

Jeff Hanitzky  
Psychologist  
John Oxley Youth Centre

P. Coyne  
Manager  
John Oxley Youth Centre

Re: Educational Outing 24.5.88

On 24.5.88 I left John Oxley Youth Centre at 8.15am for a day outing at the Lower Portals via Rathdowney. I travelled to the Lower Portals car park with Gordon Cooper (teacher), Bob O'Hanley (teacher), [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (residents), in the Centres mini-bus. We were followed by Karen Mersiadis (teacher), Sarah Moynihan (youth worker), Annette Harding, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] (residents).

When we reached the Lower Portals car park at approximately 10am we alighted from the bus, joined the others and began the walk to the Lower Portals. On the way down the group became spread out because the children were excited and travelling at different speeds. I attempted to maintain contact with all the party members but eventually stayed with [REDACTED], [REDACTED], [REDACTED], Sarah and Karen in a separate party at the rear.

We reached a river and took an incorrect turn. After walking for about a kilometre we decided that we were going in the wrong direction, turned around and headed back to the river crossing.

At the river crossing we took another path and reached the Lower Portals at approximately 12.10pm.

When we reached the Lower Portals I discovered that the other group, Bob O'Hanley, Gordon Cooper, [REDACTED], Annette Harding, [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] had already had lunch and were off exploring the area. Annette had apparently fallen in the river and had removed her jeans. She had a jumper wrapped around her waist. I am unsure how that occurred.

I sat down to have lunch with [REDACTED] and Sarah Moynihan. [REDACTED] had gone to join the other children playing in rock pools about 10 metres away.

When I completed lunch I noticed that the children were out of sight. I decided to go and ascertain their whereabouts. I headed off in the direction of where I last noticed the children playing. A period of about 10 minutes had elapsed. I had a good look around and foraged through nearby bushes before returning to express my concerns to the rest of the group about not being able to locate the children before heading off to search for them.

Gordon Cooper and myself scaled a nearby small hill in search of the children. When I got to the top of the hill all the children were standing in a group. I do not think they heard me coming. Annette Harding and [REDACTED] were standing up embracing. I enquired as to what the group was doing. Annette ran over to me and the rest of the group began to point out a further hill that they claimed to have scaled. Annette did not appear unsettled. I then admonished the children for disappearing and mustered them back down to the main party. The total time elapsed from the time I sat down to have lunch and the time that I located the children at the top of the hill was about 15 - 20 minutes. (This includes searching time).

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My suspicions were aroused about possible sexual contact between the children while they were missing when I saw them on top of the mountain. My brief investigation there failed to prove this hypothesis.

While we were walking back to the car park, I kept close surveillance on [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted]. Towards the end of the track [redacted], [redacted] and myself paused to allow Sarah, Karen and Annette and [redacted] to catch up. During this pause the 4 boys were talking about sexual activity with Annette. Whilst this talk was similar to the talk that these boys would engage in, in their normal conversation, combined with the fact that they had spent some time missing, my suspicions were further raised. Again I talked briefly with the boys about what happened while they were missing but they wouldn't answer my questions.

We resumed walking and a short time (5 minutes) after we reached the car park. The boys, [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted] went to the toilet. I went to discuss my suspicions with the remainder of the staff who were approximately 25 metres from the toilet block.

Bob O'Hanley then went to the toilet to check on the boys. He returned to the group saying that they were gone.

I ran over in the company of Karen Merslades and we began to call to the boys to return. Although we could hear the children in the bush, we were unable to pinpoint their exact location. I decided against pursuing them, as it was late in the day and I feared that they could become lost in the scrub for the night. I decided it was better to prevent that than pursue them. After yelling general instructions to the boys to make sure they were not going to wander deeper into the bush and get lost I returned to the car park and instructed Bob O'Hanley and Gordon Cooper to drive to the nearest police station with the remaining 3 children and alert them.


While Gordon and Bob were away doing that I spent about 1½ hours scouring the bush and retracing our steps looking for the boys.

At approximately 4.30pm a police officer arrived with the 4 boys in the back of his car. Sarah, Karen, the 4 boys, [redacted], [redacted] and [redacted] and myself drove back to John Oxley Youth Centre.

We arrived at John Oxley Youth Centre at approximately 6.45pm. On arrival the boys were very aggressive and non compliant. I phoned Peter Coyne, Manager at home about the outing and he came to the Centre arriving about 7.15pm.

A meeting was held immediately between Peter Coyne, Sarah Moynihan, Karen Merslades and myself at which we discussed the events of the day and my concerns and suspicions. A decision was made that the suspicions of sexual activity would be investigated as early as possible on the 25.5.88.

I then went home at approximately 9.15pm.



Jeff Manitzky (Psychologist)