have heard information that having only about 10 hours means idle hands, so the kids get into strife because they get bored and that is when they try to take off over the fence - that type of evidence. I know a lot depends upon finances and resources, but do you believe there should be extra schooling in addition to what is happening already? We seem to be below the average schooling hours in other States.

**Mr BECK** - Yes. As I said in answer to one of the other questions, I would happily take any increase in any program area. Whether that would be a positive step for all young people at Ashley, I am not too sure. That would be a decision for those involved in the delivery of the education and I would be interested to hear what the principal had to say about that, because some of our young people have very short attention spans and as I said, sometimes the 2-3 hours of classroom time can, in the long run, be much more productive than increasing the hours.

**Mr WILKINSON** - The holidays there are consistent with school holidays, so therefore over the Christmas period you have December, January and part of February -

**Mr BECK** - Yes, it would be good to see some sort of summer program.



**Mr WILKINSON** - I am sure the kids in there might not do anything for three months, and likewise for first-term and second-term holidays.

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Are people on remand able to go to a school program? If I am on remand and I am there for another month before I come back to court again, do I get slotted into a school program, or do I have to wait and see what happens with my sentence?

**Mr BECK** - No, straight into school.

**Mr MARTIN** - Okay. Going back to the restorative model and the rehabilitation, do you think there are enough human and financial resources there to make a difference in the lives of some of these young people? Are we really committed as an institution and as a government to carrying out what the Youth Justice Act is all about in relation to Ashley, or are we just trying to pay lip-service to the concept of rehabilitation?

**Mr BECK** - I think there have been some really positive steps forward over the last couple of years and I think we are well and truly heading in that direction. We have talked primarily about programs so far and, as you would have seen on site, at the top of our wish list would be a purpose-built programs area on the site. As you have seen, we have a little music room at the back of Bronte unit and a fitness room over there and it is spread all over the place. We would love to see a programs unit and it may help us in attracting service providers to deliver programs on site as well.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - So you can have formal music therapy rather just hanging it on to -?

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - How are we going with programs?

**Mrs JAMIESON** - I would be interested to know what percentage of the youth who go through there do you think are able to be rehabilitated? Because we keep hearing stories -

**Mr BECK** - Who can answer that question?

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Yes, I appreciate what you are saying, but they would be better rehabilitated if you had better structured class room and or other activities? Some of them treat it as a bit of a joke, as we know

**Mr BECK** - Absolutely.

There is quite a high percentage of young people who respond to the Ashley program while we have them on site. When the young people go back into the community and back into the environment from which they came, I think it is fair to say that more often than not any gains that we have made during their stay at Ashley are quickly lost.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Are you aware of the programs that follow the young one back home into the community to make sure that they stay on track and maybe work with the family for example? Or is that asking too much?

**Mr BECK** - It has always been a goal of ours. We believe a young person's successful re-integration back into the community is dependent on establishing positive networks and support within the community. We have had a couple of success stories, where we have been able to link a young person to employment prior to their leaving. Some young people we have had on site have been working in the community from Monday to Friday, 9-5, for months leading up to their release date. We are very supportive of that where we can find those positions and where the young person meets all the criteria.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - What about the involvement with programs that might come into Ashley for example White Lion?

**Mr BECK** - Absolutely, White Lion, and also members involved in the God Squad through the mentor program have been very supportive to Ashley; coming on site, building rapport and getting to know young people. That is part of establishing those positive supports and networks for the young people.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Do you find management and staff are very happy to help support that?

**Mr BECK** - Absolutely.

**CHAIR** - Okay, if there are any other questions we have not had answered, we can always come back to them.

Ralph, I would like to move on to staff issues, which is obviously a part of our terms of reference. We have had evidence to suggest that, for people coming in to start a job at Ashley as a youth worker, their induction period is not long enough and the training they receive is not long enough and not comprehensive enough. Would you like to comment on that?

**Mr BECK** - I believe that we have a very good induction program. We have a 19 day induction program, further supported by regular rostered training days and a number of other training days and sessions incorporated into that as well.

**CHAIR** - Is it difficult to recruit good staff? Being out in a rural area, do some people not want to travel? Is that an issue?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, it is.

[4.15 p.m.]

**CHAIR** - What is the solution there, do you think? Is there anything that you see as being a solution to try to attract a better calibre of staff, if you like?

**Mr BECK** - One of the initiatives over the last couple of years has been that on employment we offer to enrol all youth workers in a certificate for youth work, and that has been an incentive for some.

**CHAIR** - We have been told, too, that absenteeism is pretty high; that you get staff members suddenly going off on sick leave, which makes it very difficult to fill a shift and therefore you get inexperienced people working on the shifts. Would you like to comment on that?

**Mr BECK** - Sick leave does at times appear to be a bit higher than it should be, but working within a custodial environment with the client group with which we work can be -

**CHAIR** - The committee acknowledges and accepts that. In general, what is staff morale like? Is staff morale good or does it vary a lot?

**Mr BECK** - It varies a lot. It goes up and down and on the back of an incident, for example that evening back in November. Staff morale does go down for a time. It is up and down and it can depend on the dynamic of the group or the client mix on a given day.

**CHAIR** - Anecdotally we have heard too that some staff tend to bunker themselves away, that they would prefer not to have that coal-face interaction with residents and it is easier to put themselves away and not have that interaction. Do you see much of that at all?

**Mr BECK** - As I have said, the staff -

**Mr WILKINSON** - Not you, Ralph.

*Laughter.*

**Mr WILKINSON** - It has been mentioned.

**Mr BECK** - I am sure it is the same in any workplace. Some days are better than others and if a staff member, for whatever reason, on any given day feels under pressure or feels uncomfortable being out and about and taking a group for the day we may be able to delegate them to another role for a short period. But it is certainly something that we would not support on an ongoing basis.

**CHAIR** - You are the operations manager and, as such you are probably seen as a lynch pin between the manager and the team leaders - and this is a question that we have to ask - do you get support from the manager and the bunker that has just been referred to?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, absolutely. Bill Smith is a great manager, and as far as support for me - is that the question?

**CHAIR** - Yes.

**Mr BECK** - Extremely supportive.

**CHAIR** - Okay.

**Mr MARTIN** - Ralph, how many staff are up there at Ashley? What is the total staff number at Ashley?

**Mr BECK** - In total on the books?

**Mr MARTIN** - Yes.

**Mr BECK** - Close to 100 all up with casual staff and staff from all areas.

**Mr MARTIN** - How many lines of management are there between Bill, the manager, down, say, to the youth worker?

**Mr BECK** - Down the operations stream?

**Mr MARTIN** - Yes.

**Mr BECK** - There is my position, there is a team coordinator and there is a team leader.

**Mr MARTIN** - Okay. So for an instruction to go from the top to the bottom, Bill would pass something onto you, you would pass it on to - who is under you?

**Mr BECK** - The ops coordinator.

**Mr MARTIN** - Then the team leader and then the youth worker - so that is five. There has been a fair bit of evidence provided by both past and current staff that if they put in a complaint they quite often do not get any feedback and they are not sure if it ever reaches the top.

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mr MARTIN** - What happens to complaints? If a youth worker puts in a complaint about any issue, what happens to it?

**Mr BECK** - All complaints, following our complaints procedure, can go to the Ombudsman or the Commissioner for Children, but if they remain on site they go to the centre manager and the centre manager would then make a decision as to whether it would come back to me to follow up, which happens more often than not.

**Mr MARTIN** - So every complaint from a youth worker would get to the centre manager?

**Mr BECK** - Absolutely.

**Mr MARTIN** - What are the feedback guidelines? Is every complaint supposed to be responded to back to the complainant?

**Mr BECK** - Yes. I think I know where you are coming from here. It often comes up that people involved in complaints, if they have taken a complaint for a young person and it is to do with another staff member, often feel that they have not been given adequate feedback. The problem with that is if the complaint is about another staff member and it is being investigated, it is a private matter between whoever is investigating and that individual, so the person involved initially who raised the complaint is, more often than not, not going to be aware of the outcome.

**Mr WILKINSON** - What about standard operating procedures? Again, the questions we are asking are as a result of evidence we have heard. There has been a lot of talk about different people having different operating procedures and that makes it hard for some when they come on duty because the previous leader had a different standard operating procedure. He might be a bit more lenient than the one that is coming on, for example, and that causes problems for the one that is coming on duty. Do standard operating procedures have to be strictly followed?

**Mr BECK** - Yes. That said, no two individuals are exactly the same. For example, standard operating procedure for telephone calls is that a young person gets 10 minutes on the phone. You may know that the young person on the phone is talking to his family about a family matter so you might let the call go for a couple of minutes longer, whereas another staff member, regardless of what the issue is, might stand strictly by the rules, so there are some of those greyish areas off the side of the SOPs and inconsistencies from one team to another.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Are you happy that all teams are abiding by the SOPs, or should they abide by them closer than they are?

**Mr BECK** - No, I think there has been some evidence that some should pay a little more attention.

**Mr MARTIN** - Is there a difference between the contractors and the full-time staff in relation to those issues?

**Mr BECK** - In following procedures?

**Mr MARTIN** - Some inconsistencies because of the lack of training they have, for example?

**Mr BECK** - If you are asking whether I or we expect service providers on site to follow our standing operating procedures, the answer is yes.

**Mr MARTIN** - Do you think the Platinum contractors perform as well as your full-time staff?

**Mr BECK** - Some do, some don't. We have a contract with Platinum Security, as you are aware, for escorts; we don't have a contract for backfill on site. They have helped us out over the years when we have had problems with recruitment.

**Mr MARTIN** - How often are they used for that part of the job on site?

**Mr BECK** - It is difficult for me to give a figure. At the moment, as I said, on site we have had a population of detainees numbering in the mid- to low-twenties for some time now, so not often. We would probably hardly be using them on site at all if it wasn't for the additional two staff members required on night shift following the November incident.

**CHAIR** - So you have two Platinum people on every -

**Mr BECK** - No.

**CHAIR** - No, not every night shift. Are they still being used for the transfer duties between, say, Hobart Remand Centre and Ashley and doing all that sort of stuff?

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - So what you are telling us is that you do not have Platinum staff there on a permanent basis at the moment; they are coming in infrequently.

**Mr BECK** - Like I said, I couldn't give you any hard and fast figures right here and now because it changes so often but, going back for some time now, our requirement for Platinum staff on site has been very low.

**CHAIR** - In two other States that we visited they don't employ external contractors on site. Would that be your preference if the recruitment issues could be resolved? I assume that that is the problem, as you see it, why Platinum or an external contractor has to be used at the moment.

**Mr BECK** - Absolutely; that has always been our long-term goal.

**CHAIR** - Yes, I have one more line of questioning there. You talked about how you were satisfied with the quantum of time provided to youth workers when they came through for induction and training. Do you think that they should have some sort of accreditation after they have done that and have an ongoing assessment? After they have done their initial training, should they go through a period and end up with some sort of accreditation as a youth worker?

**Mr BECK** - A number of the modules in the induction are straight out of a link to the certificate for youth work, so they do end up with accreditation.

**CHAIR** - They do?

**Mr BECK** - They do.

**CHAIR** - So is every youth worker at Ashley at the moment accredited?

**Mr BECK** - All permanent youth workers are, and we are starting to work our way through the casual youth workers.

**CHAIR** - What happens if you get an employee there who is not up to speed? How do you manage that?

**Mr BECK** - The same as in any other department, through supervision and performance management.

**CHAIR** - Can their employment be terminated, and has that happened?

**Mr BECK** - That is one of the sanctions available, yes.

**CHAIR** - Yes, and does that happen at times, if they are unsuitable for the job?

**Mr BECK** - I am not aware of anyone who has been terminated. I am aware of a number of people who have been redeployed, but not terminated.

**Mr WILKINSON** - If I can ask a question around that, as I understand it, you are saying that everybody who is employed by Ashley as a youth worker has 19 days' training - correct? They also have training from time to time in relation to their expertise and skills and they are also encouraged to carry out their youth workers' accreditation course.

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Out of the 100 that are employed, how many are actually carrying out the youth workers' accreditation course, do you know?. Firstly, how many are accredited?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, but out of those 100 I am including kitchen staff, admin and -

**Mr WILKINSON** - I see. Well, let us talk about the people who are caring for the children.

**Mr BECK** - Out of those 60-odd?

**Mr WILKINSON** - Yes.

**Mr BECK** - Off the top of my head I would say 30-ish.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Right, and do the others have to carry out that course?

[4.30 p.m.]

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mr WILKINSON** - They do? So if I say, 'I don't want to; I think I have experienced enough', you would say, 'Get on your bike and see you later.'?

**Mr BECK** - We have not had to deal with that as yet. When you say that I would say get on your bike -

**Mr WILKINSON** - In other words, if a person said, 'I do not want to do the course', the management would say that if you want to continue with us you have to do that course. Is that right?

**Mr BECK** - Yes; we would endeavour to do all we could for the staff member to be involved in that course.

**Mr WILKINSON** - So presently half the youth workers who are employed there are approximately -

**Mr BECK** - In the process of being accredited.

**Mr WILKINSON** - In the process?

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Do you know how many are already accredited?

**Mr BECK** - I am reluctant to say because I may be off the mark.

**Mr WILKINSON** - That is fine.

**Mr MARTIN** - Are the figures available?

**Mr BECK** - Absolutely. If I had known I could have brought them.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Yes, that is fine.

Do you think the custodial and support roles should be split? Should the youth workers be just youth workers who work with the children there and then there be a special custodial role?

**Mr BECK** - No, I do not believe so.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Why not?

**Mr BECK** - As named in the youth workers' statement of duties, it is the role of the youth worker to be a role model and be working with young people throughout their day-to-day operation. I do not see any problem with that. I do not like the idea of splitting the role, having some people coming in to deliver programs and another group of people standing back waiting to respond if need be.

**Mr WILKINSON** - So there should not be, as far as you are concerned, any demarcation between the two roles?

**Mr BECK** - I would not be supporting it.

**Mr MARTIN** - It must be really difficult, though. If I was a youth worker and if someone played up I would have to take on the role of punishing them, and then an hour later or next day I am expected to be a mate and help them.

**Mr BECK** - Similar roles to being a parent.

**Mr MARTIN** - It is a bit different, though. It is a bit more intense I would think.

**Mr BECK** - Yes, and it is challenging and difficult work, but there are a good number of people who can do that very well.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Are you satisfied that Platinum staff have adequate induction time and training for when they are going to become surrogate youth workers? How much time are they getting for training?

**Mr BECK** - They currently spend between one and two days in the training unit and then it is linked to a competency check list that goes with them into the unit. So they will go back into the unit and be supported by current youth workers and team leaders to work



their way through the competency check lists around SOPs and whether they meet them or not.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Could you outline the workers' compensation process and are you satisfied with it? Are you satisfied there is enough paperwork and/or process and/or support debriefing from management for somebody who has a major problem?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, I am satisfied with the paperwork side and, yes, the department does offer support through counselling services of Newport & Wildman, depending on the nature of the workers' compensation. Further support from the individual's line manager or from Ashley itself is a case by case situation. It is always a difficult one. If someone is off with, say, a stress-related incident, some people like you to ring up every couple of days to touch base and see how they are going, while other people do not want to hear from Ashley, so it is a difficult one.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - How much involvement is there for staff and management when it comes to any major change? When the fence went up, for example, were staff involved in any decision-making about the fence? If you are going to have a major change in programs, for example, are staff involved or is it a top-down decision?

**Mr BECK** - All staff on site have an opportunity for input into all decision-making through various meetings like individual team meetings or team-leaders meetings. As I said before regarding training, rostered training days are incorporated into every Ashley worker's roster. The first half to one hour of every one of those is attended by the centre manager, Bill Smith, and it is an opportunity for youth workers, team leaders, ops coordinators, anyone on site, to raise issues with the centre manager.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Is Mr Smith well known to any of the clients you have? Does he come out on a daily basis and say hello?

**Mr BECK** - I wouldn't say he comes out on a daily basis but he is involved in centre-wide barbecues. Every Wednesday we have what is called a 'unit challenge', where three nominated staff members go from each unit and judge whatever the challenge was for the day. The young people are involved, so he is involved in those types of activities.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Any reason why you think things are a little easier now? Why do you think the numbers at Ashley have dropped off recently? Are there more programs in the community, or diversionary-type programs, or is it tied up with sentencing or remand?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, it is a difficult question to answer. It does go up and down. If you followed our numbers over the years you would find other periods where it dropped for no apparent reason; there was no one thing you could put your finger on.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - What about the number of youth of Aboriginal descent? Could you make a comment on numbers and/or programs run specifically for them?

**Mr BECK** - There may be more opportunity for young Aboriginals to be involved in programs on Clarke Island.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Is the Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation involved very much over there?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, they are involved.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Could they be more involved, or less involved?

**Mr BECK** - I would like to see more involvement in relation to time spent on Clarke Island. That would be good. We currently have two young people there at the moment and we have had one or two recently, so it has been good.

**Mr MARTIN** - Since the last major incident, has the number of staff on duty at night been lifted to two per unit?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, the total number has increased from six to eight.

**Mr MARTIN** - Roughly two per unit at night?

**Mr BECK** - It pretty much plays out that way, yes.

**Mr MARTIN** - We were told that in the past it was not unusual for one person to be left in charge of a unit during the night?

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mr MARTIN** - So that still happens occasionally?

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mr MARTIN** - We were a bit surprised to find out that it is not unusual for a male youth worker, for example, to be left in charge and alone in the girls unit. Does that happen very often?

**Mr BECK** - Does it happen very often? No. It is our preference to have a female there, if not two males. There have been occasions where a male staff member may have been there for a short period of time.

**Mr MARTIN** - Why would that happen? Is it just rostering difficulties?

**Mr BECK** - Things like if the female or females on shift had called in sick or one was on holidays. It could be any number of issues. It could be workers comp.

**Mr MARTIN** - How often now, with the increase in staff, would one person be alone in the unit at night, for example?

**Mr BECK** - Throughout the night there are four yard checks done, which takes about three-quarters of an hour. So for that three-quarters of an hour, while two people are doing the internal yard perimeter check, there would be one person back in the unit.

**CHAIR** - You have been there for 12 years and have spent quite a bit of time as the operations manager.

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**CHAIR** - You have seen it without a fence and you have now seen it with a fence. It has been put to us that perhaps the centre would be better and would run better if it just had a secure unit without a fence - as it used to in the past, and as some other centres in Australia have. Would you care to comment on that?

**Mr BECK** - I don't remember anything much good about having a nominated secure unit. My preference would be not to go back to the secure unit; I am more than happy with the current arrangement.

**Mr WILKINSON** - In relation to the management, would you describe the management process as a top-down style - in other words, telling everybody what to do - or more of a grassroots-up, collaborative style of management?

**Mr BECK** - The latter.

**Mr WILKINSON** - In the institution that is Ashley, is that the best way or do you think it can be dealt with better?

**Mr BECK** - I think in all decision making you need input from all the stakeholders. You need input from the manager and those in senior positions. The input is also extremely valuable from those staff who are working at the coalface.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Is it the same at other institutions around Australia?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, I believe it is similar.

**Mr WILKINSON** - So if people describe management as having a 'bunker mentality' - in other words, there are the workers and the management and never the twain shall meet - you would be saying, 'I don't think it is that way'.

**Mr BECK** - I don't believe it is that way, no.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Can you understand other workers thinking that way - and if so, why?

**Mr BECK** - As I said before, it can be a very challenging environment to work in and at times staff members working in a unit with a difficult group may feel frustrated with a direction or a decision that has been made. There may be some of the attitude of, 'It's all right for them up there; they don't have to deal with these kids'.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Resources mean a lot, I suppose, and if there was plenty of money to throw at it a number of things could be done. If somebody said to you, 'We want to make a difference. Here's some money to allow a new program to commence each year', what type of programs do you believe would be most beneficial?

**Mr BECK** - At the top of my list would be the programs unit. As for individual programs, there could be more on small engines, art and crafts, more therapeutic counselling services.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Woodwork?

**Mr BECK** - Yes, all that - technology programs.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Female and male youth workers work together sometimes.

**Mr BECK** - Staff members?

[4.45 p.m.]

**Mr WILKINSON** - Yes, staff members.

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mr WILKINSON** - Have you had any problems in relation to discrimination or matters like that involving males and females or that type of - what do you call it, some type of blokey workplace as opposed to a more 2007 workplace? (???!! - delete?)

**Mr BECK** - If you are asking whether it is a big issue and a problem the answer to that, from me, would be no. Have there been isolated incidents of that? Yes.

**Mr WILKINSON** - As a result of that, what has happened? Has the person come to you and made a complaint?

**Mr BECK** - Yes.

**Mr WILKINSON** - What has happened from there? What did you do?

**Mr BECK** - If we want to talk about -

**Mr WILKINSON** - The normal type of thing you do. Do you call them in to ask what happened? Do you let management know what happened? Do you endeavour to settle it yourself or do you settle it through management above you?

**Mr BECK** - If an allegation has been made there are a number of options open to the staff member and my position would explain that. Under the grievance procedure, which would be the starting place for something like that, there is the option to deal with it informally or to formalise it. Dealing with it informally would mean that the staff member involved would inform me of the situation, I would inform the line manager about that individual and the line manager would speak to the individual, maybe even with a view to sitting both parties down. That is pretty much how the informal part of that would play out. Even on an informal level I would still advise the centre manager of that. If we were to formalise that process, once again it would involve Bill, the centre manager, and also involved would be a conduct and review unit which would run an investigation.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - I was going to ask about contraband and drugs coming into the centre. Would you care to comment, please?

**Mr BECK** - There are, on occasion, incidents of contraband on site. We have a number of policies and procedures around trying to minimise that, which largely works quite well.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - What about staff and family?

**Mr BECK** - I am not aware of any staff member that has done that.

**Mrs JAMIESON** - Family?

**Mr BECK** - I am aware of family in the past attempting to do so, yes.

**CHAIR** - We have run out of time. We thank you very much, Ralph, for coming and giving evidence and wish you all the best

**THE WITNESS WITHDREW.**