

'A'

907

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Subject: Re: Alkira



MEMORANDUM TO THE DIRECTOR

RECORD NUMBER

RS:KD

MINUTE

As the Child Care Officer for Alkira since late February, 1975, I am of the opinion that the Institution is presently incapable of providing a satisfactory standard of care for the boys already there and for any who may be considered for placement therein the near future. Alkira is especially incapable of catering for the needs of the more damaged boys and there is reason to believe that the nature of child care in the Institution has exaggerated the degree of truancy, absconding and anti-social behaviour in which some of the boys engage. Furthermore I feel that the type of child care practised can be characterised in general as being inflexible, excessively punitive and authoritarian. With the exception of the houseparents who have recently resigned, the residential staff appear overall to have been unable to provide the consistent warmth, care and understanding of individual needs that is an essential precondition for any positive development in the boys placed there.

On a number of occasions it has been necessary for me to speak with the Superintendent, Captain McIvor, about his and his deputy's attitudes towards punishment in general and corporal punishment in particular. It was suggested that all possible individual factors should be taken into consideration when deciding how to deal with various types of misbehaviour and anti-social activity. He agreed and said that this was his policy. His practice, however, on a number of occasions has been different and I feel that the reason is this: where the cause of a child's acting out behaviour is not patently obvious, he is likely to conclude that the boy is just testing limits or just being naughty. He feels that too often we don't credit a child with the capacity for being responsible for his actions.

He has admitted to me that there have been a few occasions when corporal punishment has been administered when perhaps it should not have been. The crux of the problem seems to be that the staff in general has lacked the essential abilities to provide consistent care, nurture and understanding of the individual needs of the boys. As a result, when faced with a situation where they are uncertain of what to do, the tendency has been to fall back on corporal punishment as a means of maintaining control. Unfortunately this appears to have become more frequent and in some cases excessively severe. Consequently this has influenced the ways in which the boys perceive the home environment in general and the Superintendent in particular. The situation has reached such a state that, for example, boys have been corporally punished if they have merely planned to abscond.

2/.....

1. File

2. S/CO (R) (Vigil)

27/6/75

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Subject: Re: Alkira - Page 2

RECORD NUMBER	RS:KD	MINUTE
	<p>Captain McIver either cannot or will not openly consider the possibility that the social environment at Alkira may be one of the major factors contributing to the absconding, truancing and anti-social behaviour which occur. On occasions he has implied that perhaps these situations could be remedied by having more Child Care Officers at Alkira to enable more consistent and effective casework to be carried out.</p> <p>Some of his casework decisions have had extremely destructive consequences (See my report concerning HT) or appear to be inadequately considered. In the latter category I would cite the instance when a boy was told he will be allowed to spend a weekend with his foster family if he does not truant or commit any anti-social acts for one month. This boy has spent a good deal of his life in institutions and has suffered parental, institutional and foster parental rejection (the last still being very strong), and at Wilson Youth Hospital indicated his anti-social behaviour was attributable to emotional conflicts. Captain McIver felt that his decision had been suitable casework for this boy as he felt it would give him something to aim for.</p> <p>The Superintendent has an ambivalent attitude towards this Department. On one hand he resents Departmental criticism of his administration and methods, complaining that he never had such problems in New South Wales and that the Department sees only the "loving" side of things. He says he will not discuss with the Child Care Officer any allegation made by a child to the Child Care Officer unless the child has first spoken with him. He states that the boys are aware that they can go to him with legitimate complaints but this is highly unlikely in practice as the boys see him in the role of the disciplinarian and are unwilling to confide in him and he knows this. On the other hand, he needs to have a great deal of support from Departmental Officers in handling difficult situations where he is likely to resort to corporal punishment if he doesn't know what else to do.</p> <p>For about eight months now, various boys have been involved to differing degrees in a male prostitution racket. This involvement came to a head recently when two boys absconded to Sydney with the assistance of the organisers of the racket. One boy has since returned and the other is still believed to be in Sydney. This issue is mentioned for a number of reasons (a) the boys in institutional care, particularly the more disturbed ones, are at risk to such involvements; (b) the likelihood of their becoming involved can depend on the social environment of the particular institution.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">3/.....</p>

DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Subject: Re: Alkira - Page 3



RECORD NUMBER	RS:KD	MINUTE
---------------	-------	--------

(c) Captain McIver has been aware of the existence of the boys' involvement with homosexuals for some time and it has become evident that his attitudes and actions have been reinforcing the whole issue. He has been involved in "playing detectives" rather than in attempts to provide an emotional environment within the home which would leave the boys less at risk to such involvements. He had tried to discourage any mention of the incidents with the boys so that he could conduct his own investigations both with the boys and with his "contacts" and liase personally with the police. Recently he has been unhappy about suggestions that the boys who returned from Sydney be moved to an alternative placement at The Haven, since it appears to me he feels the boy will be at risk should he leave Alkira. (It should be mentioned that the boy himself is positively motivated towards the move to The Haven and is unhappy at Alkira).

The Alkira environment has deteriorated rapidly over the past four to six weeks. The situation came to a head with the resignation of a set of houseparents in May as a result of their long standing conflict with the Superintendent over the nature of punishment and low standard of child care which they saw as existing there. Their resignation was finally prompted by an incident involving HM [redacted] which was investigated by Mr. G. Smiley and Miss J. Doyle and is documented on the Alkira file. The houseparents had been required to give six weeks notice but because of further disagreements with the Superintendent and other staff they were told to leave two weeks earlier and Captain McIver decided that he and his wife would stand in as houseparents until new ones were chosen. The acting out behaviour which one would expect to result from the departure of houseparents was, I feel, intensified when the boys discovered who was to be their new housefather. The most serious manifestation of this acting out involved four boys absconding, committing two acts of arson in houses, and a break, enter and steal from a leisure centre.

In conclusion, I feel that the matters referred to above give an indication of some of the unsatisfactory aspects of child care at Alkira and should be kept in mind when deciding whether placements should be made to that Institution.

*Director's
Referred for your
info. See also files
4.9 + 50.
2. Jank
8/11/75
4/7/75*

*Noted. As you
know I will be writing
Albion, Endeavour
and Milgoma papers on
It would be of great value to me to have
a number of questions and Endeavour before
the date.*

*Report requested from
Mr. Pennington
17/7/75
14/7/75*

[Signature]
R. Short,
Child Care Officer,
18th June, 1975.