

30<sup>th</sup> March 2023

The Secretary,  
Legislative Council Government Administration Committee 'B'  
Parliament of Tasmania  
Parliament House  
HOBART TAS 7000

**Re – Inquiry into Tasmanian Adult Imprisonment and Youth Detention Matters**

I provide the following information from my experience over many years as a former Police Officer with over 37 years of service, regarding points 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the Inquiry into the Tasmanian Adult Imprisonment and Youth Detention Matters. I am also willing to give evidence to the Inquiry if requested.

As a background, I was the Officer in Charge of the Hobart Police and Community Youth Club Inc., for 26 years, instrumental in managing a wide range of innovative programs for 'At Risk' Youth, young offenders, and long term offenders. I also managed programs for the Tasmanian Association of Police and Community Youth Clubs Inc., as the State Coordinator for 4 years.

These programs included: -

- Reclink
- Mobile Activity Centres
- Young Women's Programs
- Street Work
- Teen Vacation Activities
- Multicultural and Refugee Activity programs
- Transition and Pathways Program

The recognition of these programs resulted in numerous National, State and Local Awards as well as funding and support across the Government and Youth Sector.

In 1997, the Hobart PCYC began to receive funding support from the Rotary Club of Sullivans Cove to engage a Youth Worker on the streets, through their

Parliament House Car Park fundraising program, as well as a working partnership with the then, 'Red Cross Roadhouse', who provided meals to people on the streets, where much needed interaction, support and referral was made. These 2 factors were the catalyst to assist with the change to address the needs that were evident at the time.

In relation to Point 1 of the Terms of Reference - (***Factors influencing increases in Tasmania's prisoner population and associated costs;***) I respond as follows:-

In 1996, I introduced the Mobile Activity Centre program (MAC), with a Bus and Trailer conducting activities in suburban, rural and regional areas in Southern Tasmania to many thousands of young people, linked with the Local Government, PCYC's and other Agency staff.

Through this program, many participants were assisted with a wide range of personal issues, as we not only provided an Activity Staff member, but a Police Officer and a Youth Worker. Some were referred into other programs including Reclink, the Young Women's Program and Teen Vacation activities. We were able to deal with emerging issues on the spot and with regular visits, ensured that follow ups were maintained with the rapport built with the young people.

In 1997, with the support of the Rotary Club of Sullivans Cove funding, I introduced both a Street Work program, followed up with Reclink for a wide range of Street Youth, Unemployed, Young Offenders. In the main, these had either entered the Justice system, about to enter the Justice system or being released from imprisonment.

The strong connections built up with the MAC program and relevant Council/Youth Agency staff, crossed over to full support and cooperation when introducing the Reclink program from Bridgewater/Gagebrook, Glenorchy, Hobart, Rokeby/Clarendon Vale, Claremont, Huon Valley and the Sport Aboriginal Corporation.

On addition to this, we had buy-in from Community Corrections staff, Community Policing Officers and other relevant agencies.

Participants ages in the Reclink varied from 15 years to 53 years, with the main ages between 17 – 25. One was a person released following a lengthy prison

sentence for a major crime. Some participants (3) respectively had convictions totalling between 73, 95 and 131 separate charges at the time.

In the 12 months leading up to the introduction of Street Work and Reclink, Hobart was experiencing serious Street Youth issues, with brawls, intimidation, theft, muggings, vehicles overturned and set alight, culminating in numerous arrests, especially around the Mall. We also witnessed the build-up of a gang of youths in Glenorchy, comprised of local youth committing similar offences as those seen in Hobart City.

Other similar emerging issues were noted in the outer suburbs.

We worked on a number of basic principles to gain the trust, support and cooperation of those on the street including:-

There is an old saying, - You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink, **but you can make it Thirsty** – we found out what they were thirsty for – what they wanted to do – what got their interest, and once that was ascertained, then motivation wasn't an issue.

- **Give them ownership** – We gave them a leadership role, involved them in meetings, setting the ground rules, getting quotes for equipment, and a whole host of other
- **Get in step with them** - We had a genuine interest – so we took a walk in their shoes to help us understand where they had come from and why they were hanging around with nothing to do, why they ended up in fights, why they ended up with substance abuse issues, what their background was.
- **Give them more than they bargained for** – In addition to playing football or other sporting activities, we provided much more, i.e., a BBQ, a Football Champion to meet and talk to, playing on Hobart's premier ground, new sporting gear, providing 'in situ' counselling and support, being part of a team, contributing to the team, getting healthy exercise, and getting a feeling of value.
- **Suggest – don't shove** - many of the young people we dealt with had been the victims of abuse, neglect, put downs and didn't need some coach or youth worker or Police Officer shouting and screaming at them as well.

These principles were duly noted and referenced from a book written by Mr E Wheeler, titled, 'How to Sell Yourself to Others.'

We worked initially with the Ring Leaders on the street initially, putting together their ideas gaining their full co-operation and involvement, and having them sell it to others on the street.

The Ring Leaders would accompany Staff to other outer areas and walk around the streets, talking to other youth in those areas and selling the ideas to them. From one visit to an outer area, we had 31 unemployed and school truants turn up the following week for activities.

We then brought in outside people like Community Police, Council Youth Workers, Community Work Orders personnel, Coaches from local teams, football champions like Peter Hudson (ex- Hawthorn Champion), to get their week filled up with training, playing, counselling, education, and support mechanisms. This in turn reduced their substance abuse, gave them a purpose, other than hanging around the streets bored and getting into trouble.

We initiated getting them accommodation, back into education, and undertaking courses suitable for employment. A number of the youths had Court imposed Work Orders, so they were organised to be gainfully employed with assistance in the building of the 'Windeward Bound' sailing ship to work off their numerous hours. Again, this meant a sense of achievement and pride in what they were doing, and they weren't being breached by Community Corrections. We proved it could be done

The factors influencing many of these youths being on the streets and ultimately becoming prisoners in the Justice System appeared to be sexual and physical abuse as a child, neglect and rejection. It appeared that many of these young people were affected so much by the abuse in its various forms, that it then sparked behavioural issues becoming evident in the schools, being expelled, increased violence, aggression and other bad behaviours.

Moving on from that, these young people engaged in risk taking behaviours, alcohol and other drug use, leading to offences and crimes on the street. Being thrown out from the home environment or just moving out from home onto the streets and sleeping rough brought about its own problems with mental and physical health.

Arrests, court appearances, work orders, and imprisonment became a way of life with living on the streets. Boredom and other issues became predominant, but for a number of youths both male and female, living on the streets was safer than being at home or in the environment they had come from.

Following a major arrest of a well-known identity around 1998/99 for crimes against children, we witnessed the anger and rage among a number of people living on the streets, for what had been done to them in their early lives, and wanting to exact revenge on the perpetrator(s) in their particular case.

This required immediate intervention by staff, including counselling, anger management and ongoing support. This event was the catalyst for change to come to terms with what had been done to them, be receptive to change, and to get on with their lives as opposed to the downward spiral they were on.

Through the trust built up between the youths, both male and female, with the Youth Workers since early 1997, positive changes were made that turned their lives around.

In relation to Point 2 of the Terms of Reference - (***The use of evidence-based strategies to reduce contact with the justice system and recidivism;***) I respond as follows :-

The following statistical information was undertaken to assess the outcomes being witnessed by those involved in the Reclink/Street Work program.

### **RECLINK/STREET WORK OVERVIEW**

Some of the participants had conviction averages as high as fourteen offences every six months. Only two had average offence rates lower than one offence every six months. Offences of violence ranged from common assault to armed robbery.

There was a decrease of 54% in Hobart of Street Offences in the first year.

### ***1997 Survey***

- thirteen of the eighteen participants showed reduction in their offence rates since commencing participation with RECLINK STREETWORK program;
- eight of the eighteen participants have no disclosed offences since commencing activities with the program;
- one of the participants recorded a static offence level;
- three of the eighteen participants revealed an increased offence level;
- one participant left home to live on the streets in the time since the commencement of the program and has committed only one offence; and
- a participant with an average offence rate of fourteen offences every six months has reduced that average to zero since commencing participation in the RECLINK STREETWORK program.

### ***1998 Survey***

During the 1998 program a follow-up survey was conducted on these same eighteen participants.

This revealed the following long-term resolutions:

- twelve of the original eighteen participants are now involved in weekend Club football;
- one participant has a football traineeship with the Tasmanian Football League;
- six of the participants have secured part-time employment;
- three are working full-time, one of whom has moved to the Tasmanian East Coast and has ended a long history of substance abuse; and
- one of the participants has been involved with at-risk aboriginal youth, assisting with a Mobile Activities Centre program run through the Sports Aboriginal Corporation.

**\* Conviction rates amongst this group have consistently remained low, particularly in crimes related to violence!**

Fourteen new participants on the program were surveyed in a similar manner. These fourteen participants were selected as being regular attendees of the program throughout the 1998 football season. Conviction rates were averaged over six-month periods, including the six month period from April 1998 to October 1998.

This revealed that:

- nine of the fourteen participants had previous convictions relating to violence including two who had convictions for aggravated armed robbery;
- ten of the fourteen participants showed reductions in their average conviction levels during the period of the program; and
- five out of these ten showed no convictions for the period of the program.
- These results appear to be consistent with the 1997 survey and suggest a **continuing reduction of offences as a result of the RECLINK STREETWORK program.**

### ***Unanticipated Outcomes of the project***

The unanticipated outcomes of the RECLINK STREETWORK program has been the development of a trust relationship between the participants, police officers and the street worker.

This has resulted in:

1. participants voluntarily reporting to police headquarters to have outstanding arrest warrants dealt with;
2. participants reporting to Community Corrections to complete outstanding work orders;
3. a high level of participation in weekend sporting activities outside the RECLINK STREETWORK program;
4. a number of participants leaving the 'streets' to a more stable environment including families; and
5. an improvement in a significant number of participants' social skills, health and general well-being to a stage where they were able to be employed on a part-time or full-time basis.

What this demonstrated was not only a huge reduction of 54% of street offences in Hobart, but a marked reduction in individual offence rates, which meant for many of them, not being sent to prison in the first place.

In one situation, a young person had committed a serious crime and due to his involvement in Reclink, had gained trust in the Youth Workers and Police. He

wanted to hand himself into Police, but was very worried about how it would be handled. Through the Youth Worker, discussions were held with me to address his concerns, if he was to hand himself in.

As a direct result, I arranged for a highly trusted colleague, well known to me, a Detective Sgt at the time to meet with him and the Youth Worker, to undertake the interview. Due to the level of trust, the offender was confident that the process would be handled by a Police Officer that I knew well, was trusted and would handle the whole process effectively.

This process resulted in a successful outcome, where the offender avoided prison, due to a large part, because he handed himself in and was co-operative with Police, was repentant for his actions and taking significant steps through the programs to turn his life around.

With Community Corrections Staff actually playing in the teams alongside the youths meant that a rapport and trust were built. At the end of games, on many occasions the youths felt confident to speak with the Community Corrections Staff and sort out their Community Work orders.

Community Policing Staff were also present at games and at times participated, and once again, assisted those with Arrest Warrants in conjunction with the Youth Worker to get matters sorted and handled effectively. This had a run on effect once trust had been built up with other youths coming along to games through word of mouth with the youths that had been helped.

We sought and gained the support of Senior Police to make the game day grounds an 'arrest free zone', as it had become evident that we were getting more handing themselves in than were being picked up by the Police on the streets, without any hassles.

In relation to Point 3 of the Terms of Reference - (***The provision of, and participation in, services for people in prison and leaving prison (health housing and legal services;)***) I respond as follows :-



Reclink, the Street Work Program, and the Young Women's Program, all contributed to assisting those offenders upon release from prison, access to counselling, support, and referral into the programs available.

A number of high profile serious offenders, who had spent many years in prison for serious crimes, joined into the Reclink program and participated, assisting also as mentors to prevent others from making the same mistake they made.

The Youths were assisted with finding accommodation, assisted into education and undertaking practical courses for employment. The Youth Worker would accompany them to interviews, dealing with Centrelink, refer them into courses, and assist on a daily basis as needed to meet their needs.

We even had games between a team of Centrelink workers, as well as Police teams against the youths to build a rapport and trust, which again lessened the issues when presenting at Centrelink, because there was someone there that they had played a game of football against and had created a common bond.

We also noticed that when youths from the Reclink games met up with others they had played against the week before, in their area, there weren't the issues of fights and violence towards each other. Instead, there was a common bond through the sporting activities that resulted in the dissipation of any aggression between the groups.

This in turn avoided the stresses of life outside prison and they had someone to turn to when things got tough. The access to a Youth Worker helped in a large part and avoided them from repeating the same mistakes that had put them in prison in the first place.

One offender, with numerous convictions, in his 20's turned up at the Hobart PCYC one day to speak proudly to me, demonstrating that he had completed 6 training courses in 6 months, that he now had a full time job, and that he had bought himself a car to get to and from work. He apologised that he could not play in the Grand Final game and felt he was letting his team down, but he had to attend work and keep his job.

In summarising, there were many similar stories of how having a Youth Worker in close proximity to the Hobart City centre, as part of PCYC, but also sharing office space within another Youth organisation, where there was access to

other counselling services and support, made the difference in so many young lives to stop offending, stop going back to prison and move on successfully in their lives.

It also demonstrated that having programs to refer people into that they wanted to be part of, was of importance. It also clearly showed how having a Youth Worker, who was for a significant part of his day walking around the streets, not stuck in an office, was much more effective, because he touched base with those people in their territory.

His approach was practical, effective and met their needs at the time, because he was there with them, not stuck away behind 4 walls. No-one needed to make an appointment and there weren't rules stuck up everywhere that intimidated and deterred young people from entering. He met them in their own time and space effectively. In fact, all of us felt safe in working with these young people, because we had built up the trust and rapport.

In relation to Point 4 of the Terms of Reference - (***Training and support initiatives for corrective service staff related to increasing individual well-being, professionalism, resilience and reduced absenteeism;***) I respond as follows :-

Learning from my own outlook, attitudes, and approach as a young Police Officer, straight out of training, I found it difficult at times to communicate effectively, and also found that others on my shifts were not coping or able to communicate to the degree that was needed in the situations encountered.

There was no training in 'Body Language', or 'Communications Skills' in those days, and these were aspects that determined whether you survived or not, whether you were regularly assaulted or not, had complaints made about you or not, or whether you did your job effectively.

Watching effective Police Officers who had the 'Body Language' and 'Communication Skills', who were able to defuse situations with their approach, as opposed to others who tended to create more problems, was a huge learning curve.

Being involved in PCYC, and again watching effective, practical, 'down to earth', personnel with Youth Workers, Police, Police Staff, Volunteers, Agency staff, clearly demonstrated the right and wrong ways of going about things.

We ensured that everyone involved in our programs was '*singing from the same hymn book*', so to speak, so that trust, confidence and co-operation with the participants was paramount. As a result, I undertook relevant training for myself, to in turn initiate training and training course delivery for staff and volunteers.

We also found that boredom was a major problem for the people on the streets, resulting in substance abuse issues, crime, assaults, stealing etc.,

They would leave where they were staying, as there was very little to eat, no TV, not even a refrigerator or proper heater, probably just a bed, a seat and table, so there was nothing to do where they were in most cases. In turn, they would end up on the streets, in the mall as it was warmer outside than inside.

Some were sleeping rough in places such as on the Domain in tents, at the Royal Hobart Regatta grandstand, in derelict houses, in garages etc.,

This is when substance abuse and other issues arose, because there was no meaning to their lives, nothing to do, and nothing to occupy their time productively.

In summarising, I feel that there is a need for proper training of all personnel involved in the Justice system in 'Body Language' and 'Communications Skills.'

I feel this would lessen adverse actions by youths on the streets and those imprisoned. It would lessen assaults and reduce staff absenteeism, and increase the confidence of Staff to undertake their roles.

Prisoners, such as the young people on the street, need to be doing something productive, educational, something that interests them, something that gives meaning to their lives.

This is where I believe the Administration in the system should be given autonomy to undertake changes to the system, without the bureaucratic layers to go through, to be able to learn from other country's models, and have the power to implement new ideas. I question why some countries achieve much better reductions in recidivism than others and what can we learn from them.

In PCYC, I was in a position where I was able to implement new ideas, and programs, without having to go up through the chain of command to get either a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

If I could get the funding, the resources, the staff, and put something in place, I was responsible to make it work. If there were teething issues, then it was my job to oversee and make sure they were fixed.

If it didn't work, then it was my head on the '*chopping block*', but if it did work, then I gained the trust and support of those up the chain of command, without interference.

I was also given the freedom, that other Police Officers didn't have, where I was able to undertake media interviews, meet with Politicians, do stories on the programs, without having to get approval. I was able to demonstrate to Senior Management, that my interviews were about the positives of the programs, not to be critical.

Even though I was responsible to a Committee of Management and a Police Inspector, I had autonomy to get things done, so long as I managed effectively and within any financial constraints.

It seems at times that other parts of the Justice system are not given the same latitude that I experienced and were constrained by the bureaucracy mechanisms in place affecting them and their work. They just relatively kept doing the same things, with basically the same results and little progress.

I would ask, has the Prison system asked to implement ideas and changes, but been turned down?

Have they any programs that they want to trial?

What autonomy do they have?

What layers are there in the chain of command in the Justice system and is the Prison Service being held back because of this.

What incentives are there for new ideas to be implemented?

Is training in 'Body Language' and 'Communications Skills' provided to Prison staff?

My understanding of the costs involved in running the justice system as opposed to early intervention are in the vicinity of 7 to 8 more times cost effective.

Over the years, I have illustrated to groups, the 'Cliff Scenario Model', where a young person has been impacted severely by an event such as abuse, and reacts adversely, resulting in him leaving home, truanting, getting into substance abuse, committing offences and crimes, before he literally goes off the edge of the cliff and waiting below the cliff are: -

- the Police to arrest and charge him
- the Courts to convict him
- Community Corrections to handle his case
- The Prison Service when he keeps going to jail.
- And other service agencies

To compare the cost between having someone at the top of the Cliff to provide the intervention, counselling, support and referral is so much more cost effective than the associated costs and structures. As the saying goes, "Prevention is better than cure."

I seriously question why there isn't more funding provided to 'Preventative' measures to keep them out of the Justice System, instead of at the other end, when it's too late?

K B Smith APM - 2022 TAS Local Hero