

...About Woomera

Debbie Whitmont penetrates the secrecy that has shrouded the Woomera detention centre, revealing its traumatic impact on both staff and detainees.

(PROTESTORS ON ROOF OF BUILDING WAVE BANNER: "WE REFUGEES HAVE REQUEST - FROM AUSTRALIAN PEOPLE FOR HELP")

PROTESTORS: Yes, yes, freedom!

DEBBIE WHITMONT, REPORTER: These pictures were filmed by guards at Woomera Detention Centre in February last year. They show scenes children, adults and staff witnessed, sometimes daily, in an Australian detention centre. For Woomera, this isn't an unusual day. There are demonstrations in three of the compounds and, here, a 19-year-old Afghan man has climbed into the razor wire.

MALE GUARD: Just got a CERT going on up here...it's been going for a while. Got people up on roofs of buildings in three compounds. One's crawled inside the razor wire up on top of the fence, he's just sitting there.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: The man on the razor wire says that if he can't see the Department of Immigration about his visa, he'll kill himself. He starts cutting his arms with a razor.

MAN ON WIRE: Killing myself. Killing. (Screams)

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Somewhere else, a woman has tried poisoning herself with fly spray and a 13-year-old boy has drunk shampoo.

MAN: There's one coming up who drank something. It's fly spray or Aeroguard. Medical One, November Three. Yeah, there's another one coming, small child.

MAN ON WIRE: Take off your camera, motherfucker.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: A group of adults and children stands by as the man above them cuts himself.

FEMALE GUARD: CERT one has just been called for a resident hanging in razor wire.

(DETAINEES CLASH WITH GUARDS AS MAN HANGS ABOVE IN WIRE)

WOMAN: Go away, children, go away. It's not for you. Go and play. It's not for children.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Last month, Woomera was closed. In the end, 80% of those detained there were found to be genuine refugees and given temporary visas. Many who worked at the centre say they were pressured to stay silent about what they saw and did. Its only now that the full story is starting to be told.

ROWENA HENSON, NURSE, 2000: There seemed to be no accountability, uh...that they had...they seemed to have laws, rules of their own, that they could bend and break. It was very secretive.

ALLAN CLIFTON, OPERATIONS MANAGER, 2000-2001: I think it's as simple as saving money. ACM's a private company. At the end of the day, the bottom line is how many dollars they've made. I think yeah, definitely, it's all about saving money, making money.

MAN: We are human, not animals.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Tonight on Four Corners, key staff, including a senior manager, speak out for the first time. They tell a story of mismanagement, lies, cover-ups and relentless trauma.

It's January 2002. For one man, it's the day he's been waiting for. He's just been given a visa.

FEMALE GUARD: There's one Afghani resident here who's just received a visa.

MALE GUARD: Yeah. Yeah. Come on, Kernadad. Come on, mate. Come on. Thanks very much. He's been ready since 7:20. Come on by.

FEMALE GUARD: Give them all a wave. He's a happy man. He's just got his double visa.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: But on this day, this celebration is an exception. Across the compound, most of Woomera's Afghan detainees are on hunger strike.

(GUARDS APPROACH HUNGER-STRIKER LYING UNRESPONSIVE ON GROUND)

GUARD 1: Hey, come on, wake up. Excuse me.

GUARD 2: (Feels man's clothing) He's drenched.

GUARD 1: Can you try and wake him up for me, please?

GUARD 2: Musta. Musta.

GUARD 1: Do you want me to call for a stretcher? Stretcher? Medical?

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Over its three-year history, some of Woomera's worst hunger strikes were reported in the media. But others weren't. And pictures like these were never shown to the public.

This hunger strike has gone on for nearly a week. It has a specific cause. It's three months since the US attacked the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Department of Immigration has stopped processing most visas for Afghans. They've been trying to find out what will happen to them. But there's been no answer.

(GUARD APPROACHES MAN ON HUNGER STRIKE)

GUARD: Do you need any water, food?

MAN: Freedom.

GUARD: Freedom. I cannot grant you that. I can give you food, water and medical assistance if you require it.

MAN: Visa.

GUARD: I cannot give you a visa. It's out of my power. What about medical assistance? Do you need any medical assistance?

MAN: No.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: There are now 189 people on hunger strike. 62 have sewn their lips together, including two women and five children. ACM staff making this video are clearly disturbed by what they're seeing.

WOMAN: Absolutely heartbreaking.

ALLEY CRACE, WELFARE OFFICER, 1999-2001: Just basically, I see the compound all the time. I see hundreds and hundreds of people begging and crying, and I see people dehydrating in the sun. I see people with sewn lips and buried in the ground, 'cause that's what they did. I see people slashed up and cut their throats and their arms.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Alley Crace worked at Woomera for two years. It's only now she feels able to talk about it. She began as an office assistant when the centre first opened.

ALLEY CRACE: There was better block buildings and a few demountables and very limited toilets and, uh...laundry facilities for, you know, a large amount of people.

U.S. ADVERTISEMENT: In Australia, Wackenhut Corrections has a wholly owned subsidiary doing business under the name of Australasian Correctional Management, with offices in downtown Sydney.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Australian Correctional Management or ACM is a subsidiary of Wackenhut, the second largest detention company in America. In Australia, ACM runs four private prisons. In 1997, the Department of Immigration or DIMA and later, DIMIA - gave ACM the contract for its new detention centres.

Woomera was built out in the desert, five hours from the nearest city and at the end of a closed road. In summer, temperatures often passed 50 degrees Centigrade.

PHILLIP RUDDOCK, MINISTER FOR IMMIGRATION: We will be briefing people when they come in here on the nature of the facility, the environment in which it's been placed. It's not a holiday camp, nor should it be seen as one.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Within weeks, the centre, set up for 400 people, was overwhelmed by nearly 1,000. As each one arrived, they had to be processed within 48 hours. There were only three people to do it.

ALLEY CRACE: Many of the refugees came with lice, scabies, and they were dehydrated. They did have diseases, such as malaria and things like that, and they were quite sick. So, in this 48-hour process, they were collapsing and fainting and vomiting and all that sort of stuff.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: There were two nurses, and Alley - who had no medical qualifications. If they didn't process everyone within 48 hours, ACM would be penalised.

ALLEY CRACE: The consequences, from my understanding, were there would be fines to ACM - Australian Correctional Management - for not doing the needs assessments in that time.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Money...money penalties?

ALLEY CRACE: I believe so, yeah.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: The detainees were sick and exhausted. Staff had no filing system, no set procedures, no official interpreters.

ALLEY CRACE: There were people missed that had disabilities. There was an incidence where there was a child with cerebral palsy that wasn't detected for three or four weeks later. And a child that had a heart condition that we didn't pick up until later, things like that.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: By April 2000, Woomera had nearly 1,500 detainees.

ALLEY CRACE: You're talking over 1,500 people living in that compound, with, you know, maybe two washing machines or three washing machines and five toilets. Um...no communication being passed to them about what's going on or what's going to happen to them. And not enough...no resources or facilities set up for them to actually keep busy.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Even so, at first, detainees were hopeful they'd soon be given visas. And staff did their best to make daily life normal. Alley Crace, by now promoted to welfare officer, set up a makeshift school and a prayer area and ran sewing classes for women.

Rowena Henson was one of Woomera's first nurses.

ROWENA HENSON: There was a lot of beautiful people there, a lot of people, both officers and nurses, who really wanted to do the best for these people.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: But after a few months, with little news about visas, some detainees broke down. Families splintered. The centre was gripped by rumour, uncertainty and people's fears about their future.

ALLEY CRACE: A lot of them had come with major trauma already from wherever - from the Taliban and from Saddam Hussein's regimes and things like that, and they had no outlet. So we had several people that would self-harm with cigarette burns, glass. They'd break glass and threaten to slash themselves.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In early 2000, Woomera brought in a suicide-watch system used by ACM in its prisons. Its called HRAT - the High Risk Assessment Team. People at risk of self-harm were put on periodic observations from every 2 hours to every 2 minutes. The observations were supposed to be done by guards. But often there weren't enough of them to do it properly. A man who had cut himself was put on HRAT. Whilst supposedly under observation, he set himself on fire.

Why was that? What happened?

ALLEY CRACE: Lack of staff, lack of, um... There was not enough staff there to actually follow through, to have someone sit and watch this person.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In April 2000, after a long career in private prisons, Allan Clifton became ACM's Woomera Operations Manager. Clifton stayed 16 months. But Woomera took its toll on his health and his state of mind. He believes its traumas will have a long-term impact, not only on detainees, but also on many staff.

ALLAN CLIFTON: You can't walk away from a place like this and forget it. The riots, the frustration, the lack of support from head office, seeing strong people break down - and I'm talking about detainees and staff. Seeing people change over a very short period of time, knowing that those people would never be the same people again.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: When Clifton arrived, he found Woomera short of staff, totally lacking in fire-fighting equipment and with only enough riot gear for six officers. He complained to ACM management.

ALLAN CLIFTON: I passed on my concerns to head office and was basically told not to worry about it, I was just being paranoid, I come from a correctional background. "You're too paranoid. Don't worry about it, nothing will happen."

DEBBIE WHITMONT: By then, many people had spent nearly six months in detention. Some hadn't been interviewed at all, some were getting rejection letters they couldn't understand. They began to protest. Detainee delegates asked to meet with the Department of Immigration.

ALLEY CRACE: So we had one meeting - a delegates' meeting - where Immigration did come, and there was lots of swear words and fighting and um...

DEBBIE WHITMONT: How was the process explained to people? How were the delays explained?

ALLEY CRACE: That they should be grateful that they were in Australia, that they are being looked after in good conditions, and that we were not responsible for them coming here, and that the process will take as f'n long as it will. And, um...basically, just a very abusive degrading information to the residents.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Do you think that marked a change, a turning point?

ALLEY CRACE: Huge change. That's a month later was when we had the escape to Woomera city centre.

ALLAN CLIFTON: We actually found the plans of, um...the road into Woomera and Woomera township. This information was passed on and, once again, I was told, "You're just being too paranoid about this. Don't worry about it. Get on with your job." And, of course, around midnight on a particular night they escaped.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Where did you pass on the information?

ALLAN CLIFTON: Head office.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In June 2000, 400 detainees pushed over a fence and marched into Woomera township. There weren't enough staff to stop them, or to get them back to the centre.

ALLAN CLIFTON: There was nothing we could do. We didn't have the resources to do anything.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: And what was Sydney saying about this?

ALLAN CLIFTON: At the time of the escape, Sydney was panicking.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: The escape lasted two days. Several guards were injured. Finally, ACM flew in extra staff and detainees were forced back to the centre.

Could the escape have been prevented, do you think?

ALLEY CRACE: 100%. (Laughs) I don't think you should say 100%, but information was given to Immigration and ACM management to avoid... They were fully aware the break-out was going to happen.

ALLAN CLIFTON: I guess the big thing was lack of support from anyone higher up, so we weren't able to prepare. And, well, we didn't have enough staff to prepare, anyway. We had only around 75 to 80 staff - operational staff at that point in time.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: For how many detainees?

ALLAN CLIFTON: 1,400. Approximately 1,400.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Consistently low staffing levels would have a critical impact on the way the centre was run and on ACM's profits. DIMA paid ACM according to the services delivered, the number of detainees in the centre and the expectation of an adequate number of staff for those detainees. ACM called that staffing level the Full Time Equivalent, or FTE.

ALLAN CLIFTON: In the times that I was there we hardly ever had a full FTE. In other words, we hardly ever had the required number of staff that I might add that ACM were getting paid for by DIMA...DIMIA.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: And how did that happen? Were they sending in reports on how many staff they had?

ALLAN CLIFTON: They would send in reports stating that we had the required number of staff when in fact we didn't and quite often we were told at a local level to fudge the figures. In other words, if we were asked by the local DIMA business manager we would say yes, we had enough staff, we had the required number of staff. At times we got down to where we were 40, 50, 60 staff below the number that we were supposed to have and, I guess, more importantly, the number of staff that ACM were getting paid to have on the ground.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Did you ever yourself fill out a staff report on numbers specifying the accurate number, the truthful number?

ALLAN CLIFTON: No. I didn't. I was directed not to. We were expressly directed not to report the accurate numbers.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Who directed you...to do that?

ALLAN CLIFTON: Um, centre manager, but I also was aware that he had been directed to pass that down the line.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: From above?

ALLAN CLIFTON: From above. From Sydney.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: There's little doubt that at least some in the Department of Immigration were well aware of the true staff levels.

There was a DIMA person at the centre?

ALLAN CLIFTON: A DIMA business manager and his assistants, other staff that worked for him.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Would he have been aware of that situation?

ALLAN CLIFTON: Um, he was aware and he raised that situation with centre management on quite a number of occasions.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: And what response did he get ?

ALLAN CLIFTON: The response was basically a fudge, a gloss-over of what was currently taking place.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: To your knowledge, did that DIMA person raise that with DIMA people above him?

ALLAN CLIFTON: I am aware that from time to time he raised that with DIMA people above him as was his duty, his duty to do that.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Are you saying that senior ACM management were aware that the staffing levels were being misrepresented and so was senior DIMA management ?

ALLAN CLIFTON: Exactly.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In Sydney and Canberra?

ALLAN CLIFTON: Sydney and Canberra, yeah.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Clifton raised the staffing problem with ACM's managing director in Sydney.

ALLAN CLIFTON: We'd breached unsafe staffing levels. We just did not have enough staff to adequately maintain the security of the centre, and just as importantly maintain the security and wellbeing of the detainees and the staff. Um, I had a lengthy conversation with the managing director about this, expressed my concerns quite clearly. And, er, he quite clearly told me that I didn't know what I was talking about and that the FTE or the Full Time Equivalent was a number that he'd pulled out of his arse to satisfy DIMA.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Four Corners put that allegation to the then managing director concerned. He said he couldn't recall that conversation.

In early- to mid-2000 as detainee numbers peaked and frustrations grew, Woomera became ACM's most profitable detention centre.

ALLAN CLIFTON: I have heard that in the very early days that Woomera was making around a million dollars a month.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: That estimate could be conservative. This report from the centre manager in April 2000 boasts a so-called "positive variance" of \$1.92 million above budgeted profit. And ACM didn't need to use its profits to improve facilities. They were supposed to be provided by the Department of Immigration.

ALLEY CRACE: The plumbing and sewerage was a major issue. It was leaking and it was in a bad way. There was no lighting for the women's toilets, women weren't getting any sanitary needs for their menstrual cycles, things like this.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In August 2000, detainees rioted.

(DETAINEES YELL ABUSE, THROW ROCKS. GUARDS DISCUSS CONTROL MEASURES OVER RADIO)

These ACM pictures have never been shown publicly. It was the first time a water cannon was used in Australia. 32 guards and an unknown number of detainees were injured. Allan Clifton was in charge of Operations.

ALLAN CLIFTON: It was like a war zone, I guess. I did not have enough staff, and at one stage we came very close to losing the, er, entire centre. I was actually being advised by other people that we should pull out and just walk away.

(DETAINEES PELT GUARDS WITH ROCKS)

MAN ON RADIO: And it appears that block 136 is burning at the moment as well as the education buildings, over.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: But according to Clifton, the riot - like the escape - could have been avoided. He says its catalyst was ACM's intransigence. The day before the riot, there'd been a protest in the main compound.

ALLAN CLIFTON: As a result of that, we thought it best to move some of the ringleaders from the main compound to the management unit. We did that and I think we removed around 20 to 25. And, as often happens in that case, you will pick up the ringleaders, but you also may pick up some people that were not involved in it.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Detainee spokesmen told managers that two of the people picked out hadn't been involved in the protest. They wanted those two - and only those two - released.

ALLAN CLIFTON: I thought that was a fair enough request. I passed on those, um, concerns and issues to Sydney and, er, I was told that ACM doesn't back down, ACM doesn't give in, I was being "fucking paranoid", I should know better and just get out there and take them on. I said, "There will be a riot. We may lose. We don't have enough staff. There'll be a number of staff injuries." I was told to

stop being, once again, to "Stop being so fucking paranoid. Take them on, because we're not going to back down." The end result was that I went back and had to pass on these...thoughts, but not in those words, to, um, the people that I'd been negotiating with. They apologised, thanked me for doing the best that I could do. Within 15 minutes, we had a riot in the main compound.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: When that riot ended, there was a new group of ringleaders to pull out of the compound. Guards went in in riot gear.

ALLAN CLIFTON: Detainees were waiting for us, large numbers of detainees were waiting. The teams were very lucky to get out in one piece. Women and children in the compound have been exposed to this too. That then escalated into a full-scale riot.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: It was then that ACM brought out the tear gas and water cannon. Reinforcements were flown in from other centres and jails. After a full day, Clifton and Woomera's DIMIA manager negotiated with detainees and the riot ended. Clifton wrote a report. He was directed not to mention his phone call to ACM in Sydney.

What were you directed?

ALLAN CLIFTON: To leave the phone call.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Out?

ALLAN CLIFTON: Out of the report.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Where did that direction come from?

ALLAN CLIFTON: The direction came from the centre manager.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In Woomera?

ALLAN CLIFTON: In Woomera.

ALLAN CLIFTON: Yeah, my centre manager, my immediate superior.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: And do you believe he in turn was directed?

ALLAN CLIFTON: Yeah, I believe that he in turn was directed.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: The centre manager concerned refused to talk to Four Corners. But other ACM staff who did talk told us the company had little financial incentive to avoid disturbances.

ALLAN CLIFTON: Basically everything that we needed, would be, at the end of the day, be paid for by DIMA. For whatever material we might need, whatever resources we might need, we would then on-bill. We would buy it, on-bill DIMA.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In the early days, that on-billing included charging for extra staff if they were needed. And the extra staff, billed at more than twice the normal rate, left ACM room for a profit.

ALLAN CLIFTON: So if we had an incident, it would be fair to say that ACM would make a profit out of it.

MALE GUARD: Where are they getting all these rocks from? Unbelievable! See what they're doing?

FEMALE GUARD: See the buildings, the brick buildings? They're smashing them with the posts.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Damage from the August 2000 riot was said to total millions of dollars. The government put the blame solely on detainees.

PHILLIP RUDDOCK: We will not succumb to any pressure in relation to people who have no entitlement to be released into the Australian community.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: After the escape and the riot, relations between many detainees and guards deteriorated.

ALLAN CLIFTON: That was one of my concerns. At times, they would be in a situation where they would feel that the detainees were the real enemy and they couldn't look past that. They couldn't also appreciate detainee frustrations as well.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Psych nurse Peter Ostarek-Gammon was at Woomera during and after the riot.

PETER OSTAREK-GAMMON, PSYCHIATRIC NURSE, 2000-2001: Yeah, well, there was a lot of anger from the officers and the management, a lot of anger directed towards the detainees.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Mark Huxstep says detainees were locked in their dongas, or cabins, for hours on end.

MARK HUXSTEP, NURSE 2000-2001: Lockdowns. Um...head counts. "Everybody in their donga. Nobody's to leave until every head's counted." No set time. No set number of times per day. Any hour of the day or night and as many times as they liked.

PETER OSTAREK-GAMMON: In fact, some of them were not just locked into their dongas, but they were drilled in. The doors were drilled closed.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Did you see that?

PETER OSTAREK-GAMMON: I did see that, yeah. Another nurse and myself actually had to visit one of those guys one day and they had to get an electric drill to open the cabin.

(MEDICAL STAFF ATTEND PATIENTS)

WOMAN: At one time, we've had up to 25 residents in the medical centre. Yeah, I'll hang over this other bag and then bring you the drip stand.

WOMAN 2: Got another drip stand?

WOMAN 1: I'm hanging this bag up. And I'll give you the drip stand from that one, OK?

WOMAN 3: Do you know where this guy can go?

MAN: Is he still out there?

MAN 2: Can we move this fellow out?

WOMAN: There's another patient in the immunisation room.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: This is Woomera's health centre, videoed last year. It's so crowded, people are being treated in the corridor and on the floor. Even so, the facilities are new and clean. In earlier days, according to many nurses, the centre was filthy.

WOMAN: 18, 19, 20, 21. Uh... 22. A total of 22 residents in the medical centre.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Maree Quinn arrived at Woomera in January 2000. She found a nurse diagnosing and dispensing medicines in the mess hall.

MAREE QUINN, NURSE, 2000: It concerned me a lot because nurses don't do that. Nurses cannot give out a drug unless it's been authorised and written by a doctor.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Did you raise those concerns with management?

MAREE QUINN: I raised those concerns with the health manager. And she said, "This is a detention centre. "We are on Commonwealth ground and we can do what we like."

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Nurses who tried to do their job properly were under enormous pressure.

ROWENA HENSON: Well, the staffing levels were very inadequate. I was on my own on night shift. Uh...

DEBBIE WHITMONT: For how many people?

ROWENA HENSON: 1,300. 1,300 people. Possibly 1,400 people.

WOMAN: 23.31 medical centre. Multiple self-harms.

MAN: He's just taken shampoo, has he?

PATIENT: (Yells and struggles violently from bed) Don't touch me! Don't touch me!

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Through 2001 and 2002, with guards and medical staff both often stretched to their limit, Woomera's tension and frustration became overwhelming.

Four Corners has obtained the computer records of the thousands of official reports written by ACM over the last three years and given daily to the Department of Immigration. They document the relentlessness of hundreds and hundreds of self-harms and suicide attempts. Like this boy, who smashed his own head with a rock. And this 14-year-old girl who saw him do it cut herself and told staff she was frustrated with the Department of Immigration. Many who worked at Woomera told Four Corners it was that, the visa process, that caused most stress for detainees. In particular, the Refugee Review Tribunal was seen as arbitrary. Despite its name, each tribunal was made up of only one person. Some were lenient and some were harsh.

Dominic Meaney is a doctor.

DOMINIC MEANEY, DOCTOR, 2001: One person had a reputation for knocking back everybody. And these people'd be distraught because they happened, in the luck of the draw, to have had this person who had the reputation of knocking back everybody.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Many people got rejection letters written in English which they couldn't understand.

ALLEY CRAGE: They were begging at my feet to...to help them, and I didn't understand the legal document. I didn't have a clue what...what...what to do for them.

PETER OSTAREK-GAMMON: We'd actually had a memo come around to say we were, under no circumstances, to approach anybody in DIMA about any issues.

MAN: You will see. If I be rejected, you see on daytime...and I present...I present my body as, like, gift for ACM, for DIMA.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: People often told guards that if they didn't get a visa, they'd kill themselves. The guards couldn't help them with visas so they put them on HRAT - or High Risk Assessment observation. But often it was little help. In these pictures filmed last year, a man who has stitched his lips is already on two-hourly observations when guards are told he's slashed himself with a razor. Without watching him constantly, there's little the guards could have done to prevent it. But there weren't enough guards to constantly watch everyone who needed it. Last year, Federal Government auditors came to Woomera to see how the High Risk Assessment system was working. Glenda Koutroulis was at the centre.

GLENDA KOUTROULIS, PSYCHIATRIC NURSE, 2002: Prior to them coming, there was a frantic level of activity going on to get as many people off the High Risk Assessment Team, or High Risk Assessment, as possible.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Why was that?

GLENDA KOUTROULIS: Because the officers would be left looking like they weren't doing their work because they didn't have the means to be able to check on everyone that they were supposed to check on, according to the...the risk.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: So they had to make it look as though they were capable of complying with it?

GLENDA KOUTROULIS: Yeah.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Lyn Bender, a psychologist, says it's a miracle no-one died. She believes the main reason was that the centre was crowded.

LYN BENDER, PSYCHOLOGIST, 2002: One of the reasons these attempts were foiled is it's such an enclosed environment you're likely to be seen, and there was a strong imperative from the management to not have any fatalities. They were very worried about fatalities. They weren't so worried about actual harm, and they weren't worried about the detainees' state of mind either. It was widely known that ACM faced financial penalties if anyone died. As the High Risk Assessment system became increasingly overloaded, the measures used to stop people harming themselves became increasingly crude. These pictures show a man on High Risk Assessment at the end of 2001. The guard says that if he tries to harm himself again he'll have to take him to the police lock-up down the road in Woomera township.

GUARD: He's here on observation because he tried to hurt himself.

MAN: You get out now?

GUARD: The officers aren't going out. If he tries something again, I'll take him to the cells. They're full, but I will still take him.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Earlier this night, the man was found with a rubber cord around his neck trying to kill himself. Now the guard threatens him with handcuffs.

GUARD: If he tries it again, put him on the ground, get a set of handcuffs from our people - cuff him.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: When another detainee asks, "Why the handcuffs?" the answer is because there aren't enough staff to watch him properly.

MAN: Why?

GUARD: What?

MAN: Why?

GUARD: Because we don't have the staff tonight, you have to be watched because this... He has to be watched because this - end of story. You stay here tonight.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: This man was threatened with the police cells. Many others were actually taken.

GUARD: Relax tonight. You're staying in here tonight. If you make any more problems, I'll take you to the cells. And I don't want you to go to the cells.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: This young man has cut himself with a razor blade. The week before, he threatened to kill himself. After that, he was put in the police cells on two-minute observations. This time, once again after a self-harm, and though ACM's own reports suggest he's done nothing illegal, he's taken to the police cells for management.

Early on at Woomera, one case highlighted other concerns about the way some self-harmers were dealt with. In August 2000, a detainee who'd had bad news about his visa was in an isolation room on high-risk observations. He began banging his head against the wall. One of the two nurses on duty rang a local doctor who prescribed 100mg of Largactil, a powerful antipsychotic. Mark Huxstep thought the dose sounded high.

MARK HUXSTEP: She said, "No, that's fine. It's the doctor's order. We'll just give it." So she drew it up, she raced off. I had reservations, however. I got out a drug book and looked it up, and from what I could read it said 50mg was the maximum dose that should be given to an adult. This was twice that. So she raced away, she came back. She said, "They held him down while I injected him." Some time later, the guards brought him over to the detention centre and said, "He's not very well." He was quite pasty-coloured and sweaty and pale and clammy. His level of consciousness wasn't appropriate.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: The man, handcuffed throughout, had to be resuscitated. Mark Huxstep says that in the hospital where he now works, what happened that night would not have been allowed.

MARK HUXSTEP: So I don't think that was justified, no.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Why...if it wasn't justified medically, why would it be given?

MARK HUXSTEP: To restrain him.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: The man was sent to hospital in an ambulance. The next day, Huxstep wrote a report.

MARK HUXSTEP: I did it on the computer in the medical centre. I typed it up, um, printed off a copy, signed it, and sent a copy to the health centre manager, and put a copy in his medical notes.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: A few days later, Huxstep's report disappeared. He printed off another and filed it. In all, the report disappeared three times. Then the man was transferred to another detention centre.

MARK HUXSTEP: So infer what you will from that.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: What do you infer from that?

MARK HUXSTEP: Uh...they... You can't be liable for something there's no record of. So if there's no documentary evidence of breach of duty of care, you can't be held accountable for it.

(SCENES OF DETAINEES AT BREAKFAST: CHILDREN SMILE, KITCHEN WORKERS JOKE WITH CAMERA OPERATOR AND POSE FOR SHOTS)

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Over the years, many staff and detainees did their best to improve daily life at Woomera. By 2002, the kitchen was upgraded. Some detainees were allowed to work there.

Occasionally, the centre opened up for media tours or inspections by bodies like the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. But before they came, staff were groomed by ACM management on what could and couldn't be shown to them.

ALLAN CLIFTON: We always knew in advance that they were coming so we put on a show, so to speak, a charade. The place was dressed up. It was made to look like, "Yes, services were being provided." So for the day, two days, or however long they may have been there, we put on a charade.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: ACM was paid to run activities for children and adults. Staff did what they could, but often there weren't enough staff to do it properly or at all.

ALLAN CLIFTON: There was activities that were being reported as having been carried out for detainees - being taken out of the centre or whatever - when you knew those things hadn't happened. But we were pressured into reporting that these things had actually occurred.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: And ACM was being paid?

ALLAN CLIFTON: ACM was being paid for that. It was one of their contractual obligations to provide the required number of hours in all different areas. More often than not we weren't providing that service.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In 2001, before a press conference, ACM managers told Alley Crace there were some things she mustn't talk about.

Were you told to avoid things?

ALLEY CRACE: Anything to do with minors or unaccompanied minors, children, families.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: One of the biggest concerns about Woomera has been its impact on children.

BARBARA ROGALLA, NURSE: Sexual abuse of children certainly was quite an open secret there.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In late 2000, a former nurse claimed that a sexual assault on a child had been hushed up in the centre, but she had no direct evidence and two State Government inquiries found the claim unproven.

PHILLIP RUDDOCK: People drew all sorts of inappropriate conclusions which were fuelled by people who had no first-hand knowledge. No first-hand knowledge.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Now, for the first time, those at the centre of the scandal are speaking publicly. They say that ACM management not only covered up the case, but prevented the child getting the

medical help that a nurse said he needed.

ALLEY CRACE: I was very, very, very concerned that he was being sexually abused and used as a male prostitute.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: In February 2000, Alley Crace and others, including a guard, reported concerns, on several occasions, that a 12-year-old Iranian boy was being sexually assaulted by other detainees.

Was the matter brought to the attention of the upper centre management?

ALLEY CRACE: Yes. And Immigration. And they made smutty remarks.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: At the time, Alley Crace didn't report the case to the State Child Welfare Authority. Her bosses told her she didn't have to.

ALLEY CRACE: At that stage, I was told that because the people had no identity and that they weren't actual people in Australia, there was no needs, or necessities to report to Family and Community Services - as in FACS.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: For more than a month, nothing was done. Then, one night in mid-March, four guards brought the boy to the medical centre in a critical state. There are some medical details the nurse concerned cannot discuss on camera, for the sake of confidentiality.

ROWENA HENSON: They brought him to me in a visibly shaken state. They were saying to me that they had caught - or almost caught - him being sexually assaulted, that they believed that he had been sexually assaulted and they brought him to me for care. And before I knew it, guards and officers and the centre manager was there with his 2IC and they were taking over...what was to go on. I wanted to then get the boy to the hospital and to the doctor. That was my main aim, was to get the boy to the doctor - out of the detention centre and into the doctor in Woomera Hospital.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Did you say that's what you wanted?

ROWENA HENSON: Yes. Yes, I did, and I was prevented from doing that.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: By whom?

ROWENA HENSON: By the centre manager.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: What did he say to you?

ROWENA HENSON: He said that I was probably wrong and that he would take over the case, that he wanted to interview the boy, I didn't know what I was talking about. Um...and, er, he did - he took the boy into another room and interviewed him with another detainee who could speak the language.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: After that interview, the centre manager said nothing had happened to the boy - he was simply under a lot of stress.

ROWENA HENSON: I was very angry, we fought about it in the...in the clinic. Er, I wrote...while the interview was being done in the other room, I wrote out my incident report - the way I saw it - and he came out and read it and tore it up and threw it in the bin.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Rowena Henson was soon given the sack over another matter.

ALLEY CRACE: That specific file went missing very quickly.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Nearly a year later, an inquiry into procedures at Woomera found "possible interference" in the centre's record-keeping, but by then it was too late find out what had really happened to the boy, or to help him.

Did you feel intimidated by all of this?

ROWENA HENSON: Oh yes, yes. Very intimidated and confused, you know - that I felt in my heart I knew what was happening and that these people had told us that he was under watch, that for weeks, we watched this child through all of this problem and then when it was there in their faces, they didn't want it.

(HUNGER-STRIKING DETAINEES LIE ON MATTRESSES ON GROUND)

GUARD: You need any water?

MAN: No, thank you.

GUARD: Want any food? Anything? Need to go to Medical or anything?

(To second detainee) You need any water? Food?

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Those who starved or harmed themselves in Woomera weren't a small minority. And, ultimately, most were found to be genuine refugees and given temporary visas. ACM is filming this hunger strike to show they're providing food, water and medical assistance. But one man sees the camera as a chance to speak to people he's never met - ordinary Australians, outside Woomera.

MAN: We don't want to damage to anything to the DIMA, or we don't want to burn anything. This is a promise. Only we want to harm ourselves.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: He tries to explain that the detainees have nothing left to use but their bodies to plead their desperation.

MAN: We are crying, we are screaming. And we are all, "What to do?" We have nothing. This is what you want? This is Australia say to us? Please help us and listen as we are suffering inside. We don't want to make any rampage. We don't want any things to this. (Sobs) We all came from bad condition. We want help.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Many who worked at Woomera say they think of what they saw and had to do there every day of their lives. Today, in Adelaide, a group of ex-Woomera nurses lodged the first claim for damages against their former employer. And South Australian WorkCover claims for stress against ACM already total more than \$21 million.

ALLEY CRACE: I've seen children bashed. I've...I just... Every day, every day it's very clear in my mind. I see colleagues that I wish I could've helped more. Um...I see things that I wish I could've done a little bit better and I didn't. Women crying for their husbands when they're pregnant, giving birth to children and their husbands aren't allowed to go. I see children...at the fence, hanging off the fence, asking for freedom.

ALLAN CLIFTON: The good is the good staff that I worked with, the heroic staff, the brave staff, the compassionate staff. The things, the good things that we achieved.

Nightmares are of the riots that I've been involved in. Um...the blood that I've seen shed. The unnecessary violence I've seen during riots - buildings burning, kids crying out for help, women crying out for help, innocent people just wanting to be helped. And, you know, trying to get them that help. Of having to order staff to go in and do things where you weren't sure they would come out okay on the other side.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: Four Corners asked ACM for an interview. But after a week trying to negotiate with ACM, the company wouldn't record an interview in time for this program.

Those who spoke to Four Corners are still afraid of the pressures they will face for not staying silent. But they want the full story told - about Woomera and what happened there in the name of a government policy and the profits of a private company.

ALLAN CLIFTON: I don't believe we've heard the whole truth yet. I believe there's a need for an inquiry, an inquiry that is not hindered by any political red tape, that's free to go in asking questions that need to be asked, and, just as importantly, to receive the correct answers. I believe it's been a whole sorry event that probably did not need to occur the way it did occur.

DEBBIE WHITMONT: And there's more to tell?

ALLAN CLIFTON: I believe there's more to tell. And there's more that will come out in the years to come. There's a lot of people out there, detainees and staff that'll go through a lot of suffering yet.

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