COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Official Committee Hansard

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Reference: Education of boys

THURSDAY, 29 MARCH 2001

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS

Thursday, 29 March 2001

Members: Mrs Elson *(Chair)*, Mr Barresi, Mr Bartlett, Mr Emerson, Ms Gambaro, Ms Gillard, Mrs May, Mr Ronaldson, Mr Sawford and Mr Wilkie

Members in attendance: Mr Barresi, Mr Bartlett, Mrs Elson, Mr Emerson, Ms Gillard, Mrs May and Mr Sawford

Terms of reference for the inquiry:

To inquire into and report on:

- the social, cultural and educational factors affecting the education of boys in Australian schools, particularly in relation to their literacy needs and socialisation skills in the early and middle years of schooling; and
- the strategies which schools have adopted to help address these factors, those strategies which have been successful and scope for their broader implementation or increased effectiveness.

WITNESSES

Committee met at 9.08 a.m.

ALLCHIN, Mr Steve, Special Projects Organiser, Boys in Focus

ALLOTT, Mr Gregory, Team Leader, Boys in Focus

FLEMING, Mr John, System Director, Boys in Focus

HORTON, Ms Janelle Elizabeth, Boys in Focus

CHAIR—I declare open this public hearing of the inquiry into the education of boys. I welcome the representatives of Boys in Focus. Do you have any comments to make on the capacity in which you appear?

Mr Fleming—I work with an association of people; we call ourselves BIF. We are concerned about boys from one end of the spectrum. Our focus is on working with boys in schools who are in the bottom one-third. We are concerned about boys who are most disengaged from school. We focus our attention on this group and we believe that the most acute problems faced by boys can be found within this bottom group of boys.

CHAIR—I wonder if I can stop you there; I should have stopped you earlier, sorry. I am obliged to remind you at this stage that the proceedings here today are legal proceedings of parliament and warrant the same respect as proceedings within the House. The deliberate misleading of the committee may be regarded as a contempt of parliament. The committee prefers that all evidence be given in public, but at any stage if you wish to give evidence in private, please ask the committee and we will consider your request. I would like to ask you now to make your remarks and then we will go into questions and answers, thank you.

Mr Fleming—As I mentioned before, I am a schoolteacher who works with an association who are concerned about the way we address the bottom third of boys in particular. We believe that there are very serious consequences already evolving if we continue to fail to engage this group successfully. We believe that this group of boys in particular lead the way in issues that relate to school behaviour, drug abuse, bullying, vandalism, community violence, domestic violence, suicide, criminality and so on.

I started to specifically work with this issue in 1992 when I returned from overseas and got a job as an English teacher at Camden High School. I got what is called a bottom English class in my allocation that year, and I was taken by the number of boys who were actually in that class. They were hostile, they were not easy to reach and they had significant literacy problems. The following year I asked for a similar class and began to work with a stream of different approaches. I read and researched anything relating to boys' education, but in those days there was very little, if anything, of substance or quality. I began to experiment with many approaches that year, and the year was quite honestly a mixture of disasters and successes. I began to understand that these boys were very hard to shift because they were already too established in their development, and I asked my head teacher, Di Roki, to establish an all boys year 8 English class in the following year. I specifically asked that the boys be made up of those who exhibited most disengagement in year 7, and they were all put together in one class. It was very much a sink or swim decision, I think.

The first few months were extremely difficult. The boys were already well on their way towards developing hostility and disinvestment. I pulled out all sorts of approaches that had worked with the older boys that I had addressed in the year and a half before. I began to experiment and chip away at their learning, and importantly I began to work on the relationship that I could develop with these boys. The next three years were a journey of learning for all of us, and over that time I was able to discover the many things that seemed to be most effective with these types of boys. I could actually see in practice those things that would work and those that would not, and I think crucially I was able to understand why things worked and why they did not. I was able to analyse these experimental interactions over those years and use that as the basis of my next stage of research.

Today I am still very close to many of these boys I worked with in those early years, and I have followed their development beyond school. In 1996, the last year of this hands-on research through that class, I began to understand the need to take these results beyond my own personality and beyond working with a timetabled class. I wanted to develop something that went beyond the work of a single classroom teacher—that was important to me. I believe that these approaches could be universally applied and developed as part of a school structure, part of a school system. I felt at the time there needed to be something that was more systemic in schools, rather than an individual, just relying on a teacher.

I was concerned about looking at a system that could be built into all schools and could create similar successes with individuals in a whole range of environments. So at the end of 1996 I teamed up with a police officer who worked out of a PCYC—that is Steve Allchin—and from there we began to work on developing a system that could operate in schools beyond the classroom and in a way that would take the strain from individual teachers and behaviour managers. We began to run a pilot system on the basis of the research I had been doing with disengaged boys, and over the next three years we worked on tuning the various components into a system that fulfilled the two most important requirements: the first one was that there needed to be a direct and specific success with the boys, and the second one was that it had to be a system that could be easily applied and maintained in an average school. The wider system we developed proved very successful.

This brings me to a wider series of comments. We often hear the refrain about which boys are causing problems, and I think that is a very important refrain. We also believe that that is a fairly easy question to answer. The worry for us who are involved in BIF is that the bottom third of boys that are serious problems appear to be growing in numbers and they appear to be growing in influence. That is probably what has brought us to this point. School professionals may not always be comfortable with the recognition of their existence because it reflects on the school in many ways. But if you interview kids and you interview a lot of school professionals you will often recognise the subtext of, ‘There is a group in the school that we can’t seem to reach.’

I am really concerned that our present society and our present system does not seem to be successful in working with this particular group of boys, and we need to be especially concerned, as I mentioned, that this is a group that is growing in numbers. I actually advocate that we must change the way that we work with these boys, and to do this we must balance an awareness of the many different types of boys. Some boys at one end of the scale have insulation—I use the word ‘insulation’—which is usually families. If you have that insulation in

your life you can often be protected from a lot of societal pressures out there. I guess that is emphasising the importance of family as well. Without some degree of insulation you will find boys, and girls as well, with coping problems in society. Gangs are an example of insulation. Gangs are about insulation. We need to understand that if we do not provide it as a system these kids will find a substitute somewhere else. That is probably the cornerstone of our issue. They can find it through drugs, through gangs, through antisocial reactions and through antisocial relationships in the community. They will find it somewhere. If we don't provide it they will find some other alternative.

To understand this, you need to recognise the massive changes that have occurred in society over the last 40 years. Much of the insulation that has protected boys in the past has been stripped away in a world that has changed, particularly in the last 40 years. You don't find father roles in the family the way you used to. That strips down the insulation straight away from boys. Employment paths no longer exist. Physical strengths are a fading advantage in the wider society context. So boys have lost insulation from the pressures that exist out there. I would suggest that those pressures are fairly intense. To understand this you need to recognise those massive changes. The women's movement has been more active in adapting women and girls for the future. That is a very positive thing. We have given them proactive tools, or they have taken up proactive tools that have allowed girls and women to find a more assured place in the world. That insulation is still very much there. With girls who lose that insulation you will have the same problems, perhaps in different ways.

A large group of boys simply have no hope of realising a similar possibility without help. We have to be active about giving boys the tools to handle societal pressures to help support that insulation. Some of the boys at the successful end of the scale can show some adaptive problems and issues but these at this end pale into insignificance compared to the cracks that are appearing amongst boys at the other end of the scale. I think the inquiry needs to be made aware of that difference. When we talk about which boys, again that issue becomes important. The pressures on boys in relation to their masculinity is so insidious and so constant that most of our methods for addressing behaviour are restricted to limited and ineffective reactions to these boys. We are not proactive in the way we work with them; we react to them.

Again, which boys? At one end of the scale we can argue about labour market outcomes—this is something which is a big issue to me. I fail to see how a few percentage points at one end of the scale can be something that we debate in detail, and yet we ignore an outcome at the other end that is an absolute catastrophe for a whole group of boys. We need to consider the reasons behind male behaviour issues in schools when 70 per cent to 90 per cent of problems occurring in schools are boy based. This goes on to consider incarceration rates occurring mainly from this end of the scale—94 per cent of the incarceration rate in our society is male based. Why do we see so much more violence coming from boys and men, particularly at this end of the scale, and why do men take the option of suicide at a rate five times higher than the average?

The problem we face can be summarised by considering the impact of the mass media on boys who do not have the insulation to protect them from a bombardment of images. For many boys, their view of masculinity is drawn from images controlled by television and the mass media. In many cases, and particularly with boys, the attraction is drawn from masculinity of the worst sort. Too many boys are learning about their male role through television. They have no other example in their life that can teach them about masculinity. The television is something

that comes into their life that can actually give them a display of masculinity. If you do a study of the sorts of masculinities that appeal to their simple views of masculinity, you will see why it is no wonder we are having problems with many of these boys. The images provide a reinforcement of inadequate and distorted masculinity.

How do our schools, when built on traditional models, cope with this sort of disastrous self-expression of identity? They cannot deal with it and they are not dealing with it. Schools are not dealing with these issues. There are losers all round with teaching professionals who are working in unsafe conditions. We have damage to communities, and the boys themselves are being damaged. For many of these boys, a distorted masculinity follows a long road of societal destruction and self-destruction. Our success in equipping girls for the future needs to be matched by similar work with boys. It will require a different approach, but one that is just as important as the work that we do with girls. We need a masculinity that equips boys for a future. It is not enough to put up posters or come in and give them a bit of a whizzbang motivation talk. You must work with them every day through things that are most successful in reaching boys. It is through families, peers, role models, good teaching practice, real experiences and support that we will find solutions to a lot of these problems.

We need a clear view on some issues. Poor teachers and ordinary schools do not cause the problem. They contribute to the problem by failing to address the problem—and that, I think, is a very important issue. They do not create the problem, but they do contribute to the problem not being addressed. We continue to hope that hardworking and innovative teachers can magically, if you like, create microclimates of success in isolation, or we can support them through specific systems and training that operates in terms of developing microclimates of this type into wider school climates.

So what do we do? We need to put systems into schools that work with these difficult problems and support teachers in their professional environments. We need a diversity of approaches and we need to see the wider problem and develop systems that will support the very best teachers we can get. We need to move away from a tick-a-box system and move our emphasis into resources and systems that target problems in a sustained way. If we do this, we can lead the world in education structures.

I will leave you with two final points. Literacy is a component of solving the problem but it is not the answer. And I have a final comment on some of the deliberations that I understand you have had. Good teachers cannot be found on an HSC scorecard, and that is a concern I have about some of the debate that has been going on in the community. I thank you for putting up with my submission.

CHAIR—That is very good, thank you, John. I am quite sure you have stimulated many questions here. Before we go any further, Janelle, would you like to make a few comments?

Ms Horton—I am here as part of the team supporting John and his work within Camden High School.

CHAIR—Would anyone else like to make any further statements to the inquiry?

Mr Allchin—We are here to support John. If there are any questions that John cannot answer, we will deal with those.

CHAIR—I would like to start the questioning. John, do you go into schools with your program and explain them to the principal and does he incorporate that within his school? I am just trying to think where—

Mr Fleming—Other schools?

CHAIR—Yes.

Mr Fleming—I have been contacted by hundreds of people across Australia and overseas in terms of our approach. I have a pro forma letter that I send to people. I can give you a copy of this; it actually outlines the approach. The problem is that it is fairly difficult to take seven years of experimentation and research into a document that says, 'Okay; follow this.' I have been saying to people, 'Look, what we've got to do is really push governments to set up training systems, so we can train people in this type of thinking and in this approach.' I think that is the most crucial thing to be looking at. I can hand people copies of how the system needs to be approached—and I have done this. But it is a platform and a system that opens the access to these boys. It is not a program that works with drug abuse or violence in the home. Our focus is to build a platform, which means we can access these boys and any sort of strategy or program can then be laid into it and we can guarantee a direct access for those boys to be learning from that. We work with many different issues. I believe you need to be trained to follow an approach like this; it is too involved.

CHAIR—Do the boys you are working with contact you or do you identify them and then approach them?

Mr Fleming—I actually leave it to the school. Janelle has been involved in that. I just say, 'You hand me the boys and we'll work with them'.

Ms Horton—As year adviser, I was responsible for year 7 in 1999. I went to the teachers first to see if they could identify students who were playing up, who seemed to be quite disengaged from their learning. The other thing I did was to send a letter to the parents of all boys outlining what the program was about. From that action, we identified two or three students whose behaviour was fine—in fact, one of the kids was in one of my classes. He was a delight but as a small child he had experienced horrendous abuse and was in an environment that was all male. The males that he had had in his life had been very destructive. He was involved in the program. We would not have identified him but once we had that background information that was really critical in putting him as a priority over others.

The other thing is that, because our resources were limited, we had to limit the student number to about 10. I had kids coming to me, begging me to nominate them for the program such is the reputation that it has. It was very sad when we just could not nominate them. It was really critical that we not take on more and then weaken the impact of the program.

That is the sort of impact that it has because they can see the effect. It is the relationship building that I see as the most significant aspect of the program. We were seeing boys crave

these significant male models and go looking for the positive models that we have within our school rather than the negative models who often become the un-nominated leaders. So they look to the more positive, and it is a very powerful thing. There were a number of issues that we looked at, but parents and/or guardians did provide some very critical pieces of information in identifying the kids to become involved.

Mr BARTLETT—You have stressed the need for positive male role models, and I totally endorse that. Do you use women at all in the program or are you just using men?

Mr Fleming—Janelle is very involved in it, and we would think that women are an important part of the way you work with these boys. We know that they watch us very closely, so the way we work with women, the way we talk to women, the way we can work as a colleague is something these boys are watching all the time because in the environments that they are from that is not the sort of relationship they are used to seeing. We are very aware of that sort of thing, that what we display to the boys is what they will want to take on board. Greg actually is an example. He is still a young man but he has had two lives. He was a boy we took on at a young age. I badly wanted Greg in the program because I recognised that he had leadership qualities, and to get these sorts of guys on side means that you have a web effect out on the boys around them, so it is not just the specific boys we work with.

Mr BARTLETT—Greg, what made you want to be part of the program to start with and what were the crucial parts of it that really had a positive influence on you?

Mr Allott—Initially I actually was against being involved in the program. I fought it pretty harshly for the first three months or so. I guess for me it was really the experience of meeting the older guys. Most of the people I was hanging around with—I was living in Campbelltown, which, as you know, is a fairly rough area—most of the guys living in my street were drug dealers or stole cars and things like that. Those were the sorts of guys who I wanted to be like. It was funny when I finally got put in front of some other guys who were just as tough, who were just as strong, who were basically everything I wanted but who also cared and were a lot of fun to be around. That really appealed to me, that whole team atmosphere and the sense of community.

Mr SAWFORD—Can I just ask a few clarification questions first? How many schools are you operating in?

Mr Fleming—Just one.

Mr SAWFORD—Okay. How are you funded?

Mr Allchin—Funding—what's that?

Mr Fleming—We have always tried to do it in-house. I was interested to learn about developing a system that could be applied, not something that you would throw $10 million at and, bang, it happens.

Mr SAWFORD—The question I am asking is whether this is a recognised pilot program that you have been—

Mr Fleming—No.

Mr SAWFORD—No funding at all, nothing.

Mr Fleming—We are actually only just now going out and talking to people about it. In the last 12 months we have really gone out, I guess, approaching people and talking to them about it.

Mr Allchin—Excuse me, can I just make a comment? The reason I became involved in the program was because I was the branch controller of the local PCYC and I had a fairly good budget and a lot of resources at the club. I had been running at a tangent to John. Basically we had the same aims and goals and objectives but I had resources and he had the boys and other opportunities. When we came together and we moulded, that is when the program started to take off as such. Would you agree with that, John?

Mr Fleming—Yes. We were actually raising money before Steve came along. We made the raising of money part of the program. We would get the boys out selling sunburn cream to raise money to be able to do things. The amazing thing about that is that it became an important part of the boys' thinking that they were trusted with money.

I was nervous a lot of the time knowing that these guys were selling sunburn cream—that they would come back with a box with no sunburn cream in it and maybe 30c. The guys were so involved and their loyalty to BIF as a structure was so strong that I never had that happen; I never had that problem. We raised money by selling sunburn cream and various other things because you cannot have a cake stall with guys like this.

Mr Allott—We did.

Ms Horton—You did; we ate the scones.

Mr Fleming—They are commenting on the fact that they got the guys into the cooking room one day and got them to bake some cakes. They carried them out and tried to sell them but most people looked at the cakes as if there was something really quite strange about them. We can include the raising of money in the program with working with these boys. By connecting with Steve, we had access to a bus straight away, which made a huge difference.

Mr Allchin—You do not really need a great deal of money to run the program. There is more money involved in setting up and having professional people monitor and run it.

Mr SAWFORD—John, I acknowledge what you were saying in your introductory comments—that there is a lack of balance in the current debate on boys and girls education. I think that is what you said. I think you said there is a lack of diversity of approaches in terms of dealing with disengaged boys. In your view, after doing this for a reasonable period of time, what are the essential attributes of a change process that you would apply to disengaged boys?

Mr Fleming—It has got to be sustained. I come across a lot of people who say to me, 'We've got this great idea.' I was on the radio a few months ago and a guy phoned in and said, 'We've got this thing happening. We go in and talk to these boys and give them a bit of a pep talk and

then we walk out of the school.' That is just a waste of time. When you are working with boys who have a whole sea of problems in their lives, you could pick Australia's No. 1 sportsman to come in—and they will charge for it. These boys have this sea of poison in their lives, and this person will come in, give them a bit of a talk and walk out the door. Do you think that has an effect on this sea they have left behind them? That frustrates me. So it must be sustained. It has got to be something that touches them every single day in some way. It has got to be there for them every day. If you have that, I think you can really have an impact. It has got to be sustained; it has got to occur every day.

There is probably a whole battery of other little things that you should be doing. I think you need to be very careful about the sorts of people that you put in front of the boys. To me, that is part of the training process. The program is run in such a way that, if you put the wrong figures in front of them, they could be learning from that. This is a process of learning for these boys, and it is a very direct form of learning. The boys get to the point—they do not start out like that—very quickly where, with respect to what you say and the directions you give, they are just grabbing everything you can give them. You need to be looking at having the best trained personnel in that role.

The other thing that is important is that, if you set up a system in a school, you should not rely on putting the pressure on individual teachers. I am sorry to rabbit on a bit here, but I will give you an example. We have a judgment time when we get reports about something that one of the boys may have done in the school on a behaviour issue. We had one little bloke in front of us at one of those early stages when things are very sensitive—the relationship thing is very sensitive—and the boys are trying to suss out which way they want to go. Do they want to follow you or do they want to stay in this world over here that they occupy? I do not know whether Greg remembers this, but there was one boy who had sworn at a teacher and thrown a chair at her. We heard about it and had this meeting. All the BIF boys were sitting together. We have what we call judgments where we sit and judge what the boy has done, aside from what the school does. You can throw detention at them and they laugh. You can throw suspension at them and they think, 'Great, I can do some more fishing,' or 'I can hang out down the street.' They don't care what you dish out. The fact that they get even less schooling actually exacerbates the problem.

We would have our own judgment. Because they were BIF boys, they would come and stand in front of us. We would look at them and discuss what they had done. We ask them a series of questions—for example, how do you feel about what happened? We are never interested in addressing comments like, 'This teacher did this wrong.' We are always about, 'What did you do? How was that appropriate?' I remember saying to this particular boy, 'There are two things that you are going to have to do. The boys have had a discussion and have decided that you are going to walk around the school grounds with a garbage bin and clean up the school.' He said, 'Okay, I will do that.' I said, 'There is one more thing I want you to do. I want you to go to that teacher and apologise to her for what you have done.' He looked at me and said, 'I can't do that.' My stomach churned and I looked out of the corner of my eye and saw that I had like 20-something boys sitting next to me and there was this collective moment. The next question I asked him was, 'Why is that?' He turned and looked at me and at all the guys and said, 'Because I have already done it.' There was this collective cheer from all the guys. The hands and fists went up and the guys were all saying, 'Yes!' because this is what BIF is about. I went

from this almost terror of thinking I have a problem here and this is a problem that is going to eat away the program, but it worked in a very positive way.

Mr SAWFORD—You mentioned that literacy is not the be-all and end-all and you also mentioned that 90 per cent of that 94 per cent of that prison population had been spectacular failures in school and had the common element of lack of literacy skills. That is a fact. I have been a teacher and it is not hard to teach the basics of learning. So something has gone horribly wrong in the last 20 years other than the other comments you have just made in terms of what has happened to families and the labour market. Something has essentially happened and is terribly wrong in schools. We have been to schools that have recognised that problem, both in low socioeconomic areas and high socioeconomic areas. If they put a structured program through, in a very short period of time—four or five years—they manage to stop the differential attainment levels of boys and girls, because they have had a structured program. They have proved that it is not hard.

Maybe in the last 20 years, particularly in primary schools, the basic teaching of reading has gone from highly structured to highly unstructured programs. That is certainly true. You are in the secondary school system. Do you have a relationship with any of those feeder schools? Are you aware of some of those literacy problems in those primary schools that come to you? Do you have opportunities to liaise with those people? Are you aware of the programs that they are actually offering in literacy?

Ms Horton—It is too varied, because we have about 15 feeder schools in the year 7 cohort in total that I was responsible for—and some of these may have been individual students. The bottom line is that you cannot be fully aware of exactly what they are doing with literacy. We certainly see it impacting in patterns of students from individual schools. Given that you might have a wide variety of ability from any one school, you still see trends of problems. Obviously you can identify by observation that some schools are not addressing literacy issues quite as successfully as others.

Mr SAWFORD—Have you identified what is missing?

Ms Horton—No. Specifically we know that there are clearly problems—for example, they have problems with spelling, they have never been encouraged to write in sentences or they may not have been encouraged to edit their work. Those types of specific issues can be quickly identified. In terms of learning strategies, there is no way that a high school would go to a primary school and say, 'You need to look at the way you are teaching literacy.'

Mr SAWFORD—The high school would not know.

Ms Horton—In many cases, they would not. A lot of it is gained as you get to know the kids in any particular group. In terms of the literacy impacting on behaviour, we do see a very high percentage of prisoners who have basic literacy problems and learning problems. I think the guys who do not have as many literacy problems are not in jail because they are too clever to get there, and I think that is an issue. I see that the problem in disruption to the learning of individuals and to the group comes from kids where the literacy component may be an issue, but the biggest thing is this unresolved anger that comes from a whole range of issues. That is what this program addresses. Literacy can be part of that, but it is much easier to institute

systems to support a kid, even at high school, with specific learning problems than it is to try to address that anger.

Kids are ready at different stages. There are some kids who come into the program, and it is something that they have been yearning for because of the disruption to their lives for whatever reasons. There are others who just have this wall of anger, and making sure it is a persistent, sustained program is critical because you have to chip away at that. It does not matter what literacy they have or how good their learning is, if that anger is a barrier to achievement and to taking a positive role in society, we are not going to get anywhere.

Mr Allott—We were contacted by the primary school in 1999. They knew of our program and they wanted us to send some older boys into the primary school to basically promote reading in primary school to the younger guys. So we sent our leaders and some of our boys into a primary school. We spent the entire day there, and even though it was similar to that old tick a box system, it was important for our boys as well as their boys. It is something that we have looked at to continue doing.

Mr Fleming—Greg was actually a leader. He organised it and was involved in the whole process from the start. To have a boy who was in year 11 at the time organise that whole process was pretty incredible. It is the sort of leader that we had.

CHAIR—Greg, did you have a problem at primary school with literacy or numeracy?

Mr Allott—No. I was top of my English classes and top of my maths classes.

CHAIR—I am sorry. There is a division in the chamber and we will have to be excused to register our vote.

Proceedings suspended from 9.48 a.m. to 10.18 a.m.

CHAIR—We will continue with our inquiry.

Mrs MAY—John, I am still a little confused. I just wonder about the structure of the program and how it works within the school. Stop me if I am wrong, but you have obviously identified a group of boys, and this starts in year 7. Do these boys stay within this program until they finish school? You talked about that contact and need being there daily; it cannot be a case of sending in a speaker one day and then leaving, so I am assuming that each day there is contact with these boys. How does the structure work? How is the program working with those boys? I do not know whether I have misunderstood what you have been saying to us.

Mr Fleming—Steve mentioned during the break that we had not actually talked about that part, so that is a good question.

Mrs MAY—Thank you.

Mr Fleming—I have a little document here which I can leave with you which is an outline. We work at approaching the boys in the areas that they seem to be influenced with. We work with peers and at creating a peer environment. We work with mentors who are part of that peer

structure, and then the next level, I guess, which is those of us who work as role models at that level. We take the boys into a program. I will read you the timetable approach:

> **Stage 1**
>
> The goal is exclusively to create the conditions for group bonding, loyalty and teamwork.
>
> An introduction to the concept of leadership.
>
> An introduction to the challenges ahead.

The goal is to exclusively create conditions for group bonding. We get the boys together and we then begin to do workshops, activities, et cetera. We don't actually try to tell them anything about anything; we just want them to get the group bonding happening.

Mrs MAY—Is this during normal class time? Are they taken out of a normal class routine for this program?

Mr Fleming—To fit it in we set it up to operate during sport. Instead of them doing sport, they actually come with us and work with us. That initially was a problem because a lot of the boys think, 'I want to do sport; I don't want to do this stupid thing.' But once you establish a reputation and the boys really enjoy what they do, you don't really have that problem. I have a lot of boys coming up to me now saying, 'Oh look, I would rather come back into BIF and I would rather do this.'

Mrs MAY—But wouldn't sport be just one afternoon a week in high school?

Mr Allott—That is the formal part.

Mrs MAY—So that is the formal part, but then on a daily basis there is some sort of contact or program running?

Mr Fleming—What happens on a daily basis is that I have the dealers—I have the leaders, and they are dealers in one sense—I have the leaders-–

Mr Allott—Which are boys themselves.

Mr Fleming—Guys like Greg who will come in, and we have meetings and talk about different individuals. They will talk to me about what is happening in what I call the shadow school. Most schools are very conscious of what is happening on one level, but every single school—and it doesn't matter what the school is—has a shadow school that operates as well. Most of the teachers, and certainly the executive, have a very limited idea of what is actually going on at that level. The leaders then report to me about things that are going on, and we work on strategies and talk about ways that each leader can work with different boys in his team. The boys then go out there—and Greg is the guy you should be talking to about this—and sit with the guys at recess time, at lunchtime, and talk to them and spend informal time with them throughout the week. We then have that formal time when we meet as an organisation. But the organisation still operates in the playground the rest of the week through the interactions I would have with the leaders and then what the leaders have with the boys.

Mrs MAY—The boys elect to stay involved with BIF; that is a choice for them. If they were maybe brought into the program in year 7 they can stay through to year 12, and you use them as leaders or peer-–

Mr Fleming—No, we don't have the resources. We target a one-year program with them. Look, I am a schoolteacher and working with the boys' program is the equivalent of my whole teaching load again. You don't have weekends. I have a young family—and it is a problem when you come home from work at 5.30 in the afternoon—and I will have three hours of work to do that night. What I am saying is, it is too difficult for me as a teacher with a job to do as a schoolteacher, a drama teacher, to keep maintaining a boys' program, which is why we are getting out there and sending out the message. If I specifically just worked on the boys' program, I would then start setting up follow-up approaches after the initial year that we work with them, but we don't have the resources to do that now. The success we get is from just one year.

Mrs MAY—And that is year 7?

Mr Fleming—Year 7 and some intake on year 8.

Mrs MAY—I was going to ask you, Greg, whether you have left school.

Mr Allott—Yes, I have now.

Mrs MAY—But you are still coming back into the school to work with boys?

Mr Allott—Occasionally I come in as the program is not running currently because of injuries to John. But I still have a lot to do with all the boys who I have worked with. I have got them jobs in the factory. I worked in a factory to help pay my way through university and I have managed to get employment there for some of the boys who have been removed from the school, who basically have no options. I am still very much involved in their lives.

In terms of what we were talking about with the follow-up just then, the year 9 boys and so forth who had been through the program and who we thought had leadership potential would often be involved, maybe once a month, in an occasional activity to keep them involved with the program—not directly as a leader, but like a leader-in-training—so we could see if they had the skills necessary to go on and to be entered into the leadership program. So most of the boys are not completely removed. It is not like we have something to do with them and leave them there. They are still involved with us. Kids who I worked with three years ago still call me up and want to talk and go out and do things and want me to be a part of their life.

Mrs MAY—When you talk about activities, what is an activity? Can you give us an example of an activity that you may introduce into the program?]

Mr Fleming—It depends on the stage. In the beginning stage, it is a lot of physical stuff—anything that is an activity that supports group bonding. I use a lot of my drama skills, a lot of drama activities. We get the boys out of the school and we put them in environments where teamwork is an important part of it because we know that the team bonding thing is very important in the initial stages.

Then we go to the second stage, which is where we begin to run workshops on issues. The first stage is about getting the guys wanting to listen to us, because if they are not doing that, it is impossible. The first stage is to get the group bonding, then we begin to deliver workshops on anything. I can remember one boy was freaking out a little bit on speed at one point and his mate had had a bad reaction. That then was the perfect opportunity for us to say, 'Well, let's sit down as a group of people and talk about drugs as an issue.' You might spend a month talking to the boys and bringing in other programs or displays, or showing them documents and talking about it as a group of people.

Mrs MAY—Would you bring in outside professionals if you were talking drugs, if that was part of your program?

Mr Fleming—Absolutely.

Mrs MAY—So you would bring in professionals?

Mr Fleming—Absolutely. If we had the resources to do it, I would bring in everybody and anybody who could help us support the work with these boys—absolutely anybody.

Mr Allchin—The program is basically a platform where we have these boys and we can then bring in experts to deal with specific problems.

Mrs MAY—John, from the program—and it has been running for a number of years now—have you been able to measure any outcomes? Greg is obviously a perfect example of an outcome, from what you have told us about his background. You are at university now, Greg; what are you studying at uni?

Mr Allott—Psychology.

Mrs MAY—That was not hard to guess. What sorts of outcomes have there been? Have you noticed a difference in retention rates, maybe, at school, or boys taking part-time jobs? Have you been able to measure any sorts of outcomes from the program?

Mr Fleming—I would like someone to take that on as part of the process. I think that sort of thing is very important. You need to research and really look at that in terms of figures. I see at the coalface what is happening to these boys, but I am flat chat balancing everything. Teaching is an extremely difficult job to do well, and to balance that with running this sort of program, I have not got a hope of covering many of the other bases that I would like to see covered. We have boys come to us all the time, and we are having to say no to them because we had to make a decision to turn the focus from the immediate boys we were working with and go out into the community and spend our time talking to people and saying, 'This is something that we have been working on for many years. Can we look at having it researched? Can we look at having it piloted? Can we look at having research done on this? Can we look at having it extended?' That is our focus now and just that side of things is a full-time job in itself.

Evidence was then taken in camera, but later resumed in public—

CHAIR—We could have sat here all day! I have to be honest and say that you have given us a good insight. We appreciate your honesty. We wish you all the best. I can imagine the

workload on your shoulders. We appreciate that you have come here and given us such a valuable submission.

Mr Fleming—We know the voice of a lot of inarticulate boys, and someone has to be that voice.

CHAIR—We appreciate it. Thank you very much for coming before the committee. All the best, Greg. You have turned out great, mate!

Resolved (on motion by **Ms Gillard**):

That this committee authorises publication, including publication on the parliamentary database, of the proof transcript of the evidence given before it at public hearing this day.

Committee adjourned at 11.05 a.m.