

CONFIDENTIAL:BOX HILL BOYS' HOME.

This Home was visited by Mrs. Stelmach and myself on 27.4.65. I found considerable interest in comparing present conditions with those obtaining on my last visit almost exactly 5 years ago. The general impression gained is that although there have been some improvements the place is still substandard.

Numbers: There are at present 114 boys in residence, ages ranging from 7 years to late 'teens. Twenty of these are privately placed; the rest are wards. These numbers are down on 1960 and if anything a decrease rather than an increase is envisaged. Despite the loss of much-needed bedspace I feel this is reasonable in view of the state of facilities.

Accommodation: The boys are quartered in three sections (known as Nos. 1, 3 and 4 Sections) standing some distance apart on the large (and valuable) site.

Section 1 which is physically the most attractive consists of the original double-storied Home building plus a set of weatherboard dormitory blocks. This section houses 54 boys in dormitories holding from 4 to about 20 beds and also contains the administrative section, visitors' room, infirmary and staff dining room. At the rear of this is the section dining room - a gaunt, vast weatherboard erection which doubles as a T.V. room and a Conference Hall. The kitchen has been recently improved and is now decently workable.

No. 3 Section is rightly regarded as an eyesore. It consists of a set of decrepit weatherboard buildings apparently flung together as a temporary measure far too long ago and in typical Salvation Army architectural style. Dormitories are depressing and cramped, the kitchen is dark and poorly equipped and the playroom is a rough barn fitted with a T.V., some battered theatre seats and a few timber lockers. 36 lads are housed here.

No. 4 Section - a U-shaped brick section opened in 1928, which is now showing fully that it was jerry-built to start with. The kitchen is pokey (plans are afoot to extend it) and the dining room again is used for T.V. The dormitories as elsewhere are tidy but cramped and as elsewhere individual possessions are kept out of sight. Again, the rumpus room was bleak and battered. 26 lads live here.

In all sections, sleeping accommodation and kitchens are clean, dining rooms grubby, and playrooms clean enough but battered and depressing.

There is a wide difference in standard in the toilet and washing facilities, these ranging from one set reasonably attractive, recently installed through depressing to horrible. One showerroom in particular would be enough to put youngsters off washing for life. We also noticed that in one washroom the towels were grubby and in another damp and downright grimy.

Pleasingly, each section has a rough but usable home-work room. In all sections efforts are being made to make the shoddy interiors pleasanter through repainting and new curtains, on which thousands are said to have been spent. While applauding this, one feels there is a danger that the life of antiquated buildings may be extended even longer if they can be kept looking superficially attractive.

The Director
AS 5/5/65
Mr Hughes

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Other buildings include a rough gymnasium-cum-playroom, Education Department school (erected years ago by the S.A.) and assorted semi-derelict sheds surrounding the woodyard whose contents heat the entire institution.

The overall effect of the buildings indicates a history marked by poverty and well-intentioned amateurish efforts to make do with minimum facilities.

Staff: As with many Salvation Army institutions, staffing has been a perennial problem. Apart from the senior officers, who are reasonably stable, staff changes are frequent and Major Broadstock made several references to undefined "difficulties" he has had fitting in the more transient officers. At present the staff is said to be working harmoniously together and numerically the most adequate to date.

The staffing is as follows:-

Manager, Major Broadstock.

Matron, Major Hooper, who is responsible for "co-ordination", staff control, clothing, domestic administration etc.

Mrs. Broadstock, who is particularly responsible for stores but helps in general domestic oversight.

Brigadier Van Kralingen, secretarial work.

In Section 1 - O/C. Captain and Mrs. Sanders - who work there but have their own house some distance away.

Three male staff, living in the section.
Cook (5 days p.w.) and kitchen-hand

In Section 3 - O/C. Major Bamfield (single woman) who lives in separate quarters.

A married couple who live in the section.
Cook (5 days p.w.).

In Section 4 - O/C. Cap. and Mrs. Exon, who live in the section.

Single man from No. 1 as helper.
Cook (5 days p.w.)

Care staff are rostered and now get improved time off - i.e. one day off per week and one weekend in 4. Care staff do weekend cooking with help of relieving cook.

One daily domestic (suprisingly inadequate - boys clean under staff control).

Two laundry hands 3 days per week.

Three sewing hands part-time.

Five volunteers one day per week - mainly ironing, etc.

Boilerman - gardener (husband of relieving cook) who lives in with her on the premises.

Daily maintenance man - who has a solid schedule of public works to deal with.

Health: Said to be good. No epidemics.

There is a four bed infirmary (equipped only with beds, e.g. no wash basin) in No. 1 Section. A sick parade is held daily, attended to by an officer who has had First Aid training. A G.P. (Dr. Maloney) is on call but does not visit regularly. School Dental Service gets round about once a year - this could well be increased if possible. Dr. Drew, psychiatrist, is still available for consultation.

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Education: The Education Department school is still in operation on the premises and the rambling old school block has been recently repainted. Mr. Richards, the present Head, proved most co-operative. The staff consists of at present one elderly woman teacher and two young men in addition to the Head, covering between them (nominal) Grade 1 to (nominal) Grade 6, at present, (and this is a very real worry to the Turana Placement Committee.) The Opportunity Grade is out of action owing to the Education Department's inability to provide a trained O.G. teacher. Mr. Richards is willing to go on taking retarded boys but cannot of course give them quite as adequate teaching as they would get in a separate Opportunity Grade. Most boys (except the very retarded) after 6th Grade attend either Burwood Tech. or Wattle Park High. About 40 of them are doing so at the moment. These boys are taken to school and fetched back by truck - a saving in fares and means of preventing absconding, but nevertheless of debatable desirability.

The attitude to education is sound and boys are encouraged to stay on if they show any sign of academic success.

Catering: Done in section kitchens, two at least of which are inferior in equipment. Food appears better than it was in 1960. Major Broadstock waxed voluble in pointing out additions he has had made available - e.g. 16 varieties of spread instead of only golden syrup bought in 44 gal. drums as found on his arrival.

Laundry: Done on premises. Laundry is well equipped and has been completely redecorated and reorganized since 1960.

Clothing: Also improved, with more individual styles. Clothing is kept in a clothing room, where each boy's things are kept for him in a numbered locker and handed out as required. A sort of half-way house between the mass-issue system and the individual wardrobe. One got the impression that the Turana outfits are much relied on and that the maximum wear is extracted from each.

Heating: Poor. Two ^{dill care} officers scavenge the neighbourhood for wood, which is cut up on a circular saw and distributed to the sections for boiler and space heating. This is rightly seen by Major Broadstock as a waste of officers' time and a source of frustration, as it is possible for woodstoked fires to go out, leaving boilers cold just when water is wanted. Space heating is by wood fires, mostly open. One boiler has been converted to oil firing and it is hoped to convert another soon.

Visitors are welcome Saturday and Sunday afternoons and at other times if they cannot manage the above. Visitors' Books exist in each Section but are barely used - more diligent use of this was requested.

Discipline said to be by exhortation with a spanking, deprivation of privileges, or extra chores if this is ineffectual. Information from the Headmaster bears out that heard "on the grapevine" at Turana that lurid threats of being sent to Bayswater are used at least on occasion as a means of securing good behaviour.

Pocket Money: No set system. Money given as needed, particularly to boys going with holiday hosts.

Entertainment: Cricket and football played in local Churches League. Lacrosse has been started and is popular. A T.V. set is in each Section and there is scouting activity for such as are interested. Many of the lads make models, etc. A Shetland pony spends a week with each Section in turn and gives much fun. There is a good deal of activity connected with items in S.A. functions, e.g. gym displays, but nothing to compare with the full range of activities provided at such places like St. Augustine's. On the other hand, there is plenty of space for free play and real boy games.

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Relations with the Community: Said to be under-developed. Local Rotary and Apex have done a few jobs around the place and at last enough holiday hosts have been organized to get all the boys out for at least part of the holidays. Without discussing selection procedures for hosts at length, I suspect these could be somewhat superficial. Major Broadstock quite rightly feels that it is rather late in the day to try drumming up local interest in the place, especially as its future is uncertain.

Major Broadstock is known to Turana staff as a tense and panicky person and the visit did nothing to dispel this opinion. He lacks Major Hewittson's personal warmth and has difficulties handling absconders or boys with history of offences. He very much resents being sent lads with such histories, though Turana staff have frequently pointed out that boys may show entirely different characteristics in their permanent institution from those seen at the Reception Centre. I can imagine that he would have difficulty controlling staff and building up their morale. On the other hand, he appears to have far more managerial ability than Major Hewittson and is less willing to put up with the constant frustrations of running an ill-equipped institution. He also, has, or at least voices, a keener appreciation of the effect on the children of the attractiveness or otherwise of their surroundings. From a Departmental viewpoint he has the advantage of not being possessive - he believes that unless home conditions are quite impossible it is pointless to try to keep parents and children apart if a bond of affection exists. He has attended and appreciated the Training Courses at Lisson Grove and found the interchange of ideas between Army Officers and staff of other institutions particularly valuable.

Tone: It was unfortunate that lack of time prevented us from seeing more boys - just sufficient were seen to give the impression that there might be some incidence of nailbiting (the worry symptom), institutional voice and unreal fantasies about future vacations, but it would be quite unfair to make any judgements on this at present. It would also be unwise to comment at the present on staff-boys relationships. I feel however that it is in order to criticise the constant "plugging" of the title of the Institution - e.g. blazoned on the dining room walls and "Box Hill Boys' Home" woven into the towels.

Although there is a great deal of room for improvement here, particularly in the surroundings, I feel there is a very real place in the Victorian system for such an institution as Box Hill, where the staff can accept without too much heartburning long term placements of boys from very substandard families who are unlikely ever to do them much credit or older lads who are too dull or unmannerly to be acceptable in the more refined type of cottage home. It is also a real haven for many youngsters who have had exhausting emotional experiences with adults and need a place where they can quietly slip into a mob of lads their own age. It would be (this is only my own opinion) a retrograde step for an attempt to be made to go entirely into small, mixed cottages.



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(D. Jaggs),
4.5.1965.

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