

To: Joint standing committee on migration
Inquiry into immigration detention in Australia
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Canberra Act,2006

Submission No.....63
Date Received.....

From: Margaret Bryant

RECEIVED
18 JUL 2008

Date: 17/7/2008

BY:.....MIG.....

Introduction

This submission to the joint standing committee on migration inquiry into immigration detention in Australia addresses the third term of reference: *'options to expand the transparency and visibility of immigration detention centres'*.

It briefly describes my experience as teacher/project officer working with Victoria University (VU), given the task of planning and delivering education programs to the Maribyrnong Detention Centre in 2002/3.

It exposes the role of management, individual staff and Australasian Correctional Management in deliberately and maliciously obfuscating *transparency and visibility at the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre*.

Origins of the Maribyrnong Detention Centre (MDC) project/ Background

As project officer I became involved in the MDC project in November 2002.

During semester 1/2002 a submission for funding for this proposed project was written by a team at VU.

After considerable delay, the following project was granted: \$7,000 from Dusseldorp Skills Forum, \$5,000 from Australasian Correctional Management (ACM) and \$5,000 from the State Government. Victoria University waived all infrastructure costs as its contribution to the program. Because the funding was not received in time for semester 2/2002, it was agreed that the project should be timetabled for first semester 2003.

Implementation of the MDC Project: preliminary consultations and considerations

On 13 November 2002, the Project Manager introduced me to the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre for initial consultations with _____, Operations Manager for ACM, and _____, the Centre's Education Officer (also employed by ACM). Every effort was made to establish good will at this meeting for further

collaboration between the Centre and VU on this project. It was agreed that I should work closely with . We discussed possible teaching activities and a plan for establishing a space to set up a self-access facility including especially computers and the installation of these.

My next meeting was scheduled to meet with on 13/01/2003. Although was away sick that day, I met with , the Centre Manager, and again with

We discussed the prospect of coordinating a small team of “volunteer” teaching staff from VU to offer a wide range of individualized and enriched programs. It was agreed that such a team of teachers might be sought. The initial proposal for this small team of teachers was that they each might be responsible for delivering a weekly two-hour session at the MDC for 12 weeks semester 1/2003. Ms asked for documentation of the proposal to send to the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs for approval. This was provided. VU staff who worked at the Centre would require Federal Police clearances.

The rationale for the cooption of this team of teachers was that they would provide a more diverse range of educational programs than would be possible from my allocation of 8 teaching hours a week for a single semester.

The Reference Group

The first meeting of the Reference Group was held on 28/1/ 2003. The reference group members included Project Manager, representing Dusseldorp Skills Foundation, Head of School Arts & Prep. representing Higher Ed, , TAFE representative, Head of Language & Literacy Department, Education Officer at MDC representing ACM and myself, Margaret/Maggie Bryant project Officer.

As will become clear later this project was never straightforward as initially hoped but the Reference Group became a valuable site for discussion, guidance and support.

Needs Analysis

On Friday 24 January I made another excursion to the MDC to begin a needs analysis. had spoken with detainees about my visit and purpose and encouraged them to meet with me. In the men’s area I meet with about 10 men whose first languages included Arabic, Russian, Kizwali, Singalese, Mandarin, Cambodian and more. The easiest needs to identify were for English language and literacy and computer classes. In terms of considering teaching programs, in this cohort there were conspicuous differences in English language skill-levels; that is, there were clearly some detainees with higher English language and literacy and computer skills while others demonstrated much lower level especially English language skills. Demonstrated here was a very conspicuous need for English classes for detainees/students with low-level English skills. Detainees particularly requested English classes and computer classes.

In the Family/Women's section at the Centre I spoke with 5 detainees, a Woman from Iraq (here with her husband and her 15 and 7 year old daughters), a woman from Sri Lanka, a young (and pregnant) Vietnamese woman, an older Macedonian man who was there with his wife, and a young Somalian woman. There was a conspicuous need for English language and literacy in this section, too. In the limited discussions I had with detainees, it was agreed that English classes were their most urgent need. Despite this I insisted that the program should provide other courses/materials/resources such as work in Accounting, Business, Trades, ...

The Project gets underway- or so we thought at the time

In December 2002 I met several times with the project manager to discuss how the project might best be implemented. The brief called for the delivery of flexible learning resources in response to the educational needs of detainees. This of course was a very open brief, deliberately so because the needs and circumstances within which the program was to be delivered were as yet unknown. We were to respond to the needs of detainees.

I continued to develop the plan to bring in other teachers as a resource. I worked with these teachers anticipating their work at the Centre. VU teachers agreed to participate in this scheme.

Things go wrong

During January and February 2003, I made several visits and appointments to visit the Detention Centre hoping to implement the program but, increasingly, my efforts were frustrated by [redacted] with whom I was required to work. Seemingly at each point, and on each issue, Fiona and Dave obstructed our efforts. Matters of security and curriculum were repeatedly discussed. From the very beginning, VU staff agreed to meet security requirements unconditionally. All VU personnel would be required to have Federal Police checks. Some police checks were delayed and refused some VU teachers access to police check papers. Once this hurdle was cleared, timetables ostensibly became the issue over which we were refused access.

The curriculum proved grounds for the next heated contest. [redacted] insisted VU *not* teach English language. At first I thought she was joking for most detainees spoke English as a second language and from the initial needs analysis there was an almost exclusive and unanimous request from detainees for language skill development. [redacted] insisted that English Language was her domain and we were *not* to teach this area. [redacted] suggested I concentrate on other accredited subject areas like Accounting, Horticulture, Trades... I argued with her about the relevance of her suggestions and the need to embed English language teaching in the curriculum and the impossibility of excluding English from our curriculum. It was clear that she would prohibit our access unless we agreed to leave English language to her alone. At this point the project manager and I wondered about her skills and qualifications for teaching and called in [redacted] expert in teaching

Language and Literacy, for a meeting with [redacted] and other ACM staff. [redacted] insisted that as language is embedded in the curriculum it is impossible to separate it from content.

[redacted] remained insistent that she had a monopoly on teaching English and demanded to see curriculum documents indicating we would not teach English before we would be granted access. I spent some time seeking out such curriculum documents before taking this and other issues to the next scheduled Reference group meeting.

The other issue in dispute was *where* our program would be delivered. [redacted] teaches in a specially built “classroom” in the men’s area and in the living area in the women’s/family area. [redacted] insisted our programs could only be delivered in a secure, remote and small room which detainees could only access after negotiation and supervised movement between locked rooms from ACM staff. I intended to deliver our programs in the living areas, or the specially built “school-room”. We would use the spaces when [redacted] had no classes timetabled in the day or evening. We would teach in the women’s/family area while she was in the men’s area, or in the men’s area while she was in the women’s/family area, or we would timetable our classes for the evenings when she was not teaching. Fiona refused our access to these spaces. For various reasons it became clear to me that the integrity of the educational programs required that they be conducted either in the specially built class room in the men’s area or at a shared table in the men’s or women’s/family areas. Removal to a separate small room locked away from the living areas would mean that the kind of learning/educational community we were trying to establish would be impossible. I became convinced that [redacted] and [redacted] did not want us to establish a meaningful learning/educational community, but rather wanted a tokenistic resource that could be displayed on the DIMIA website: that ACM offered such educational programs to detainees. It also seemed that [redacted] wanted to monopolize any chance of delivering meaningful educational activities to detainees.

[redacted]’s last call was to proclaim that we could not teach in the living areas because it would intrude on the “privacy and dignity” of the detainees. Of course this was clearly nonsense and at this point it became clear that [redacted] and [redacted] would permit only token sessions to be held in the small and inaccessible locked room away from detainees access.

My Last call

At the last Reference Group meeting held I proposed that in order for the program to have any integrity we needed to have control over the curriculum and to be able to deliver our educational programs in the detainees living areas (as [redacted] does). At this meeting it was tentatively agreed that VU could be responsible for the curriculum they delivered. It would run along side [redacted]’s education program, but independent of it. The space for the delivery of our programs remained in dispute at the end of the meeting.

[redacted] the Centre Manager attended this last Reference Group meeting and agreed to meet with us either the following day or soon after to discuss these matters further. The next day [redacted] emailed [redacted] and myself to say that the project was cancelled.

We were very disappointed and indicated that we were keen to keep the possibility of delivering our programs at the Center open.

Conclusion

This submission provides a case study of the role of management, individual staff and Australasian Correctional Management in deliberately and maliciously obfuscating *transparency and visibility at the Maribyrnong Immigration Detention Centre* as VU attempted to deliver Education Programs in 2003.

While our negotiations were taking place ACM proudly displayed on their website that they offered VU education programs to detainees at Maribyrnong. Rather than being 'transparent and visible' this was clearly a case of positive rhetoric; in reality, my attempts to run any sort of educational program for detainees was repeatedly thwarted by menacing and mean-spirited ACM employees.

Margaret Bryant
Teacher/Project Officer
Maribyrnong Detention Centre Project

17/7/2008