

Inquiry into the Control and Management of Ashley Boys' Home, State of Tasmania

1951 – 1953

Details

The Inquiry into the Control and Management of Ashley Boys Home began in 1951. The government initiated it after accusations that boys from Ashley did badly after their release. The Committee conducting the inquiry made an interim report in October 1951 and a final one in April 1953.

The Inquiry addressed four main issues:

- The future management of the Home, the buildings required, and whether the government should buy a new site.
- What caused 'delinquency' in boys and how it could be prevented.
- How boys could be supervised after their release from Ashley.
- Whether some of the boys who would normally go to Ashley could be in foster care.

The interim report of the Committee found that 80 percent of boys who had been at Ashley did not go on to reoffend. It made 14 recommendations, including:

- All the boys at Ashley should be tested for an intellectual disability by officers of the State Psychiatric and State Psychological Departments. Since the Committee believed that boys with an intellectual disability could do 'immense harm' to the other boys, it suggested that they be sent to a different institution. This did not happen until the government established West Winds Boys' Home in 1967. For boys remaining at Ashley, the test results would provide a guide to the best form of training.
- That the government establish a new Home for boys up the age of 14. They were usually in Ashley for lesser offences, such as truanting or being 'uncontrollable', so the Committee did not consider them 'delinquent.' It did not think that they should mix with older boys who had broken the law and might be a bad influence. Following this recommendation, the government established Wybra Hall in 1956.
- That the main dormitory block which burned down in 1950 be rebuilt. It should include a dormitory for 'undisciplined or unruly' boys and another for those who had just arrived. There should also be disciplinary block of six separate rooms for boys who did not respond to 'discipline'. These rooms were not for 24 hours a day solitary confinement. Instead, the boys would work or attend school with the others. Their detention would not last longer than two weeks. The Committee also recommended building two cottages with room for 12 boys each, which a married couple would run. This was to be the main form of accommodation.
- That the government adopt the recommendation of the Director of Child Welfare in New South Wales which stated that boys should be encouraged to take a pride in how they looked. They should have a daily shower and be given a comb so that they could do their hair several times a day, especially before meals. Boys should receive their own set of clothing on admission and wear it during their stay at Ashley.
- That there be two teachers instead of one at the school. One should be qualified in teaching children with intellectual disabilities. The trade instructor should be employed full time.

- Since it was difficult to fill in leisure time at Ashley, the Committee recommended that the boys have shorter school holidays than other children. However, the boys would not do academic work during this time. Instead, they would have their usual holiday at Port Sorell, followed by project work when they returned to the Home. The Committee also recommended the appointment of a recreation officer. The government appointed Mr James WHC Klein. He later resigned so that he could write to the *Examiner* with a number of allegations about Ashley. This led to an inquiry by the Public Service Commissioner.
- That there be a house mother in each cottage and in the central block. The Committee suggested that one of the teachers be a woman.
- All the boys at Ashley should receive vocational guidance.
- That religious teaching be a priority because, according to the Committee: 'one of the great troubles of the boys who are sent to Ashley is that they have not led stable lives through no fault of their own. A religious faith can do a great deal to give them that stability or help them to attain it'. The Committee recommended that the boys receive more religious instruction than they currently did.
- That the best possible staff be employed and that, in order to attract them, good salaries be paid. In the cottages and home for younger children, the Committee believed that, it was 'essential that they should have people who understand children, and who have the capacity to be kind but firm'. Instructors should be qualified. They 'must be men who understand boys and who can and do take a constant interest in their welfare. In particular, it is essential that their bearing and address can win the respect of the boys and act as an example to them'.
- Finally the interim report recommended that the government architect assess the buildings at Ashley, many of which were 'old and out of date'.

The final report was more concerned with the causes of delinquency and how to prevent it. Drawing on a Memorandum of Juvenile Delinquency issued by the British Home Office and Ministry of Education in 1949, it found that the causes were poor housing, problems with parenting, a failure to identify 'sub-normal' intelligence, and changes in society's 'moral standards'. Another problem was that children did not have enough guidance about how to use their leisure time. Finally, the high prices of goods attractively displayed in shops led to theft.

In order to prevent juvenile delinquency, the Committee made a number of recommendations. These included:

- The formation of a Department of Child Welfare which would bring all children's services together. These included those usually carried out by the Social Services Department, the child probation service run by the Attorney-General's Department, and the psychological and welfare services run by the Education Department. The Committee also recommended that a child guidance clinic be established which included an 'advisory bureau' for parents. It was especially concerned to assist parents in preventing truancy as their research showed that in 60 percent of cases this led to delinquency. The government never established the new Department. However, it did set up child guidance clinics.
- The appointment of four trained probation officers. Their role would be to prepare a report before a child's case came before the court; supervise children committed to them by the court; supervise the homes of boys in Ashley and make recommendations about their return to them after release; stay in touch with boys while they were at Ashley; and help them adjust to community life after their release. The probation officer could also help with the wards of state.
- That the provisions of the *Infant Welfare Act* (1935) and the *Criminal Code* which made parents responsible for their children's offences be enforced.
- That a foster father be present in foster homes that took in boys. The Committee also suggested that the Department purchase houses where a married couple could live rent free in exchange for looking after up to six wards of state, girls and boys. The government did not adopt this idea for foster homes. However, it ran receiving homes in this way.
- That fully equipped play areas and clubs be set up for children to give them something to do other than playing on the streets.
- That only two or three magistrates preside over children's courts and that they be paid. This would ensure that they all administered the *Infant Welfare Act* in the same way.

More info

Related Entries

Related Events

- [Investigation into Ashley Home for Boys, Public Service Commissioner, Tasmania \(1951\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Ashley Home for Boys \(1926 - 1999\)](#)

- [Wybra Hall \(1956 - 1988\)](#)

The Inquiry recommended the establishment of Wybra Hall in order to remove boys under 14 from Ashley Boys' Home.

- [West Winds Boys' Home \(1967 - 1983\)](#)

The recommendations of the Inquiry may have led to the establishment of West Winds Boys' Home even though this did not happen until 1967.

- [Children's Court of Tasmania \(1905 - current\)](#)

The Inquiry into the Control and Management of Ashley Boys' Home recommended that two or three paid magistrates preside over all the children's courts.

- [Public Service Commissioner \(1918 - 1973\)](#)

Resources

- Swain, Shurlee, [History of Australian inquiries reviewing institutions providing care for children](#), October 2014
- [Ashley Boys' Home plans](#), The Mercury, 4 July 1951

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