

REPORT ON POLICE ENQUIRY RE BETHCAR CHILDREN'S HOME, BREWARRINA

Reference is made to my report of March, 1980 to the Director regarding allegations made by some of the children at Bethcar Children's Home of alleged indecent assaults on them by one of the workers at the Children's Home, Colin Gibson. Two detectives, a female policeman from Dubbo and a male detective from Cobar called to Brewarrina and duly interviewed the girls in question. The girls advised that they had no complaints to make in respect of Colin and would not elaborate on the allegations made. They did not deny that they had made certain allegations to the Brewarrina Police on 5.3.80 but refused to make any allegations or make any statements against Colin. They stated that they were quite happy at Bethcar and have no problems. In view of this the Police were unable to take any action in regard to the matter.

It is unknown at this stage whether the girls refused to make any statements to the Police because the original allegations were untrue, because they were apprehensive about making statements to Police, because they feared that they would be removed from Bethcar if any action was taken against Colin or they may have felt that the home would be closed down if the allegations were substantiated.

After this episode, several visits have been made to Bethcar and Mr and Mrs Gordon have been seen. Colin is back working at the Home and Mr and Mrs Gordon are satisfied that Colin had done nothing wrong.

For my own part, I am still apprehensive about whether Colin did or did not do anything. When I attended the Police enquiry on 5.3.80 the girls appeared to be composed and did not appear to be telling lies. However, it is a discussion point only at this stage because there is no further action the Police can take. As an alternative to try and provide the children with some protection, if this is required, I have spoken to Mr and Mrs Gordon about the possibility of allowing the children to meet their parents or relatives away from Bethcar Children's Home at least once per month. I have put this up to Mr and Mrs Gordon on the basis that the Department is encouraging contact between natural families and Ward and that this sort of contact should also be encouraged on Committal To Care cases. Most of the relatives of these children live in and around the Brewarrina area. They may feel more relaxed with their natural families and may discuss any problems that they have with them. As Mr and Mrs Gordon have agreed I intend starting off a scheme from June 1980 where all the children in the home who have relatives meet their natural families at least once per month at the District Office for approximately 1 hour per family. This will be arranged during school hours so the children can still be driven to school on the Bethcar bus and return from school when school has ended. I can think of no other way that I can provide some sort of outlet for the children to discuss any problems they may be having.

I have also discussed with Mr and Mrs Gordon the fact that when this issue first came to light it should have come to the Department and advised us of their problems. Mrs Gordon's response was that they weren't sure whether the Department would close the home. I advised them that it was not the Department's intention to close down the home but if there were any problems in the home we would prefer to hear about it from them. They now understand this point and have agreed that if there are any future problems or allegations they will advise the Department straight away.

In summary therefore it would appear that either the allegations are unsubstantiated against Colin or the children are apprehensive for their own reasons about going along with the allegations. As there is no Police action that can be taken on the matter the Department can only adopt a watching brief. With this in mind arrangements have been made for the children to see their natural families at least once per month on their own and to be able to discuss any problems they have with the natural family. Mr and Mrs Gordon are agreeable to this.

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As far as long range plans for Bethcar go I am still not placing any further children in the home at this stage. The home is now down to 23 children which is one under the prescribed licence requirements. I also would appreciate some sort of advice from Head Office on whether the submission prepared by Mr Corcoran regarding the home going over to some sort of situation where Mr and Mrs Gordon are regarded as Mnager and Manageress, where positions are allocated for a Launderess, Cook and a Handyman/Bus driver and for them to be paid some sort of wage. It is noted that Dubbo Department of Social Security suspended Colin Gibson's Unemployment Benefit. I do not know how much longer Mr and Mrs Gordon can carry Colin without any extra money coming in. Urgent advice on this matter would therefore be appreciated.

- Recommend:
1. Note Police unable to take any action in respect of Colin Gibson.
 2. Note arrangements made locally to allow the children access to the natural family to discuss any problems.
 3. Urgent advice requested on ~~status~~ of Department of Aboriginal Affairs towards providing extra funding to Bethcar in the form of salaries to the staff working there with provision for relief payment when the staff go on holidays.

T.R. Madden
 T.R. Madden
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8.5.80

\$11,000 grant made by Dept to assist Colin.
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