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Queensland State Service Union

REF: LMJG/KM

18th October 1989

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The Hon. B.A. Nelson, M.L.A.,
 Minister for Family Services,
 Parliament House,
 BRISBANE 4000

Date: 3.12.2012

Exhibit number: 74

Dear Mrs Nelson,

I enclose herewith a submission and attachments relative to shortcomings which have become evident at the John Oxley Youth Centre.

You will note that the submission goes to the following points :-

- ✓ Role of the Centre
- ✓ Personal safety of staff
- Adequacy of staffing *Staff ratios.*
- Structure of the Centre and its amenities *(physical)*
- Staff training

These matters have been the subject of expressions of concern on the part of our members and those of other unions employed at the Centre for some months. They are deserving of the urgent attention of yourself and your Department and I feel confident that you will apply your best offices to the resolution of the concern expressed within the submission.

Yours faithfully,

L.M.J. GILLESPIE,
GENERAL SECRETARY.

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John Oxley Youth Centre was purpose built for the mixed living of children committed to the Care and Control of the Director-General, Department of Family Services. The original Centre program description states that "... children who may be excluded from the Centre are those who have or are -

- . extremely aggressive behaviour patterns
- . extremely poor interactional skills or no potential to develop better skills
- . high absconding risks
- . some sexual offenders

The same program description also states "The John Oxley Youth Centre will not have a remand, receiving or transit function. These functions will be retained Sir Leslie Wilson Youth Centre". (See attached copy.)

Since the opening of John Oxley Youth Centre, the above functions have altered, thereby changing the needs of the client population.

John Oxley Youth Centre now -

- . admits all boys under fifteen years of age committed to Care and Control and deemed as needing custody
- . admits all girls ten to seventeen years of age, whether remanded or committed, deemed as needing custody
- . clearly has a remand, receiving and transit function for those girls on remand
- . from time to time admits boys ten to fifteen years of age on remand - this occurs when other facilities are full

The change in function has obviously altered the client population and their attendant personality components. This change has stretched the range of services that need to be provided, altered the security needs of the Centre and placed greater demands upon workers than had been intended.

Since the Centre opened, there have been increasing demands on both staff and the building. To allow the Centre to adequately perform its present function and allow for further development, the following issues appear to be the most pressing.

Increased Personal Safety:

- 1 The alarm system at John Oxley Youth Centre was to be completed by the end of March 1989. It is over six months later and the alarm system has not been completed and there appears to be a major problem with the sensors being too strong, thus causing overlapping and sensors being too weak, causing duress calls not to be registered.
- 2 Locks and doors have been causing problems since the Centre opened and continue to do so.
- 3 A Time Out room is needed in lower detention so that we do not need to negotiate steps while containing struggling children to get them to the Time Out room in upper detention.

- 4 An isolation area is needed in the Centre so that children who are very disruptive and incite other children to riot can be placed in a secure contained and caring area. Such facilities are available at Westbrook Youth Centre and Sir Leslie Wilson Youth Centre.
- 5 Additional lighting is required in the Semi-Secure Yard and Secure Yard, which can be put on when we suspect that there are intruders on the premises.
- 6 Communications equipment is required in each of the Centre's cars as well as communications equipment which can be carried by us when supervising residents in the Semi-Secure Yard, as well as when we are completing searches. Currently, there is no adequate communications equipment and searches for residents who abscond are totally unorganized.
- 7 Each living section at John Oxley Youth Centre (Blaxland, Lawson, Wentworth) has seven single rooms and one triple room. It has been proven beyond any doubt that residents can only be contained in single room accommodation. We therefore believe that the maximum capacity of John Oxley Youth Centre should be twenty-four residents until the triple bedrooms are converted into single bedrooms.
- 8 John Oxley Youth Centre is located at Wacol and in close proximity to two prisons, a security patients' hospital and a large psychiatric hospital. At night, it is very lonely and dark. Intruders have been found in the front of the premises and grave concern is held for the personal safety of staff at change of shift at 11.00pm. There would be minimal cost in employing a security guard from 10.50pm till 11.10pm to ensure the safety of staff. Security firms advise that this service could be supplied for approximately \$ 4 000 per year. It is also considered that the minimal expense involved in electronic gates to the carpark and the front of the Centre warrants their installation.
- 9 Given some of the physical shortcomings of the building and the change in function at John Oxley Youth Centre, we believe there is an urgent need for the staff structure to be reviewed. We also believe that extra staff are required if we and residents are to have a safe working and living environment. We believe review of staffing levels should be conducted immediately and review recommendations implemented.
- 10 The need for a review of training procedures -
Currently, the Youth Worker Award states that "progression beyond the third year salary level shall be dependent upon the employee satisfactorily completing the Departmental In-Service Residential Care Certificate Course or the possession of qualifications which, in the opinion of the Assistant Commissioner of the Public Service Board and Chief Executive Officer, Department of the Public Service Board, are equivalent.

A large part of this In-Service training is carried out in Youth Workers' own time. This is unsatisfactory in that shift workers need more leisure time to recover from shifts and take three years to complete a course which includes knowledge and skills they are expected to use from the first day of service.

- 11 There is not other formal training available for other categories of staff within the Centre.

A combined Unions meeting held on 27 February 1989 resolved that a proposal regarding training needs be prepared and sent to Gary Clarke. A copy of this proposal is attached. No feedback has been received to date.

- 12 The need for an integrated approach to training for all categories of staff at John Oxley Youth Centre -
The needs of all staff at John Oxley Youth Centre are different to training required in the rest of the Department. A co-ordinated training program similar to those now introduced into the regional structure of the Department is proposed. That is, creation of a training co-ordinator position.