

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ASHLEY, YOUTH JUSTICE AND DETENTION MET IN THE LAUNCESTON TOWN HALL ON TUESDAY 13 MARCH 2007.

Mr NICK TRIFFITT WAS CALLED, MADE THE STATUTORY DECLARATION AND WAS EXAMINED.

CHAIR (Mr Hall) - Thank you very much for making the time available. As a former worker at Ashley, and I think you were a team leader there, you had several years' experience there that I am aware of so thank you very much for coming along. I invite you to give bit of an overview of when you started, when you finished and then just talk about each term of reference.

Mr TRIFFITT - I started at Ashley in 1987 so I had quite a few years there up to 2001. I have not worked there since 2001 so what I am offering is not relevant for the last six years. In 2001 I went off on workers comp, following a lot of other staff who were on workers comp. My stress was not created from face-to-face contact with the clients but from my involvement with the budgets. I was team leader, or acting team leader of the administration when I went off in 2001.

If you read my submission you will note that I started when Ashley was a boys home. It was a quiet little country place and I saw all of the changes over those times. I saw the introduction of girls form Wybra Hall in 1988. It went from a home for wards of state to a youth detention centre. There was a period of time through all this in the late 90s when the Youth Justice Act was coming into being. We had wards of state there for a while and though it was not widely advertised, we were having to accommodate both wards of state and detainees, so it was not a healthy environment for the young people, especially the wards of state.

Mr WILKINSON - Did you have to lock them up at night?

Mr TRIFFITT - We had to keep them separate in what was then called the new wing. I do not know what it is called now. It was a new building built when Wybra closed so our young people went over there. We did not have a lot of wards of state but there were always four or five or six. I also kept the admissions and discharge register and was heavily involved with recidivism that was going on with the offenders. I had it very close to me for a long time. What has gone on since 2001 I do not know. I did not want to know for a number years.

When I heard that this committee had been formed I thought that I had something to contribute, if you want to hear from my past. I do not think it has improved all that much from when I left, but maybe it has. I would like to think that it has. I have two other colleagues that were in Ashley and are now down at Mersey campus in different positions so I hear first-hand from those guys and others that I run into. For a number of years I would go into the town not wanting to know Ashley at all. It became a terrible place to me. As I put in my submission, the managers could not and cannot do what they are supposed to do and what is expected because the funds are not there. We mix so many different groups of kids in that place and if it was a mainland detention centre they

would have individual areas for all of them. But Tassie is such a small State of 500 000 people that it is not possible to separate the youth group that is there because of the big expense. We tried to keep the wards of state in those cottages - I believe each of you have been over the site; he cottage at the front, as you go in the drive, and there is a cottage out the back. Did you get out the back, outside the fence?

Mr DEAN - Not outside the back.

Mr TRIFFITT - There is another cottage there. We used those two cottages and the new wing that I mentioned. But it was not a very good environment for the wards of state. I am not sure what they are doing with them now. Some of them graduate into Ashley or into the youth justice system and graduate further into the prison system eventually. I have seen so many kids go through that place in that period that I was there from 1987 to 2001 and could see them keep coming back and I do not believe we do enough for them.

Mr WILKINSON - Do they come back a worse person?

Mr TRIFFITT - They go out of Ashley worse than they go in generally.

Mr WILKINSON - Why is that?

Mr TRIFFITT - They are there too long. They mix with a bad element, the other kids that are there.

Mr MARTIN - You mentioned there is a problem with mixing all the kids together from 10 years of age. They can be up to 21. Can you expand a bit more on that?

Mr TRIFFITT - This was when I was there. I do not think it is happening now. I certainly hope it is not happening now. I think that to get into Ashley now they have to come in under a detention order under the Youth Justice Act. There are no longer wards of state there. It was a political hot potato initially because we were mixing lots of groups.

Mr MARTIN - There are still some very young kids?

Mr TRIFFITT - You can get 10 year olds now and there are some pretty wiry 10-year-olds around these days who initially start as uncontrollable kids and wards of state and then they get into offending. I feel the more they go into Ashley the more likely they are to keep returning because they get comfortable with that group in the centre.

CHAIR - Nick, can we just go through and address our terms of reference? With regard to security arrangements, the fence would only have been put up since you -

Mr TRIFFITT - 2001. It was there when I left. It had just been put up.

CHAIR - We have had some evidence which suggested that perhaps the whole system worked better without the fence and just a secure unit there as it used to be a few years ago. Can you comment on that at all?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes. The trouble with the old secure unit was that it got burnt down - all the accommodation. One of the reasons the security unit and what was known as the old

dorms burnt down was one of the kids left a cigarette in an easy chair overnight and that is where the fire started. It was a bit of a shock to me to come to work at 8.00 one morning and find the building had been burnt down. There was talk of putting a fence up before that, and putting up more of accommodation; losing those dormitories brought it forward by a number of years, or the State would never have outlaid the funds.

It has not been sufficient, the fence was never built to withstand an attack of the type of attack these kids can launch, and I think I put that in my submission. Staff pick up what they are doing after a while, but the kids come into the place and work out the weaknesses; they know the weak staff; they know the weak places in the fence. They have been able to break out ; it was never expected to hold juveniles, it was just a deterrent.

There is a higher ratio of staff to clients with young offenders, than the adult prisoners have, so it does not need to be as secure as a prison is. The more secure the fence is, the bigger the challenge for the kids. They will get out if they want to - you will never stop them. They will never be stopped for a fence.

CHAIR - On the other hand, we saw a couple of facilities in the mainland States where I do not think fences have been breached.

Mr TRIFFITT - Did you see Malsbury?

CHAIR - No, not Malsbury.

Mr WILKINSON - We went to Cavan and Magill.

Mr TRIFFITT - They have much more funding for their juveniles than we have.

Mr DEAN - That is a real problem.

Mr TRIFFITT - Well, we knew when the fence was initially discussed that it was going to be built and it would not be strong enough. I think any of those kids could get over that fence given enough time.

Mrs JAMIESON - How much involvement was there with staff, like yourself, in discussing what sort of fence, what security cameras, and the like?

Mr TRIFFITT - Artas were the architects for the building and the fence, and there were a lot of meetings where the staff gave input, but what we got was not what was needed. I have not seen the buildings for six years, but I hear they are in pretty bad state, especially ?Quamby, the first one, the most secure one. One of the guys at Mersey told me they have spent more money on maintaining that building than it originally cost because of the damage that has been done there.

CHAIR - You talked about surveillance cameras, do you have a comment about that?

Mr TRIFFITT - You have to have a certain amount of surveillance, but you have to have the one-to-one contact with these young people. That is very expensive. The older they get,

the harder they are to turn around. The closer they get to being 18, and eligible for the adult prison, the more difficult it is to turn them around.

Mr WILKINSON - Do they talk about going to the adult prison as a badge of honour?

Mr TRIFFITT - There is a culture among them. It goes from generation to generation, and you will find that they will talk about their father and their grandfather and it is a great thing for them to go their too.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about their siblings in Ashley?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes, you get siblings as well.

CHAIR - You talked about the video link and you are saying it is under-utilised.

Mr TRIFFITT - It was when I was there. We spent a lot of money to have the video link-up, to have a court set up. If they have the young person in Ashley there is no reason that cannot happen. They told me when they are to be sentenced they need to be in the actual court room where the magistrate is. They used it with adults like Martin Bryant; they never sat him in a court room. Some of these kids are really serious offenders; I have seen triple murderers in there.

CHAIR - Mr Wilkinson, you might know the answer to that. Is that the case? Do they have to be in the court room for sentencing?

Mr WILKINSON - I do not know whether it is part of the regulations but it is always the case when they hand down sentences they are present. In relation to the rehabilitation side, you can have that by way of video link.

Mr TRIFFITT - Are they doing that now, can you tell me?

Mr WILKINSON - Yes, they are doing it with the young kids.

Mr TRIFFITT - All of them?

Mr WILKINSON - I don't know whether they do all of them but I know they are doing some of them.

Mr TRIFFITT - It is not my right to ask but I do not keep in touch with Ashley now as I used to.

Mrs JAMIESON - I was looking at the contraband comments that you made here, would you like to expand on those?

Mr TRIFFITT - The best spot for the kids to get their contraband is when they are taken to their court hearings around the State. They go everywhere even the regional court rooms.. Family members were one way they used to be supplied, I do not know whether it is the same now.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about visitors coming in?

Mr TRIFFITT - They also bring it in.

Mrs JAMIESON - Staff? Did you ever find that a problem?

Mr TRIFFITT - With the staff?

Mrs JAMIESON - Bringing in contraband?

Mr TRIFFITT - The staff would do it but it was not out in the open.

Mr WILKINSON - When you were a team leader - we had evidence from people who work at Ashley talking about different standards and operational standards between different team leaders -

CHAIR - We are leaving staff issues now.

Mr WILKINSON - I was talking about security.

CHAIR - Okay.

Mr WILKINSON - The question was, how do you believe the variance in the ways people do things affected the security of the staff members?

Mr TRIFFITT - Well it has to. They have the standard operating procedures now and I hear that they do not adhere to them as perhaps they should. One ex-staff member I have spoken to said he lived the SOPs to the letter, Standing Operating Procedures, but he was not given a fair go.

Mr WILKINSON - How does that affect security?

Mr TRIFFITT - It has to affect security if there are variances in the way the staff adhere to the standards. You have to have a fairly level playing field for all staff and all teams. When I was there I could see teams were playing one team against another and the kids play one staff member and one team member and one team against another. Children are the best manipulators, as I am sure you are all aware particularly if you are parents or grandparents.

CHAIR - Staff issues and OH&S.

Mr TRIFFITT - It has not been a physically safe place for staff to work in because of the assaults on the staff. I saw many staff going on workers' compensation in the late 1990s, the year 2000 and into 2001. They tell me it is not as bad as it used to be and that is great if it is. I hope it is better than it was but there were always at least a dozen people on workers comp.

The problem was that it becomes something that gets quite contagious in the place. Some of the heavier kids, the kids 16, 17, 18 year-olds were standover merchants; we could not contain them at Ashley for a period before the wall was up and after the

dormitory was burnt down and so they had to be transferred to Ashley South, the medium or low-security part of the Risdon Prison.

CHAIR - In your time was there quite a lot of staff absenteeism?

Mr TRIFFITT - All of the time.

CHAIR - Did that compound the operational problems by making it difficult to fill rosters?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes. I looked after the rosters as well up to that time. We got a security firm in there.

CHAIR - I am asking that because we've had evidence to suggest that. I'm just wanting to confirm it.

Mr TRIFFITT - There was a security firm that we employed to do the fill-up staffing, not only at Ashley but also transportation to and from the courts because we just did not have the staffing to do it. Because there were so many off on sick leave and stress leave we had to backfill. We could not get the number of qualified staff to fill the rosters.

CHAIR - Has recruitment always been done in the local area? Has there been a preference for people who live in Deloraine or around Deloraine to work there?

Mr TRIFFITT - I have heard that has been seen as a problem. People won't travel to Deloraine from Launceston and Hobart and Devonport and never would. They are starting to a bit now and it has been becoming more attractive and the quality of your staff, the expectations of your staff have gone up. Remuneration is better so there is a bit of incentive.

CHAIR - You were a team leader when you were there?

Mr TRIFFITT - I was finished by running the administration so I used to be in and out with the kids because of my role in the administration. I used to look after their pocket money and I knew them all the kids and all the staff personally. It would not be like that there now for me of course.

Mrs JAMIESON - So that was your initial job description, was it, the administration part of it?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes. Initially I started on the rosters. They were night staff and residential care workers, senior residential care workers, and I have acted in all of those positions but that was not for me. That was too much. Even in the early days I could not work in that sort of environment because of the different standards of different individuals and I figured if I was going to make a difference at Ashley I needed to be somewhere where I could make a difference and I did for a while. My stress did not come from the kids, it came from the other staff who were stressed. I was taking it all, and from the politicians - excuse me, people.

CHAIR - The current manager was not there, obviously, when you were there?

Mr TRIFFITT - No, he left. He came after I left.

Mr WILKINSON - What were the politicians doing?

Mr TRIFFITT - Interfering with the running of it. Sure, they have their role to play and you are all politicians here, but most people of the people that were making comments were not in a position to make comments. I mean, everyone has an opinion on how the place should be run and even today I am sure if you ask a dozen people you get a dozen opinions about how to bring these young people through the system. If there was an ideal way of youth justice we would have found it. It is not a prison, it never was meant to be a prison. Some of those young people you could turn around but if you made it a prison you would harden those kids too soon and they would never turn around.

Mr MARTIN - You said some are able to be rehabilitated. Do you think all of them are?

Mr TRIFFITT - No, but that is only me saying that.

Mr MARTIN - Evidence has been produced to the committee that there is a very small hard-core group of young people who are beyond help.

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes.

Mr MARTIN - Do you agree with that?

Mr TRIFFITT - Some are 12 when they get in there. You can sort of pick them when you work with them. You should never do that I know but you can pick the ones that will graduate to the prison and the ones that will be there once or twice and it is all about maturation. As they mature they get better sense and you get them out of the system before they graduate to the adult prison system.

CHAIR - Any more questions regarding staffing?

Mrs JAMIESON - Yes, I would be interested in workers compensation. You mentioned you were out on compo. Did you feel that was satisfactorily and adequately handled? Did you get any debriefing or any support from your staff and the hierarchy?

Mr TRIFFITT - I was referred to counselling. It was initially challenged because I had no physical wounds. How do you tell if somebody is burnt out? I was burnt out, I was stressed out. Maybe I had been there too long, I do not know. There was too much going on and I was too involved with it all, and with the manager. I was perhaps the manager's right-hand man and he would debrief on me. The number of managers that I saw! The department challenged my workers comp for six months and I had to get a lawyer to speak for me. They backed down and realised that I was not somebody taking advantage of -

Mrs JAMIESON - Have you had any indication as to whether other people claiming workers compensation had a satisfactory outcome and process?

Mr TRIFFITT - Most of them drop away and never come back to work. That seriously hurt at that time, physically hurt. Sad isn't it?

Mrs JAMIESON - It is really.

Mr TRIFFITT - They have changed their name now to youth workers. They are not supposed to have batons and the things that prison officers have available to them. It is about rehabilitation. Prisons should be rehabilitation but some are horrible.

Mr WILKINSON - Chair, do you want us to ask question here in relation to training?

CHAIR - We're still doing staff and the O H & S. When you first went to work at Ashley did you have any formal training?

Mr TRIFFITT - No, there was no formal training. They upskilled it since I have left and during the time that I was there. I believe that there is adequate now for the staff. I am hearing that the security people that are employed get very little training.

Mrs JAMIESON - The only other question was the staff hierarchy. Are there too many bureaucratic-type staff now?

Mr TRIFFITT - I am hearing that there are. It has become very top-heavy.

Mr MARTIN - What was the management structure in your day?

Mr TRIFFITT - A manager, an assistant manager and that was it.

CHAIR - Was there an operational manager in your day?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes, there was an operational manager as well.

CHAIR - There is now but when you were there, there was a manager and an assistant manager.

Mr TRIFFITT - And there was an operational manager.

Mr MARTIN - And the staff.

Mr TRIFFITT - And then you have your staff. You have your team leaders of course, three or four teams.

Mr MARTIN - So basically you had just three managers in admin.

Mrs JAMIESON - You were doing rosters so was there ever a time when you did not have enough females staff when you had female residents in there?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes there was.

Mrs JAMIESON - And how did you manage that?

Mr TRIFFITT - We worked very carefully around it. We always got enough.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would you roster two men onto the female section then or how did you do it?

Mr TRIFFITT - No. Initially we would only have female staff with the females and have a male that was available if there was an incident. Mind you, there were some incidents with the young women there.

Mr DEAN - I noticed in your report here that you make a comment that staff must feel they have management support at all times. Are you telling us that when you were there that management support was not there?

Mr TRIFFITT - Towards the end of the 90s when the management were preoccupied with the redevelopment at a very active level with the architects and those others who were driving it, management had no idea what was going on in Ashley.

CHAIR - Anecdotally you have probably heard the same happening now.

Mr TRIFFITT - It is happening now, you are saying. Yes, I have heard that.

Mr DEAN - The other one was that it has been said to us on a number of occasions that there is a lot of inconsistency within the organisation with people doing certain things and others doing other things. Nobody is really consistent and they do not follow the standard operating procedures. Do you wish to comment on that?

Mr TRIFFITT - I would agree that standard operating procedures when I was there were not being adhered to. It was early days, in the late 90s and it was a learning curve.

Mr DEAN - Can you tell us about the complaints mechanism when you were there? If somebody made a complaint would those complaints be followed through and would the person making the complaint be advised as to what was going on?

Mr TRIFFITT - They were pretty much informed. Given what was needed when they made a complaint it was followed through and some decision was made if there were some practices that needed to be changed. With these young people you have to constantly be reviewing what you are doing. Just from one week to the next or from one day to the next the client group can change, the dynamics in the group can change because of the nature of the young people.

Mr DEAN - This is my last question. Were you of the view that there was a lot of cronyism and nepotism in the organisation when you were there?

Mr TRIFFITT - There is some of it.

Mr DEAN - I meant to the extent where it was injurious to on the institution and was not in the best interests of what Ashley is all about.

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes, I would say there was.

Mr WILKINSON - I am worried about training of staff, not training the kids. There was a comment made that you have your most complex kids with the most complex problems and yet you do not have properly trained staff. What do you say to that? I understand there is a three-week course prior to you becoming a youth worker. To me that does not seem enough for the complex kids with the complex problems.

Mr TRIFFITT - No, but you can bring in people like psychologists, psychiatrists and others who can work with these young people and give them direction.

Mr WILKINSON - But they are not there all the time. If something blows up you need a trained person, I would think, to cope with that problem.

Mr TRIFFITT - As I said I have not been there since 2001. I do not know what the practices are there now. I would hope that they are better than when I was there.

Mr WILKINSON - Do you believe if you were better trained you would have been better able to deal with the job.

Mr TRIFFITT - Possibly. I was involved in a fair bit of the employment too, initially. You can look at somebody and pretty well sum up whether a person is going to be suitable to work in that environment. Working in the Ashley environment is totally different from working in youth justice in Launceston or Hobart because you are on shift for eight hours a day with young people who are in your face for that period and they know how to push buttons; they are very good at it.

Mr WILKINSON - Do you need any ongoing training?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes you do. You do in any workplace, don't you?

Mr WILKINSON - How often in your experience would you have benefited from that ongoing training.

Mr TRIFFITT - At least every month, every two months. I do not know what they do now but they do need it.

Mr WILKINSON - What type of ongoing training would that be?

Mr TRIFFITT - Just having different people coming in. We had prison officers come in and they were good; they can do so much. Then the youth justice workers have their role. There are different roles for different people.

Mr WILKINSON - Can you do any courses on the job at Ashley?

Mr TRIFFITT - If they can afford to take you off-line you can but they generally cannot afford to take you off-line.

Mr WILKINSON - Do you get any certificates for work performed?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes they do now; more so than when I was there.

Mrs JAMIESON - Just further to that, what was your basic training before you went to Ashley?

Mr TRIFFITT - I have been a number of things over the years; in insurance, a father. I am a farmer also. Those three things certainly would not necessarily be qualities that you look for in a youth worker. I have life skills, I guess.

Mrs JAMIESON - Had you any working knowledge of detention centres on the mainland as far as staff training goes?

Mr TRIFFITT - No, not at first. I went to the mainland centres when we were doing the redevelopment, to get information for my input.

Mrs JAMIESON - Did you feel they were better run organisations than Ashley in that they have longer staff training periods?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes, I do.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would it be beneficial if that were introduced to Ashley?

Mr TRIFFITT - You need a lot of a dollars to run a good detention centre. The Government are penny-pinching.

CHAIR - We will move on to education.

Mrs JAMIESON - This is still staff training.

CHAIR -Nick will address education in his next term of reference and we will get to that in a second.

Mr TRIFFITT - Education of the young people.

Mrs JAMIESON - I am happy with that.

CHAIR - We will move from staff issues to education and try to conclude.

Mr TRIFFITT - I have looked on the Intranet and seen what the school turns out. We need to get all those young people through the school, in one way or another. I do not know whether they all go through it.

Mr MARTIN - Two hours a day.

Mr TRIFFITT - Two hours a day; is that in the secure area?

Mr MARTIN - In the school section.

Mr TRIFFITT - Do they take them out to the school or do they bring the school staff in?

Mr MARTIN - They bring them into the school.

Mr TRIFFITT - Many of these young people have numerical or literary skill deficiencies; they have not attended many school days in their lives and that is why they are in the offending business.

Mrs JAMIESON - It is not mandatory that they attend classes in Ashley.

Mr TRIFFITT - No, it is not.

CHAIR - We have had evidence in other States where it is mandatory.

Mr TRIFFITT - It needs to be made mandatory.

Mrs JAMIESON - It was six hours a day in other places.

Mr TRIFFITT - Two hours is nothing.

Mr MARTIN - No, it is not.

Mr TRIFFITT - Even if it is hands-on work. Most of these kids cannot read and write. Teach them some life skills.

CHAIR - You talk about diversionary programs in your submission. Would you like to expand on that and the issue of the school farm?

Mr TRIFFITT - The farm is still there but it is hardly used because the kids have to work their way out of the wall to be on the farm. The farm is under-utilised. A lot of these kids are only going to be farmhands in the future, if they can get into any sort of work

CHAIR - Are there security issues if the farm were to be better utilised? I consider it would be good from a number points of view, but would that require more supervision? The use of implements could cause some problems.

Mr TRIFFITT - What would happen is the kids would see getting out on the farm as a chance to do a runner. Even the most trusted ones would see that opportunity; some would never, but there is always that risk. The community is put at risk because of kids absconding. A lot of people do not like Ashley in Deloraine, as I am sure you are aware.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you feel the farm programs that they were running while you were there were satisfactory?

Mr TRIFFITT - Some of them were good. It depends on the staff members. If the staff members are genuinely interested in young people in teaching them life skills on the farm they can do a lot of things.

Mr WILKINSON - Should you finish up hanging 20 to catch one? That is what scares me about it. I am quoting a personal view not the committee's view, but to me it would seem the farm is an ideal opportunity to give the kids some training in things that they might use in their working lives. What is happening is people are scared that one might do a runner, as you put it, and therefore they are stopping all the others from doing it which seems unfair and not a wise decision.

Mr TRIFFITT - It is unfair. You are dealing with juveniles you are not dealing with adults. There is always an opportunity for course directions with these young people and as you say you cannot hang the others for one. Because there have been so many break-outs over the last years, I guess, nobody wants to take the risks. There are risks and always will be risks.

Mr WILKINSON - What about growing the vegetables to feed them?

Mr TRIFFITT - They can do that inside the yard. I notice they do a bit of that in the schools program. They have a garden. You do not need a lot of ground for vegetables and yet they buy a lot of vegetables. You could save a lot of money while teaching them life skills.

CHAIR - In your time there did you see any really useful diversionary-type programs that operated within the system?

Mr TRIFFITT - I mentioned a very good diversionary program; let me go back to it. We put the kids on rappelling and the like, out of their comfort area where they are not in control of the situation, and the kids can be turned around very quickly. They do it on the mainland. Sometimes they send the ones they give up on to an outback place where they are out of their comfort zone, put them on an outback station. They used to do that I think but I do not know whether they still do it.

CHAIR - Project Hahn has been - I don't know whether you are aware -

Mr TRIFFITT - That was one that I was familiar with.

CHAIR - We looked at an operation at Flinders in South Australia, which seemed a pretty successful sort of model.

Mr TRIFFITT - I would say that needs much for attention and utilisation, but the dollars will be too great, generally, for what is expected.

Mrs JAMIESON - How do you feel about Clarke Island?

Mr TRIFFITT - When I was there they were talking about just the Aboriginal ones; is that still the case?

Mrs JAMIESON - Yes. Because it is under-utilised do you think that would be a possibility for the more at-risk ones who are likely to escape, black or white?

Mr TRIFFITT - That is a good idea but I don't know whether the Aboriginal people would allow that.

Mrs JAMIESON - Even so, but that natural containment rather than behind a fence.

Mr TRIFFITT - That is right. The fence is what gets their adrenalin running, and it is a challenge, they have to get out. I do not know how many have got out since it opened.

If you get access to the abscondings you will find a lot of them are in transit to courts, and that is why I say we are under-utilising the video link-up.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would you think it worth exploring the idea of Clarke Island which is separate from the rest of the world, as it were?

Mr TRIFFITT - For sure, all those isolated places, if -

Mrs JAMIESON - And if it has its own natural boundaries and you could learn survival skills.

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes, pursue that.

CHAIR - Any there any more questions on educational training for residents?

Mrs JAMIESON - Have you come across the program at the back of Ulverstone called Molenda Lodge?

Mr TRIFFITT - No I have not.

Mrs JAMIESON - It's one of those alternative programs. Molenda Lodge has been set up by an individual and some church people and what have you. Kids who are at risk before they get to Ashley - mostly, hopefully anyway, but still there are some people from Ashley - end up there in one or two-day programs a week. It is survival skills and learning how to do a bit of mechanics and a bit of farm work. You have not come across that one? It does have a web site.

Mr TRIFFITT - That's great, that's the type of thing that -

CHAIR - The lady who came gave a very impressive report of that. There are some real opportunities there, I think, for some of that early diversion type of thing to go on beforehand rather than going straight into an Ashley type of situation.

Mr TRIFFITT - There must be more diversionary programs before Ashley.

CHAIR - You have seen a lot of kids on remand and there for probably a period longer than you would have liked.

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes, they'd be on remand for months sometimes in years gone by. That goes against all legality.

Mr MARTIN - That was the case back in your day?

Mr TRIFFITT - In the early period, yes.

Mr MARTIN - I was under the impression that it was a more recent phenomenon, so it is interesting that it happened back in your day too.

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes. So it is happening now?

Mr MARTIN - Yes, it is still happening.

Mr TRIFFITT - It shouldn't be.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you have any comment to make about the involvement of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Corporation, for example? We are hearing that about 40 per cent of the kids who go in are of Aboriginal descent.

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes, a very high per centage of young people are.

Mrs JAMIESON - And what about the programs that are coming in specifically for the kids that are culturally sensitive?

Mr TRIFFITT - The TAC looks after the Aboriginals.

Mrs JAMIESON - Could they do more, do you think?

Mr TRIFFITT - I am sure they could, yes.

Mrs JAMIESON - What about Whitelion or any of these other community groups going in?

Mr TRIFFITT - There are some church groups that regularly go in there; there are some individuals. I admire those people. I was reading recently of one who has been going there for years. Regularly on Sunday he would go in with his music and spend time with these young people.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you feel there'd be any benefit at all if the kids had regular music therapy, art therapy, drama therapy so they could act out and get out of themselves?

Mr TRIFFITT - They are no different to you or me, are they? Music soothes the savage beast, as the saying goes.

CHAIR - You made a couple of comments on alternative methods of sentencing. We have crossed some of those already.

Mr TRIFFITT - Any diversionary tactics are important. Before Ashley was a detention centre we used to place young people on farms; those who earned the trust would go out and have days on the properties. There are a lot of people in the Deloraine area who used to take these young people in and work them on their properties. The trust would be broken sometimes but rapport would be developed between those young people and those farmers and other people. We have had young people come into Launceston and go to different workplaces. It requires a lot of intensity to get them to and fro but that is what Ashley should be about.

CHAIR - Do you think that the Youth Justice Act is adequate?

Mr TRIFFITT - It seems to be. One of the members who works there was one of the writers of it. You were aware of that?

Mr WILKINSON - Who is that?

Mr TRIFFITT - Jane Douglas. She was involved in the writing of the Youth Justice Act before she came to Ashley. She came to Ashley and she is still there I believe.

Mrs JAMIESON - She has to put it into practice, does she?

Mr TRIFFITT -She has put it into practice.

CHAIR - You talk about inconsistency in the way that staff treat or deal with some of the residents in terms of contraband and all that sort of thing - and we have heard such evidence already. Would you like to make a comment on that?

Mr TRIFFITT - You did not have to be really smart to pick out who was handing out the cigarettes. It went on and I am sure that it still goes on today. Staff want a so-called easy shift and bend the rules. I will not do anybody in but it is widely known that different teams will bend the rules. That was when I was there and maybe it is not happening today. Maybe things are running much better.

Mr WILKINSON - Nick, you have had experience there, you have been there 14 years. As you said, you have been a farmer 99.9 per cent of the time, you have a lot of commonsense, and you have been a father. If you were starting up a youth detention centre, would you call it a detention centre? You might say that it is only moving the chairs on the *Titanic*, but it seems to me that maybe the culture has to change and you could call it a special care unit or something like that as opposed to a detention centre.

Mr TRIFFITT - No, I think you have to. I am not really sure but because it comes under the Youth Justice Act. A detention centre comes under the Youth Justice Act and Ashley fits that role. What were you going to call it?

Mr WILKINSON - I know that some in Adelaide thought 'special care secure centre'.

Mr TRIFFITT - Well, you could call it a secure centre but it is not secure; Ashley is not secure.

Mr WILKINSON - What do you believe is the main thing to have in a detention centre?

Mr TRIFFITT - You have to have a good working environment. You will always have the kids who break the rules and there has to be some sort of deterrent to breaking the rules. There have to be positive and negative outcomes.

Mr WILKINSON - They would argue that they have those now with the colour system that grants you certain privileges. What would your answer to that be?

Mr TRIFFITT - The colour system has come in since I left but I have heard about the colour system. If it works it would be okay but I do not think that it is quite working, otherwise you guys would not be interested.

Mr WILKINSON - Is that because the SOPs are not being followed to the letter?

Mr TRIFFITT - I would say so, yes. There are inconsistencies in practices.

Mr WILKINSON - There should be much more education, it would seem to me, than there presently is - eight hours a week as opposed to 30 hours a week.

Mr TRIFFITT - The Ashley school appears to be doing quite a bit for the young people that are there. But if the older ones are only getting two hours, as you were saying, they need more than two hours. Two hours is not enough to turn anybody around.

Mr MARTIN - Even the younger ones are only getting two hours?

Mr TRIFFITT - Why are they only getting two hours? They are in the education system; they should be getting the equivalent to the young people outside Ashley.

Mrs JAMIESON - It is an ideal environment where you can have say two or three students to one tutor so you can do much more intensive work.

Mr TRIFFITT - It is an ideal ratio of staff to young people. If people in mainstream education knew the ratios, they might think Ashley has too many staff.

Mrs JAMIESON - This is my last question. In your experience is there enough support for families of the detainees before, during or after experiences with Ashley ?

Mr TRIFFITT - I did not really see a lot of that. There were times when I took the young people to their homes at the end of their period. Even in the adults prison system, the money goes into the buildings, the walls and the security but there is not much there for prisoners afterwards.

Mrs JAMIESON - Do you feel that there could be more support offered to the community and to the families of the detainees?

Mr TRIFFITT - I am sure there could be more.

Mr WILKINSON - What would be the ideal?

Mr TRIFFITT - What would be the ideal? Am I allowed to say what would be ideal?

Mr WILKINSON - Yes, that is what you are here for.

Mr TRIFFITT - Some of those parents should not have children.

Mr WILKINSON -Therefore You need more support for them when they get out, or go to a halfway house. I suppose you saw a lot of them coming back in within a month or two months of getting out?

Mr TRIFFITT - They kept coming back and they wanted to come back after a period. They are more comfortable in there than they are out in the community.

Mrs JAMIESON - Would a halfway house after their first offence, or before if you thought that this kid was breaking the law be a good thing to direct them to? In other words, getting them away from Mum and Dad.

Mr TRIFFITT - I think there are some such things that are available, aren't there?

Mrs JAMIESON - Well we are working on it, yes. There should be more support for it.

Mr DEAN - You have talked about the inconsistency of staff, staff not complying with SOPs, and said some staff become worse when working with young people. I take it you mean they become aggressive, or difficult when working with the youths.

Mr TRIFFITT - They see what the young people get out of the community and think, 'Why can't I have a bit of that?'

Mr DEAN - That is the staff, I presume.

Mr TRIFFITT - I am talking about the staff

Mr WILKINSON - What can they get?

Mr TRIFFITT - Nothing major but the kids get a lot of privileges. They used to get lots of outings and different things that young people in families might not get.

Mr WILKINSON - Therefore the staff get jealous and take it out on the inmates.

Mr TRIFFITT - It is not jealousy. They think it is their right. 'I work here it; is my right also.'

Mr WILKINSON - How can they access that? That is what interests me.

Mr TRIFFITT - There are ways to get things. They learn from the young people how they get there. These young people are very gifted - gifted is not the right word - they are very determined in how to get things.

Mr WILKINSON - Can I just pursue that. I do not quite understand it. I do not think you really wanted to tell me. You are saying that the staff see the detainees as getting certain things and therefore they want a part of the action as well to get certain things.

Mr TRIFFITT - I am not saying it happens a lot, but it evolves sometimes with the staff members.

Mr WILKINSON - What are the things that they want? Stolen property, is that what you are saying? Or drugs?

Mr TRIFFITT - Yes, there could be a certain amount of that.

Mrs JAMIESON - Are there any problems with sexual harassment involving staff; male/female, or male/male, female/female and/or staff and detainees?

Mr TRIFFITT - Not out in the open. Not that I am aware of.

CHAIR - Thanks very much, Nick. We appreciate your frankness and obviously your long experience working with the youths.

THE WITNESS WITHDREW.