

**Report of the Independent Inquiry Into**  
**Women's Artistic Gymnastics at**  
**the Australian Institute of Sport**

Hayden Opie

Historical Document

**November 1995**

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# CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY</b>		1
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>		5
<b>ABBREVIATIONS</b>		7
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>		8
<b>2 GYMNASIUM - ALLEGATIONS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE</b>		11
1. INTRODUCTION		11
a. No Systematic or Widespread Abuse at Any Time		11
b. Corporal Punishment		11
c. Coaching Methods and Physical Contact		11
2. HITTING		13
a. General		13
b. Smacking: Ms Jiang and Alyssa Harvey		14
c. Hitting: Mr Calton and Kate Lam		16
d. Hitting: Mr Calton and Renee Trentini		17
i. <i>Motivation for the Allegations Against Mr Calton</i>		18
ii. <i>The AGF Itinerant Coach Position</i>		19
iii. <i>The Circumstances of Renee Trentini's Gymnastics Career</i>		20
iv. <i>Blow to Renee Trentini's Lower Back</i>		22
e. Hitting: Mr Petrenko		25
f. Hitting: Mr Calton and Sonia Brown		26
3. CHAIR THROWING		27
a. General		27
b. Mrs Tian and Monique Allen		28
4. KICKING		32
a. General		32
b. Mrs Tian and Monique Allen		33
i. <i>Alleged Incident - 1988</i>		33
ii. <i>Alleged Incident - 1989</i>		36
iii. <i>Further Observations</i>		42
5. ROUGH HANDLING		43
a. General		43
b. Strapped to Horizontal Bar		43
i. <i>General</i>		43
ii. <i>Mr Lu Ming and Lisa McTiernan</i>		44
c. Shaking: Mr Calton and Renee Trentini		49
d. Repeated Pushing Into Foam Pit: Mr Calton and Renee Trentini		52
e. Repeated Forcing Through Backward Somersault: Mr Calton and Renee		59
f. Throwing: Mrs Tian and Unknown Gymnast		61
g. Pushing and Pulling		62
6. SEXUAL ABUSE		63

	a.	General	64
	b.	Previous Investigation	64
7.		RECOMMENDATIONS	66
<b>3</b>		<b>GYMNASIUM - ALLEGATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE</b>	<b>68</b>
	1.	INTRODUCTION	68
		a. Media Allegations	68
		b. No Abuse Found	69
	2.	LANGUAGE	70
		a. Introduction	70
		a. Swearing	70
		b. Name Calling	71
		i. <i>Lazy, Silly, Stupid</i>	71
		ii. <i>Fat Pig, Pig Feet</i>	74
	3.	ANGER AND INTIMIDATION	76
		a. Introduction	76
		b. Mrs Tian	78
		b. Other Coaches	83
	4.	SPECIFIC INCIDENTS	84
		a. Ruth Moniz and Vault at 1995 National Championships	84
		b. Renee Trentini, Kate Lam, the Spotting Box and Mr Mark Calton	86
		c. Renee Trentini - Being Ignored	88
<b>4</b>		<b>ACCESS TO SPORTS MEDICINE AND SPORTS SCIENCE SUPPORT</b>	<b>92</b>
	1.	INTRODUCTION	92
	2.	MEDICAL CARE	92
		a. Introduction	92
		b. Dr Peter Fricker	93
		c. Arrangements for Medical Care	93
		d. General Satisfaction With Medical Care	95
		e. Allegation of Inadequate Medical Care	95
		f. Alleged Denial of Access to Medical Care	98
	3.	SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY	100
		a. General	100
		b. Current Practice	101
		c. John Crampton - 1985-86	103
		d. Dr Fricker's Supervision - 1987-93	109
	4.	NUTRITION	111
		a. General	111
		i. <i>Media Allegations</i>	111
		ii. <i>Richardson Proceedings</i>	112
		b. Pre-March 1985	113
		c. Mid-1990 to Present	113
<b>5</b>		<b>FLUID BALANCE</b>	<b>115</b>
	1.	INTRODUCTION	115
	2.	CURRENT PRACTICE	115

	a.	Introduction .....	115
	b.	Access to Water .....	115
	c.	Practical Restrictions .....	117
	d.	Finding .....	118
3.		ALLEGATIONS OF PAST INAPPROPRIATE PRACTICES .....	118
	a.	1985-1988 .....	118
	b.	1988-1993 .....	127
	c.	Observations and Suggestion .....	134
4.		SPECIFIC ALLEGATIONS OF HARM .....	134
	a.	Monique Allen's Alleged Renal Failure .....	134
	b.	Constipation .....	137
6		PERFORMANCE ISSUES: WEIGHT AND TRAINING METHODS .....	138
	1.	INTRODUCTION .....	138
	2.	WEIGHT .....	138
	a.	Overview of Allegations .....	138
	b.	Content .....	138
	c.	Richardson Proceedings .....	139
	d.	Importance of Weight .....	140
		<i>i Three Reasons for the Importance of Weight</i> .....	140
		<i>ii Ethical and Legal Implications</i> .....	141
	e.	Monitoring .....	143
		<i>i Vision</i> .....	143
		<i>ii Weight</i> .....	143
		<i>iii Skinfold Test</i> .....	144
	f.	Response to Monitoring .....	145
		<i>i Reprimands</i> .....	145
		<i>ii Exercise</i> .....	146
		<i>iii Diet</i> .....	146
	g.	Sauna .....	148
		<i>i Media Allegations</i> .....	148
		<i>ii Current Practice</i> .....	148
		<i>iii 1986 Incidents</i> .....	149
		<i>iv Post 1987</i> .....	154
	h.	Reaction of Gymnasts to Issues of Weight .....	159
3.		HARSH TRAINING METHODS .....	161
	a.	The Nature of Gymnastics Training and the Inquiry's Terms of Reference .....	161
	b.	Some Aspects of Training in the AIS Gymnasium .....	162
	c.	Training Punishments .....	163
		<i>i Allegations</i> .....	163
		<i>ii AIS Practice</i> .....	163
		<i>iii AIS Practice in Operation</i> .....	164
		<i>iv Individual Incidents</i> .....	164
4.		TRAINING OR COMPETING WITH INJURY OR ILLNESS .....	169
	a.	Nature of the Allegations .....	169
	b.	Scope of the Investigation .....	169

	i.	<i>Access to Medical Records</i> .....	169
	ii.	<i>Minor Ailments and Injuries</i> .....	170
	c.	AIS Practice .....	170
	i.	<i>Nature and Explanation</i> .....	171
	ii.	<i>AIS Practice in Operation</i> .....	172
	iii.	<i>Individual Incidents</i> .....	173
5.		<b>PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS</b> .....	177
<b>7</b>		<b>THE RESIDENCE</b> .....	178
1.		<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	178
2.		<b>OVERVIEW OF ALLEGATIONS</b> .....	178
3.		<b>INCIDENTS NOT WITHIN THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE INQUIRY</b> .....	179
4.		<b>RESIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENTS</b> .....	181
	a.	Numbers in the Residence .....	181
	b.	Role of the Houseparents .....	182
	c.	Physical Accommodation .....	184
	d.	Description of the Daily Routine .....	185
	e.	Communication With Families .....	192
	f.	Some Aspects of Supervision .....	194
	g.	Social Activities .....	195
	h.	Governance .....	195
	i.	Meals .....	196
	j.	Study Hall and Tutoring .....	197
5.		<b>PROOF AND IMPORTANCE OF THE DESCRIPTION OF THE RESIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENTS</b> .....	199
6.		<b>SUPPORT FOR THE RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM</b> .....	201
7.		<b>ALLEGATIONS OF MISTREATMENT IN THE RESIDENCE</b> ..	207
	a.	Historical Matters .....	207
	b.	Alleged Neglect of Responsibilities by Mrs Allen .....	217
	i.	<i>Alleged Absence from Duty</i> .....	217
	ii.	<i>Alleged Neglect of Supervision at Night</i> .....	224
	iii.	<i>Alleged Personal Unsuitability of Mrs Allen</i> .....	230
	iv.	<i>Alleged Neglect to Arrange for Medical Care</i> ....	234
	v.	<i>Lack of Discipline, Particularly in Relation to Alleged Theft</i> .....	241
	vi.	<i>Alleged Secrecy</i> .....	252
	c.	Miscellaneous Incidents of Neglect or Mistreatment ..	261
	i.	<i>Trip from Melbourne</i> .....	261
	ii.	<i>Evening meal</i> .....	262
	iii.	<i>Room Changes</i> .....	265
	iv.	<i>Boredom</i> .....	265
	d.	Alleged Victimization .....	267
	i.	<i>Payback</i> .....	267
	ii.	<i>Miscellaneous</i> .....	272
	iv.	<i>Observations on the Circumstances of Selected Gymnasts</i> .....	276
	e.	Avoiding Houseparent/Gymnast Conflict .....	284

	f.	Selection Criteria for Houseparents .....	286
		<i>i. No Involvement With Gymnastics</i> .....	286
		<i>ii. Married Couple</i> .....	292
	g.	Inherent Nature of Residential System .....	293
<b>8</b>		<b>SCHOOLING</b> .....	
	1.	INTRODUCTION .....	300
	2.	PRIMARY SCHOOL (YEARS 3 TO 6) .....	301
	3.	HIGH SCHOOL (YEARS 7 TO 10) .....	307
	4.	COLLEGE (YEARS 11 TO 12) .....	312
	5.	ALLEGATIONS .....	314
		a. Historical Complaints .....	314
		b. Recent Allegations .....	316
<b>9</b>		<b>LIFESTYLE ISSUES</b> .....	323
	1.	INTRODUCTION .....	323
	2.	RESTRICTED SOCIAL ACTIVITIES .....	323
		a. General .....	323
		b. Boyfriends and Fraternisation With Boys .....	323
		<i>i. General</i> .....	323
		<i>ii. 1991 World Championships in Indianapolis, USA</i> .....	329
		<i>iii. Breach of Curfew and Absence Without Knowledge</i> .....	334
	3.	RESTRICTED RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES .....	335
		a. General .....	335
		b. Risky Physical Recreations .....	336
		c. Recreational Opportunities While on Tour .....	337
		<i>i. General</i> .....	337
		<i>ii. Barcelona Olympics 1992</i> .....	338
		<i>iii. Victoria, British Columbia Commonwealth Games</i> <i>1994</i> .....	340
		<i>iv. 1995 European Tour</i> .....	343
		<i>v. Edinburgh Commonwealth Games 1986</i> .....	345
		<i>vi. Usual Practice Regarding Outings</i> .....	345
		<i>vii. Not Allowed to View Videos and Kept in Hotel</i> <i>Rooms</i> .....	346
	4.	CONTACT WITH FAMILIES .....	348
		a. Holidays and Home Visits .....	348
		b. Communication With Families During Training Camps and Tours .....	350
	5.	MISCELLANEOUS .....	351
		a. Value System: Honesty .....	351
<b>APPENDIX A:</b>		<b>LIST OF SUBMISSIONS</b> .....	353
<b>APPENDIX B:</b>		<b>AUSTRALIAN SPORTS COMMISSION</b> <b>JOB DESCRIPTION</b> .....	356

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## SUMMARY

### Establishment of the Inquiry and Terms of Reference

In accordance with terms of reference dated 20 April 1995 given by the Federal Minister for Sport, Senator John Faulkner, an independent inquiry was conducted into allegations concerning the Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) women's artistic gymnastics program.

The allegations were about various forms of physical and psychological abuse including kicking and hitting, improper training practices, humiliation, and inappropriate treatment of gymnasts living in the AIS Residence. These allegations received wide and prominent publicity in the Australian media in the days preceding and the weeks following the announcement of the Inquiry on 19 April 1995.

The terms of reference of the Inquiry were:

1. to examine complaints made in relation to the treatment of young female athletes in the AIS gymnastics program;
2. to assess whether the complaints are substantiated and, if so, to determine whether or not the conduct and practices the subject of those complaints were appropriate in all the circumstances; and
3. where appropriate, as a result of the inquiry, to recommend any relevant changes to the operation of the AIS gymnastics program.

Mr Hayden Opie, the President of the Australian and New Zealand Sports Law Association, was appointed to conduct the Inquiry in private.

### Overview of Findings

Almost all allegations of abuse investigated by the Inquiry pursuant to its terms of reference have not been proven and the media reports of April and May 1995 must be regarded as greatly misleading. No systematic or widespread abuse of AIS female gymnasts has been found to occur at any time. The Inquiry did not find any credible evidence of inappropriate treatment of gymnasts currently in the program.

The Inquiry did find a handful of complaints of past inappropriate treatment to be proven. Which in the overall circumstances of the Inquiry are relatively minor. These related to the inappropriate use of the sauna in the first half of 1986 and to one incident of hitting and two incidents of rough handling of the one gymnast in late 1992 or early

1993 by a coach who was employed by the Australian Gymnastic Federation at the time. He was based in the AIS gymnasium but is no longer associated with the AIS. No physical injury was caused by that inappropriate treatment. An informal rule that the gymnasts not have boyfriends was found to be inappropriate, although this is not to suggest that existing rules about propriety in the Residence need to be changed.

The Inquiry is aware that Ms Jennifer Richardson who was an AIS gymnast during the latter part of 1986 and in 1987 has commenced legal proceedings against the Australian Sports Commission and AIS women's gymnastics head coach, Mrs Tian Ju Ping. This report does not purport to touch upon matters which may be the object of those proceedings.

### **Strong Support for the Inquiry**

The Inquiry received over 160 oral and written submissions from a broad spectrum of people associated with or having an interest in the sport of women's gymnastics. Submissions were received from or on behalf of about 50% of the gymnasts at the AIS in each year since 1985, with the exception of 1990 when the proportion was about 40%. The proportion for 1985 was about one third.

Strong support and co-operation was received from the AIS and from all sectors of the gymnastics community in Australia. Only one former AIS coach and two former gymnasts declined to be interviewed, but a submission was made on behalf of one of those gymnasts.

The Inquiry believes that it has been given sufficient information to pursue its investigations and reach conclusions about which it can be generally confident.

### **Scope of Allegations**

The Inquiry received numerous allegations of inappropriate conduct and practices relating to the varied aspects of the program. Allegations related to matters as far back as 1983.

At face value some of these allegations were very serious. Some came from people who might be expected to have intimate knowledge of the program and to be able to speak with authority. These people were former gymnasts and their families, some former AIS staff members associated with the gymnastics program and officials well placed in the sport.

Although Mrs Tian figured prominently in the media reports, allegations were made not only against her but against other present and past coaches and the current senior houseparent in the Residence, Mrs Robyn Allen.



Allegations concerned not only specific incidents but patterns of behaviour. To investigate these alleged patterns it became necessary to gather evidence from many people to determine whether other gymnasts had been affected.

This volume and complexity of allegations has accounted for the need to conduct an inquiry that was more far reaching than was originally expected to be necessary.

### **Observations on the Role of the Inquiry**

The issues and allegations which this Inquiry has been called on to consider ought to have been resolved on the gym floor or near it, and in the offices and meeting rooms of the AIS and the Australian gymnastics community. There is no single reason to blame for the failure to do so, and some reasons lie outside the control of the AIS. Inadequate communication and simple misunderstanding were common reasons. However, once the public allegations were made it became essential to hold an independent inquiry.

It is inescapable that there existed a body of past grievances and concerns about the AIS gymnastics program that had not been resolved. Some of these were dormant, others simmered and some were unknown to the AIS. Also, there existed suspicions about the current program which originated from old concerns.

Recent disagreements in the Australian gymnastics community regarding financial, technical and state issues were the catalyst for the grievances, concerns and suspicions relating to the AIS mentioned above to receive wide attention. It would be, however, overly simplistic to say that the complaints which appeared in the media and were made to the Inquiry arose entirely or even predominantly from current political issues in the sport.

Another observation is that the sport is very unusual because of the young age at which the best reach their peak. This leads to issues of great sensitivity about the welfare of the gymnasts.

These observations can give some direction to the role for this report. First, it will hopefully remove inaccurate perceptions about the program held by people in gymnastics and the wider community. It may also teach some to be more cautious before they leap to conclusions. Second, once the inaccurate perceptions are removed and if the AIS gymnastics program continues to be appropriately managed and issues of communication are addressed, the concerns which led to this Inquiry should not reappear. In turn, this suggests that major change at the AIS is not necessary. Issues of communication are identified in the body of the report.

### **Rhythmic Sportive Gymnastics**

A handful of submissions were received in relation to a former program for women's rhythmic sportive gymnastics conducted at the AIS in 1983 and 1984. The Inquiry did not regard this program as within its terms of reference. It was clearly not within the contemplation of the complaints which prompted the Inquiry. Therefore, this report does not deal with those submissions.

### **Scope of the Recommendations**

The reasoning, comments and views of the Inquiry on the various allegations and relevant factual material appear in the text of the individual chapters. Conclusions are set out there as well.

The Inquiry has made recommendations in four areas. These relate to:

1. establishing a protocol for the use of the sauna;
2. counselling of the coach responsible for the one incident of hitting and two incidents of rough handling of the gymnast mentioned above;
3. ensuring that there is no formal or informal rule against the gymnasts having boyfriends; and
4. designating a person on the AIS staff as a confidential counsellor for gymnasts and their families in the event that any problems they may experience cannot be resolved by other means available within the AIS, thereby building on steps already taken by the AIS in this direction.

The full text of the recommendations is set out in the report.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the AIS not permit Mr Calton to coach in the AIS gymnasium or to coach any AIS scholarship holder until he can establish to the reasonable satisfaction of a counsellor nominated by the Australian Sports Medicine Federation that he has successfully completed counselling
  - a. to ensure that he understands the inappropriate nature of his conduct as set out in Chapter 2, and
  - b. to enable him to identify and control any tendency toward repeating conduct of that general nature. **[paragraph 2.234]**
2. That Mr Calton's inappropriate conduct as set out in Chapter 2 be referred to the Australian Coaching Council and to the Australian Gymnastic Federation for such action as those organisations consider fit. **[paragraph 2.235]**
3. That a protocol be established for the use of the sauna bearing in mind its therapeutic and training benefits and possible abuses and dangers. The protocol needs to be established quickly and the Australian Coaching Council and the Australian Sports Medicine Federation should be consulted for appropriate medical, scientific and coaching advice. Once established, the protocol should be expressed in a set of rules and guidelines which can be clearly understood by gymnasts, families, houseparents and coaches. Procedures for publicising and enforcing the rules should be made. An ongoing education process should be established so that new arrivals at the AIS are aware of the position. **[paragraph 6.72]**
4. That a person be designated as a confidential counsellor for the gymnastics program. That person's role would be to be available to counsel gymnasts and their families in relation to any problems they may be experiencing with the program which cannot be conveniently dealt with in the other ways available. The confidential counsellor would be someone from within the AIS who is familiar with both the gymnastics program and the administration of the AIS. He or she would be available to listen to problems, suggest courses of action using his or her

knowledge of the gymnastics program and the AIS and, if requested, to take matters further in the AIS on behalf of the gymnast or family. Unless requested to take matters further, all communications with the counsellor would be confidential. The identity and role of the confidential counsellor should be set out in the handbook given to gymnasts and their families. A person from the AIS sports psychology or sports medicine sections with an interest in counselling would be an appropriate choice as confidential counsellor. **[paragraph 7.444]**

5. That the AIS ensure that there is no formal or informal rule against the gymnasts having boyfriends. **[paragraph 9.29]**

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AGF	Australian Gymnastic Federation
AIS	Australian Institute of Sport
ASC	Australian Sports Commission
VGA	Victorian Gymnastic Association
VIS	Victorian Institute of Sport
WAG	Women's artistic gymnastics
WAGA	Western Australian Gymnastic Association
WAIS	Western Australian Institute of Sport

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## 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 The purpose of this Introduction is to make some comments additional to those which appear in the Summary.

1.2 When this Inquiry was announced in April 1995, it was hoped that it might be completed within two months. As is explained in the Summary, it proved a very much larger undertaking than expected. Preparing this report in time to be tabled before the Parliament rises has meant that plans to include some background information and a statement of the course of the Inquiry have had to be abandoned. Also, it was hoped to provide short statements about the nature and structure of the sport of women's artistic gymnastics and about the Australian Institute of Sport and its coaching staff. Much valuable information was provided to the Inquiry by many people in that regard. While that information may not necessarily be referred to in the text of the report, it has informed the Inquiry's investigation and deliberations.

1.3 This Inquiry came at a time when serious questions are being asked about the sport itself. In a recent book, *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes* (1995), Joan Ryan has made allegations against gymnastics in the USA. At face value, many are most serious. Whether they are true is another matter. In some respects the book lays down a serious challenge to the sport.

1.4 This Inquiry has a different role. Under its terms of reference it has been required to examine complaints against the AIS within the context that the sport exists in a particular form.

1.5 The allegations which have been made are numerous. Some are serious, others much less so. In making decisions about those allegations, the Inquiry adopted the civil standard of proof, that is proof on a balance of probabilities. In this respect, the Inquiry is guided by the statement of the Honourable D J Stewart in paragraphs 1.22 to 1.26 of his report dated 19 December 1994 into Australian Soccer. He refers to the decision of the High Court of Australia in *Rejcek v McElroy* where the Court stated:

*the degree of satisfaction for which the civil standard of proof calls may vary according to the gravity of the fact to be proved.<sup>1</sup>*

1.6 The Inquiry was required to determine whether or not the conduct and practices which were the subject of established complaints were inappropriate in all the circumstances. In preparing the report, the Inquiry has used the words "inappropriate" and "mistreatment" to describe the same element of wrongfulness. Hence, references to mistreatment should be taken as referring to conduct or practices which are inappropriate in all the circumstances.

1.7 The Inquiry received very strong co-operation and assistance from the AIS and from the gymnastics community. The Inquiry had no power to compel witnesses to appear before it, although ultimately that did not prove a significant impediment to the Inquiry's investigation. There was a handful of witnesses who did not wish to be interviewed. Ms Kylie Shadbolt declined an invitation to make a submission. She was a gymnast in the program for part of 1986 and from mid 1987 until after the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992. She is now a coach at the AIS. She figured prominently in some allegations as a gymnast who was the object of inappropriate treatment or a witness to it. That she declined to make a submission might suggest an unwillingness to make comment critical of her employer and the head coach to whom she is answerable. On the other hand, perhaps suspecting the minor or very personal nature of allegations which might be made and concern her, she chose not to become involved. In the circumstances, the Inquiry has decided not to draw any particular inference from Ms Shadbolt's non-participation.

1.8 Mr Lu Ming was a coach at the AIS from 1989 to 1994. A number of allegations were made against him. He was informed of the general nature of those allegations and declined an invitation to appear. The Inquiry might be at liberty to draw inferences from his non-participation. However, it recognises that it is very likely that he lacks an understanding of Australian legal and administrative procedures and drawing any adverse inference may be unfair.

1.9 Ms Karinda Whitwell also declined an invitation to make a submission to the Inquiry. She is a former AIS gymnast and is allegedly the source of many allegations made by Mrs Whitwell. Also, it was not practical to interview Mrs Sheryl Whitwell in person. She was interviewed by telephone twice. The

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1 (1965) 112 CLR 517, 520.

Page 10

inability to speak to her in person is a factor which has to be taken into account in weighing her evidence.

1.10 During the phases of establishing the Inquiry and taking oral submissions, administrative support was provided by Ms Judy Robinson of the Department of Environment, Sport and Territories.

November 1995

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## **2: GYMNASIUM - ALLEGATIONS OF PHYSICAL ABUSE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

#### **a. No Systematic or Widespread Abuse at Any Time**

2.1 Various allegations of physical abuse in the AIS gymnasium were received by the Inquiry. They covered actions such as alleged hitting, kicking and rough handling of gymnasts. None of them alleged any serious or lasting physical harm. However, they did allege conduct that, if proven, would be inappropriate. Allegations concerned with the volume of training and training with injury are not considered under this heading.

2.2 The initial finding of the Inquiry in relation to alleged physical abuse is that it is very clear that there has never been any systematic or widespread physical abuse of gymnasts in the AIS gymnasium.

2.3 Three allegations of inappropriate treatment of a gymnast have been proven. All involved the same coach and gymnast and happened in late 1992 or early 1993. The coach was Mr Mark Calton who was an employee of the AGF based in the AIS gymnasium at the time. The gymnast was an AIS scholarship holder, Renee Trentini, who has since left the AIS. The inappropriate conduct involved one instance of hitting and two instances of rough handling.

2.4 To the extent that reports which appeared in the media in April and May this year may have suggested the existence of current, systematic or widespread physical abuse, they were false and any resulting alarm has been proven to be unwarranted.

#### **b. Corporal Punishment**

2.5 AIS men's head coach Mr Forbes informed the Inquiry that it is the policy of the AIS gymnastics program that corporal punishment is not permitted.

#### **c. Coaching Methods and Physical Contact**

2.6 The coaching of WAG at the elite level necessarily involves a large amount of touching of gymnasts by the coaches. This touching for "technical"

reasons can occur in numerous ways. A gymnast may be lifted up in order to grasp the uneven bars. A coach spotting<sup>2</sup> a gymnast on an apparatus may be called on to catch her. It is necessary to balance or help propel gymnasts when they are learning new skills, such as a handstand or a double somersault. Demonstration of the correct way to position and hold their bodies often occurs through touch. When a gymnast is practising a skill it is very common and more effective for the coach to draw attention to a flaw in the skill's execution by touching the gymnast's body rather than explaining in words: this may cover pointing toes and holding knees and elbows straight. When being coached on the balance beam, the gymnast is elevated. The coach may then use a pointer to touch or tap the gymnast's body. Assisting with stretching will often involve forceful contact in a controlled manner.

2.7 Such degrees of contact between athlete and coach rarely occur in other sports. Numerous people from all sectors of gymnastics who came before the Inquiry were at pains to point out that contact of the type identified above was normal and appropriate. The Inquiry accepts this.

2.8 It was suggested also that such contact was open to misinterpretation as being inappropriate. Mr Forbes reported to the Inquiry that the parents of one gymnast had expressed concern that a former ballet teacher at the AIS, Ms Catyana Petrenko, was slapping the girls' knees and toes. Mr Forbes told the parents that physical contact was a normal practice, but that he would monitor the ballet teacher's methods. He did so with Mrs Tian over the next few weeks and "did not observe any aggressive slapping", only "an occasional tap". In any event, Mr Forbes said he took the precaution of informing the coach and counselling her in relation to the need to avoid contact which was either aggressive or could be interpreted as such.

2.9 At less advanced levels of gymnastics, the same degree of physical contact is not required. For those who advance to the elite level, there may be a period of adjustment. The Inquiry was told that this can lead to complaint on occasions and one such incident is mentioned at the conclusion of this chapter. However, the Inquiry did not receive any specific allegations in this regard.

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2 Spotting is a safety measure. It involves such things as catching a gymnast if she falls or guiding her to a safe landing.

2.10 Apart from being touched in the manner described above, gymnasts mentioned being shaken by the hand, hugged or slapped on the back by their coaches when they mastered a new skill. They spoke of exciting and happy experiences in that regard. Others mentioned being comforted when upset. One parent said he saw the coaches comb the hair of the girls, cuddle them and hold them by the hand when walking around the gymnasium. Other reports concerned physical play with coaches. This might mean a group of gymnasts ganging up on a coach to try and throw him or her in the foam pit. One gymnast said she was left suspended from the ceiling in a harness much to the amusement of all concerned. Numerous other such incidents were mentioned. Provided physical contact of this kind occurs without danger and within the limits of appropriate decorum, there can be no objection to it. It should be welcomed.

## 2. HITTING

### a. General

2.11 A number of allegations appeared in the media that gymnasts had been hit and "smacked". In her anonymous letter which was delivered to Senator Faulkner on 27 March 1995, Mrs Sheryl Whitwell alleged that cases of coaches hitting gymnasts had been reported to Mr Forbes but not taken further.

2.12 Eight alleged incidents of hitting or smacking were drawn to the attention of the Inquiry. One incident of hitting was proven. Two incidents of hitting were not proven, three incidents were found to be training accidents and two incidents of smacking were not proven.

2.13 Dozens of past and present gymnasts, their families, officials in the sport of gymnastics, medical officers, and staff at the AIS said that they had neither witnessed nor heard of any incidents of hitting gymnasts at the AIS. Some found the suggestion that hitting occurred to be amusing or laughable because it was so far removed from their own experiences. Ms Lisa McTiernan, who finished at the AIS in October 1993 after six years there, denied that she had ever been hit. She smiled when she answered and was asked whether she found the question funny. She replied:

*No, I don't find that funny. I'm just smiling because that's what everybody asked, 'Did they hit you; did they hit you?'*

2.14 Lisa's answer provides an interesting insight into the process of media reporting of the allegations and public reaction to them.

**b. Smacking: Ms Jiang and Alyssa Harvey**

2.15 In her written submission to the Inquiry, Mrs Whitwell said:

*Cases of some of the coaches hitting children were reported - these were taken no further than Warick Forbes.*

2.16 In her oral submission, Mrs Whitwell denied ever having seen a coach hit a gymnast at the AIS. In making her allegation, she appears to have been reliant on what she was told by a former ballet coach at the AIS, Mr Adrian Dimitrievitch. He was involved with the AIS gymnastics program from February to July 1994. The "hitting" which he allegedly saw was two instances of smacking.

2.17 Mr Dimitrievitch told the Inquiry that he had seen Ms Jiang Shao Yi, who is an AIS coach, *smack* the gymnast Alyssa Harvey on two occasions. Both times Ms Jiang had smacked Alyssa on the bottom two or three times. The first incident is alleged to have occurred in March 1994 and the second in June or July 1994. Mr Dimitrievitch had no specific knowledge of the reason for the smacking. He said that he mentioned these instances of smacking to Mr Forbes after the second occasion in June or July 1994. Mr Dimitrievitch thought that Mr Forbes had been surprised by the allegation. Although what the Inquiry was told on this point was vague, it seems that Mr Forbes said to Mr Dimitrievitch that he would "analyse the situation" and that he would have to "balance" things up. Mr Dimitrievitch probably thought that his allegation was not going to be pursued and, in turn, that is the source for Mrs Whitwell's allegation.

2.18 Alyssa denied ever having been smacked by Ms Jiang. Her mother said that Alyssa had never mentioned being smacked and felt sure she would have done so if it occurred because she was not smacked at home. Alyssa is 13 years old. She appeared to be reliable. When smacking was discussed with her, she referred to two occasions where Ms Jiang had patted her on the bottom: once to congratulate her and the other to console her after Alyssa had

accidentally "whacked" Ms Jiang in the eye. It was reasonably clear that Alyssa's range of experiences did not include being smacked.

2.19 Mr Forbes remembered a time when Mr Dimitrievitch came to him with some concerns about his role in the program and claimed as well that "the Chinese coaches are too hard on the kids". Mr Forbes said that he had no recollection of any hitting being mentioned. Mr Dimitrievitch impressed as a sincere, but excitable person. He tended to provide information in a disordered fashion. The Inquiry had to persevere to have him identify with some precision the simple details of the allegations of smacking set out above. If the Inquiry's experience is anything to go by, it is quite likely that in his conversation with Mr Forbes any claim of smacking could have been "lost" among other things. Mr Dimitrievitch's vague recollection of Mr Forbes' reaction to his allegations is quite consistent with Mr Forbes believing that before deciding someone was too hard, you have to look at the overall position. The Inquiry is certain from its dealings with Mr Forbes that if he was presented with a firm accusation of hitting, he would have taken immediate action.

2.20 Mr Dimitrievitch and Ms Jiang had clashed over professional matters in the gymnasium and, perhaps, personal coaching styles. He was critical of "the way they train gymnasts, not just in Australia, in the whole world". Specifically, Mr Dimitrievitch considered that the gymnastics coaches interfered in his professional independence and the Inquiry gathers from Mr Forbes that the coaches considered that he sought a larger role for ballet teaching in gymnastics than was warranted. Mr Forbes described Mr Dimitrievitch as a "very good ballet teacher" but as "extremely emotional". There is nothing to establish that Mr Dimitrievitch would be dishonest, but the Inquiry believes that his perception of what was innocent and what was inappropriate physical contact would be coloured by his conflict with the other coaches. It was suggested to the Inquiry that a couple of slaps on the bottom to indicate that tightening of muscles was required might be misinterpreted. On the other hand, Mr Dimitrievitch's substantial career in ballet might be thought to preclude such misinterpretation. Even so, the possibility of it cannot be excluded.

2.21 Mr Dimitrievitch was not able to be interviewed until quite late due to overseas travel. By the time he became available, Ms Jiang had already been interviewed and was involved in travel herself. Earlier, she had denied any inappropriate conduct such as hitting and, in view of the weakness of the

evidence of this allegation, it was decided not to interview Ms Jiang a second time.

**2.22** There is insufficient evidence to prove this allegation and, accordingly, the Inquiry rejects it.

**c. Hitting: Mr Calton and Kate Lam**

**2.23** Kate Lam, who has been resident at the AIS since December 1991, alleged that in 1992 after she had been at the AIS for a while, AGF coach Mark Calton slapped her on the face in the AIS gymnasium. Contact was made with her cheek. She described the blow as "pretty hard" and said that her face stung for a little while. She was neither bruised nor knocked off her feet. Kate was 10 years of age at the time. The incident is alleged to have occurred in the middle of the gymnasium near a tumbling strip.

**2.24** Kate said that she told her mother at the time. However, Mrs Lam says that she was not specifically told about that incident. Kate was not happy in general with Mr Calton because he ordered her out of the gymnasium on a number of occasions, and Mrs Lam knew about that. Asked if she knew why Mr Calton slapped her on the face, Kate replied:

*I think he was telling me to do something and I was not listening. I could not do it right. And he just got angry.*

**2.25** Kate said that she also told "all the other gymnasts there". However, she says she told them shortly afterwards. It was not a case that the others observed the incident. Alyssa Harvey was one gymnast Kate said she told. Alyssa says:

*I think it was one day I was on bars and Mark was yelling at Kate or something. And he slapped her on the face, or something, with both hands, like that, and I'm not sure if she told me, or whether I saw, because I can imagine it now, but I'm not sure whether it's just me or whether I saw it.*

**2.26** Later Alyssa agreed with the proposition that she cannot remember whether she actually saw Kate slapped on the face or whether she visualises it from Kate's description. She places the incident as happening not long after



her family moved from Wollongong to Canberra to be with her. That occurred in April 1992. Alyssa was nine years old at the time.

**2.27** Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes know nothing of this incident.

**2.28** Mr Calton denies the allegation. He mentioned that Kate would have weighed about 27 kilograms and that his weight is about 90 kilograms. The point to this seems to be the unlikelihood of a man of his size striking a girl of Kate's size. He regards the allegation as a very serious challenge to his coaching ethics. He says, "...if I was of that nature I wouldn't be within the sport".

**2.29** Mr Calton described Kate as a very "difficult girl" to coach and as "very highly strung". He said that he would "quite often" get "frustrated" with Kate. In terms of his dealings with her, he said he would get "a little bit angry", speak loudly to her on occasions, and the tone of his voice would be stern and at points, "strong".

**2.30** It is clear to the Inquiry that Mr Calton and Kate were not getting on at all well. She was seriously testing his patience, and she did not like him. Mrs Lam was concerned. She said that she had spoken to Mr Calton about the treatment Kate had received. This appears to relate to Kate being sent from the gymnasium. These circumstances give some weight to the possibility that Mr Calton might have been provoked into losing his self-control.

**2.31** Mr Calton agreed that he might have grabbed Kate's face between his hands in order to attract her attention, although he has no specific recollection of having done so. Such an action could explain the allegation, especially given Kate's very young age at the time and her dislike of Mr Calton. However, it may not excuse the action. In any event, this tends to be speculative.

**2.32** In the absence of any corroborating evidence and after making due allowance for the potential unreliability of Kate's evidence owing to her youth and pre-existing hostility towards Mr Calton, the Inquiry rejects this allegation.

**d. Hitting: Mr Calton and Renee Trentini**

**2.33** A number of alleged incidents were brought to the Inquiry's attention concerning the coaching relationship between Mr Calton and Renee Trentini.

Renee was at the AIS from the end of January 1992 until the end of March 1994. Mr Calton appears to have coached Renee Trentini during 1992 and into early 1993. Collectively, these incidents present a disturbing pattern.

**2.34** In this section, an allegation that Mr Calton struck Renee on the lower back will be considered. Other allegations concerning Mr Calton's treatment of Renee will be considered elsewhere. However, there are three preliminary matters.

**2.35** The first concerns whether these allegations may have been directed against Mr Calton because of his criticism of the AIS - criticism which must be regarded as significant in contributing to the calling of this Inquiry. The second is Mr Calton's role as the AGF Itinerant Coach. The third concerns the unusual circumstances of Renee's gymnastics career; they are essential to an understanding of why certain events may have occurred.

*i. Motivation for the Allegations Against Mr Calton*

**2.36** Mr Calton was an AIS coach from January 1985 until late 1989. Apart from the first couple of months of 1985 before Mrs Tian commenced at the AIS, Mr Calton worked as an assistant to her. His height and strength were of great value in spotting gymnasts, especially on the vault and the uneven bars. He is a coach of considerable knowledge and experience.

**2.37** Shortly before this Inquiry was appointed, Mr Calton was an outspoken critic of various aspects of the AIS program. His comments would have to be regarded as influential factors in the calling of the Inquiry. Also, he is engaged in the Victorian Institute of Sport program in Melbourne. As has been indicated above, differences in viewpoint about various technical and financial issues in Australian gymnastics have tended to pit Victorian gymnastics interests against the senior management of the AGF, as well as the AIS gymnastics program.

**2.38** In these circumstances, Mr Calton questioned the motive behind the allegations against him. Indeed, it is an extraordinary turn of events that a person whose allegations of mistreatment lent significant weight to the calling of the Inquiry should himself become the object of investigation. This very point had already occurred to the Inquiry, but had been dismissed.



**2.39** Information concerning Mr Calton's alleged mistreatment of Renee was brought to the Inquiry's attention prior to the Inquiry taking submissions from AIS staff - they had very little role to play in this aspect of the Inquiry. The ASC's written submission made no allegation against Mr Calton. If anything, Mr Forbes avoided the opportunity to alert the Inquiry to information which may have proved damaging to Mr Calton. Also, a number of key witnesses were independent. Renee said that she liked Mr Calton compared with the other coaches.<sup>3</sup> Mrs Trentini was critical of the AIS in a number of respects and had no reason to be party to any orchestrated attempt to accuse Mr Calton. For these reasons, the Inquiry concluded that there was nothing untoward or suspicious in the levelling of allegations against Mr Calton.

ii. *The AGF Itinerant Coach Position*

**2.40** The AGF made a decision to create a position known as an Itinerant Coach. This position seems to have taken effect from the beginning of 1991. Mr Calton was appointed and held the post until March 1993. Mr Calton described the position as

*to actually travel around to our now developed high performance centre system, or high performance centres to assist coaches and gymnastic programs to develop around Australia.*

**2.41** He said that although he was tired of changing homes (having worked in a number of States since leaving the AIS late in 1989), the position

*...held a couple of things which I hold quite highly and that was helping developing Australian coaches and seeing that our younger athletes get the best opportunities for development as well. And the other part of that was to encourage other really strong centres to develop around Australia. It was a job which*

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3 However, Alyssa Harvey who trained with Renee said that Renee told her that she "hated Mark". Alyssa added, "She said that she hated him most of the time, but I suppose she hated him more on the days it was bad." However, caution must be exercised before relying on the comments which pass between what would have been 10 year olds. The observations of Renee now that she is much older ought to be more reliable.

*would allow me to work on those things, to really get those up and going.*

**2.42** The position was based in the AIS gymnasium in Canberra, which Mr Calton described as the AGF's National Training Centre. He had office space there and used it as a base to travel around the country. While in Canberra he assisted with coaching at the two largest local clubs: Canberra City Gymnastics Club and Canberra United Gymnastics Club.

**2.43** Mr Calton said that he did not coach any of the AIS athletes. However, it is clear that he did, at least from time to time. Renee Trentini and Kate Lam were among them. These were the younger girls. Also, Mr Calton was involved in a certain amount of talent identification on his travel around Australia and he "recruited" a number of girls to AIS scholarships (although it was not his decision to award those scholarships).

**2.44** Thus, the allegations in relation to Renee are not against an AIS employee. It might be suggested that these allegations are not within the terms of reference of the Inquiry. However, Renee was an AIS gymnast. As a resident gymnast in particular, she was under the care and control of the AIS. The alleged incidents occurred in the AIS gym. She was coached by Mr Calton with the approval and knowledge of the AIS gymnastics program.

*iii. The Circumstances of Renee Trentini's Gymnastics Career*

**2.45** Mr Calton selected Renee. She came to Canberra from a country town on what is known as a 2000 camp. According to reports of knowledgeable observers, she was an exceptional raw talent. Mr Forbes described her as world champion material; Mrs Tian called her one of her "diamonds". Mr Calton expressed his views in these terms:

*...extremely talented. If I had to put as an individual in terms of raw physical talent that I've dealt with in my entire coaching career, I'd have to put that child number one in terms of her abilities - her potential ability in terms of just physical qualities, co-ordination... Fantastic strength, flexibility, co-ordination, natural attributes which some girls with - well, you couldn't develop them, she was just born with them...*

2.46 He used words such as "particularly graceful", "very elegant" and "extremely good flexibility" to further describe Renee. She "just stood out like a beacon".

2.47 Renee took up a trial scholarship at the AIS at the end of January 1992. She was 10 years old, but about to turn 11. She came to the program with, in Mr Calton's words, "virtually zero gymnastics". Girls up to two years younger than Renee were much better gymnasts in terms of the level of their skills. This must have troubled her. However, she made good progress on a number of fronts. Mr Calton said:

*Renee enjoyed the physical preparation part, really applied herself very well for strength and conditioning work and consequently showed in terms of her posture and her actual physical preparation was excellent...*

2.48 Nevertheless, many described her as "stubborn", including Mr Calton. She would refuse to perform skills, or inexplicably perform poorly. Mr Calton in part attributed this to "self doubt about her ability to be able to get out and compete with other athletes of the same age". Others suggested fear. Gymnasts perform complicated acrobatic skills. Ever present is the risk of danger. As gymnasts grow older they become more conscious of the risks. Even very experienced and talented gymnasts can "freeze" because of fear and a lack of confidence that they can string together the complex sequence of steps necessary to perform the more advanced acrobatic skills. For an older girl like Renee who was trying to catch up on skills, fear appears to have become an important issue.

2.49 The potential for all of this to cause a coach enormous frustration is evident. Mr Ken Meredith was a male gymnast at the AIS from January 1981 until February 1990. Since then he has been a men's coach at the AIS. He expressed this opinion:

*...if there was one person that I would say perhaps Mark was really on the borderline of maybe stepping over that line, it would probably be towards that girl... I shouldn't say singled out, but she seemed to be the one that was basically always - always in trouble, the one that really, I guess, you could see Mark get very frustrated with her really easily, and that was over a number - over*

*some time. Maybe he had some reason to get frustrated with her but of all the girls, from my observation of Mark's coaching - you can look at a coach and you can look at a gymnast and see, well, hang on, this coach has a - I guess, has some kind of conflict going on here with the child.*

iv. *Blow to Renee Trentini's Lower Back*

**2.50** Mrs Sue Wilson alleged that in 1992 she saw Mr Calton strike Renee on the lower back in the AIS gymnasium. She was in the observation gallery and was waiting to collect her daughter, Joanna, after training. Joanna was a non-resident AIS gymnast from late December 1991 to March 1994. She does not recall just when in 1992 the incident occurred, but believes that it was in the second half of the year. The day could have been a weekday or a Saturday.

**2.51** Mrs Wilson said that her attention was attracted by Mr Calton's voice. He was speaking to Renee in a raised tone which Mrs Wilson described as stern. Mrs Wilson thinks that Renee had been working on the bar, but is not sure. Mr Calton was "obviously aggravated about something". Renee started to walk away, he said something to her which Mrs Wilson did not hear and then he "whacked her". The blow was made with his right hand and landed "on the behind or high behind". Renee was lifted up and propelled forward "definitely stumbling on her feet" for a distance of about one metre. Mrs Wilson also described the blow as sort of a push or shove. According to Mrs Wilson, Renee's reaction was as follows:

*...she stopped, and she just wept with her head down. I think she just stayed - she was still in that position when we would have left, from memory.*

**2.52** Mrs Wilson said she left five minutes later.<sup>4</sup>

**2.53** Renee was clearly uncomfortable discussing the incident with the Inquiry. She is 14 years of age and was interviewed in her mother's presence.

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4 There may be concern that a gymnast would be left standing there in that condition. The proffered explanation is a reluctance of coaches to interfere in the "classrooms" of others, especially if the circumstances of the incident are unknown.

Mrs Trentini said, "She locks everything in and keeps it in and its really hard." According to her mother, Renee thought Mr Calton to be a "good coach". Of the coaches at the AIS, he was her favourite.

**2.54** Nevertheless, Renee supplied a number of essential details. She was struck on the lower back by Mr Calton. Although she had no idea of the date, she placed it as happening in 1992 or 1993. She said that the blow knocked her forward. However, her other evidence as to the force of the blow was not entirely clear. She said that she had "not really" been "hit hard". She agreed with the proposition that it was a "firm blow". Also, she agreed with the proposition that it was a "strong blow." She said that she was not physically hurt by the blow, but she said she was shocked and cried. Asked what was her reaction, she replied:

*Nothing really, I just went back on dreaming, I suppose.*

**2.55** She recalls nothing specific which may have provoked Mr Calton to strike her. However, she offered this observation:

*Probably because when I was learning my skills it used to take me a long time to get them and he was probably just really frustrated.*

**2.56** At that time, Mrs Trentini had not moved from her home town to Canberra. She did not witness the incident. Renee had not told her about it previously. Renee said she had spoken to no-one concerning the incident.

**2.57** There was some evidence to suggest that Mr Calton later sat Renee on his knee and apologised to her. Mrs Wilson had on occasion seen Mr Calton sit Renee on his knee and speak to her, but in a second interview it became clear that Mrs Wilson had not seen anything like that on this occasion. Renee thought that she had sat on his knee, but was not certain. In any event, it does not bear on events in any significant way.

**2.58** The Inquiry knows of no other witnesses to the alleged incident.

**2.59** Mr Calton denied the allegation. He said that he had never deliberately struck an athlete in his career. He added:



*That particular area of the lower back is one that as a coach your prime responsibility is to protect and in terms of that allegation, no recollection, and I would certainly deny that I would ever strike an athlete in the area of the lower back.*

**2.60** He said that "forceful acts of aggression against the gymnasts, no, it's not an area I indulge in."

**2.61** Renee's recollection of the incident as recounted to the Inquiry contains some degree of inconsistency. Mr Calton advances a sensible reason as to why he would not strike Renee on the lower back. He did not impress as a foolhardy person. Mr Calton appeared to be a likeable individual. He was quietly spoken, calm, and thoughtful and confident with his answers.

**2.62** However, the Inquiry has concluded that Mr Calton did push or shove Renee in the region of the "behind or high behind" and that this was inappropriate conduct on his part.

**2.63** Mrs Wilson impressed the Inquiry as being honest and independent. Her purpose in making a submission was to support the AIS gymnastics program because both she and her daughter had not experienced behaviour of the kind that had been alleged in the media. She did say that she thought Mr Calton was "back-chatting" himself when he criticised the AIS because she felt that he had behaved inappropriately while there. However, this does not suggest or establish a hostility that might affect the reliability of her evidence. It is merely an opinion based on what she believes and knows. Also, she displayed some concern that she might have provided evidence which may cause trouble for Mr Calton and said that had not been her objective.

**2.64** It was difficult for Renee to discuss the incident. As stated, there are inconsistencies with her account of events. However, the Inquiry was satisfied that she was being truthful when she said that the incident occurred. This was an assessment shared by her mother.

**2.65** There is no proof that Mr Calton has a violent or "physical" disposition towards gymnasts in a general sense. However, these were not ordinary circumstances. Renee, because of the combination of talent and challenges which she presented to a coach, seems to have been frustrating like no other gymnast. This is not the only incident between Renee and Mr Calton. There

are three more considered elsewhere. For two of those, the evidence of physically inappropriate conduct is stronger and serve to discount Mr Calton's denial of being physically forceful with athletes. Whilst he gave the appearance of an honest man, he also impressed as a person who would not necessarily recognise that he had made a mistake.

**2.66** The Inquiry's recommended action is set out at the conclusion of this chapter.

**e. Hitting: Mr Petrenko**

**2.67** Three alleged incidents were drawn to the attention of the Inquiry concerning a current AIS coach Mr Alexander ("Sasha") Petrenko. An investigation of the incidents found that they did not involve any inappropriate conduct. This aspect of the Inquiry highlighted some of the difficulties associated with investigating the reaction of very young girls to accidental and innocent events.

**2.68** Mr Petrenko commenced at the AIS in July 1994. He is a Master Coach from the Ukraine. As a newcomer he had to pass through the processes of being accepted by the existing young gymnasts. The gymnasts can be fickle in that respect and that has to be recognised when considering their evidence. It seems that he is now well accepted.

**2.69** The Inquiry was informed by various 11 and 12 year old gymnasts that they had heard that Mr Petrenko had "hit" two similarly aged AIS gymnasts, Helen Chan and Naomi Shibaoka. The trail of investigation was complex and not aided by children's impulsive recollection of events. Even the initial report which sparked this investigation confused the identity of one child allegedly "hit". After interviewing the children allegedly the victims of the incidents and gymnasts who had witnessed the events, rather than those who heard about them, the Inquiry concluded that there was no evidence of inappropriate conduct. A brief description of the incidents follows.

1. Mr Petrenko had been "spotting" Helen Chan while she did a flip and double back somersault. She was wearing a T-shirt over her leotard. When he went to catch her around her chest, his hand slipped on the loose material and it clipped Helen either on the forehead or just above the hairline. Helen was upset, started to

cry and complained to another coach that, "Sasha hit me on the face." The incident may have been mentioned to Mrs Tian by that coach. The incident occurred not long after Mr Petrenko arrived last year. It was clearly a training accident and did not involve any inappropriate conduct.

2. Mr Petrenko appears to have given Helen Chan a playful poke on the chin or the cheek - just as many adults do to young children they know. The Inquiry has gathered that this playfulness, while not a problem to Helen, may not have been entirely appreciated at the time by another gymnast who saw it happen. However, there is no evidence that this involved any inappropriate conduct.
3. The third incident involved Naomi Shibaoka in about August 1994. Mr Petrenko was assisting her with a new skill, a double back somersault. He helped to turn her through the somersault, but she landed a little awkwardly. She had some kind of pain in her neck or back which hurt her "A bit. Not much though." The pain departed quickly and there is no known evidence of an injury. From her own account, it appears that she was ready to try the skill, although she was apprehensive. Again, this is a training incident which did not involve any inappropriate conduct.

**2.70** When the incidents were discussed with Helen and Naomi, both of them said that Mr Petrenko had neither "hit" them nor been trying to hurt them. To impressionable young children who talk among themselves, a minor training incident and upset can quickly become a "hit" among their friends and this may even alarm some parents who hear of it.

**2.71** In the circumstances, it was unnecessary to ask Mr Petrenko to respond to these matters or to investigate them with other AIS staff.

**f. Hitting: Mr Calton and Sonia Brown**

**2.72** Sonia Brown of Newcastle attended the AIS during May and June 1992. At the time she was 11 years old. Mark Calton was one of her coaches. Sonia alleged in her oral submission that Mr Calton had hit her. The following emerged as she was questioned about this allegation.



2.73 She was doing giant circles on the men's horizontal bar using "chicken grips". This training method is explained in detail below under the heading **Strapped to Horizontal Bar**. She was attempting eight swings. Upon completing the final swing she could not stop. Upon carrying through she rose above the bar and Mr Calton, who was standing on a spotting box, pushed her on her back. It would appear that this was necessary to maintain her momentum so that she would not fall onto the bar. The landing jolted her and "just hurt". Sonia described the incident as "more of a push than a hit but it hurt", but said that she did not think Mr Calton had intended to hurt her. Sonia did not suffer any physical injury other than the transient pain. She claims that she is now afraid of heights whereas before she went to the AIS she was not afraid. No specific evidence of a causal connection was presented between her fear and Mr Calton's actions. In these circumstances, the allegation was not strongly pressed.

2.74 The Inquiry considers this incident to be a training accident. While a young girl such as Sonia may have been understandably upset by the incident, it is quite likely that Mr Calton's action prevented injury and was entirely proper. This allegation is rejected.

2.75 In the circumstances, it was unnecessary to ask Mr Calton to respond to the allegation or to investigate it with AIS staff.

### 3. CHAIR THROWING

#### a. General

2.76 It was reported in the 29 May 1995 edition of *Who Weekly* that Mr David Hardman had alleged that in 1988 in the lead-up to the Seoul Olympic Games, "he saw an enraged Ju Ping Tian...toss a plastic chair at the legs of gymnast Monique Allen".<sup>5</sup>

2.77 This allegation was described in the *Who Weekly* report as "typical of the allegations"<sup>6</sup> which had been made against the AIS gymnastics program.

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5 Paul Pottinger, 'Miracle Worker or Whip-cracker', *Who Weekly*, 29 May 1995, 26, 26-7.

6 *ibid.* 26.

**2.78** If there is in that statement from *Who Weekly* a suggestion that throwing objects at gymnasts in anger was even an occasional occurrence in the AIS gymnasium, the Inquiry has found the suggestion to be false. Apart from the incident alleged by Mr Hardman, no other incident of that kind was alleged by anyone who made a submission and no evidence of any such other incident was found by the Inquiry.

**2.79** If the incident as alleged by Mr Hardman occurred, it was an isolated one.

**b. Mrs Tian and Monique Allen**

**2.80** Mr Hardman fulfilled various roles as a junior coach in men's gymnastics in the AIS gymnasium from 1987 to 1990. In his oral submission Mr Hardman alleged that Mrs Tian had been sitting on a plastic chair, had lifted it up and "thrown [it] downwards towards" Monique's legs. He said that "hurl" or "toss" were not the correct words to describe Mrs Tian's action. Mr Hardman said the "chair wasn't thrown with force, but it wasn't dropped either". Bearing in mind that the chair was a very light chair, he agreed with the suggestion that Mrs Tian's movement could be described as pushing the chair in Monique's direction from a height.

**2.81** According to Mr Hardman, the chair did not strike Monique. She jumped back and it landed on the floor between her and Mrs Tian. Mr Hardman said he was sitting on the floor of the gymnasium some 25 to 30 metres away. Monique was facing him and Mrs Tian had her back to him. The women, both of whom are small, were about 1.5 metres apart. The chair was thrown away from him in the direction of Monique. Mr Hardman said he was looking down the line of direction of the throw. However, shortly afterwards he corrected that to say that he was slightly "off to one side". He said, "[i]f she hadn't stepped back...I'd say it would have struck her legs".

**2.82** The occasion for this incident was alleged to be Mrs Tian's frustration and then anger over the way Monique was performing a particular routine on the uneven bars. Mr Hardman said that Mrs Tian had been watching Monique and sitting on one of the plastic chairs that are usually there. Asked whether he believed that Mrs Tian had intended the chair to strike Monique, Mr Hardman said

*It looked like it wasn't thrown 100% intentionally to hit, but if it did then so be it.*

**2.83** According to Mr Hardman, Monique was visibly shocked and upset by the incident. She appeared to be crying. He does not know whether Monique left the gymnasium at that point.

**2.84** Mr Hardman alleges that this incident occurred in the few months preceding the departure of the gymnastics team for the Olympic Games in Seoul in 1988. That would be June, July or August.<sup>7</sup> He says the incident occurred on a Saturday afternoon. He usually conducted training on a Saturday morning, although on this occasion it had been swapped to the afternoon. The other female gymnast training for the Olympics, Leanne Rycroft, had left the gymnasium as had Warick Forbes. The boy that Mr Hardman was training was faced away from the incident. He did not identify any other person who may have witnessed the incident. He did not speak to anyone about the incident until the Inquiry was announced.

**2.85** No other person has claimed to the Inquiry that they witnessed the incident.

**2.86** Lisa McTiernan who was a gymnast at the AIS from 21 October 1988 until 3 October 1993 claimed that when a group of gymnasts at the AIS were comparing coach stories, Monique said something to the effect that Mrs Tian had "kicked me up the bum and threw a chair at me". Lisa said of Monique, "She didn't say it to me directly, but I was there when it was said." The only other person present during this conversation who Lisa could remember was Kylie Shadbolt. Kylie declined to make a submission to the Inquiry. The impression which Lisa appears to hold is that it was a laughing matter amongst the girls. The incident allegedly occurred before she commenced at the AIS in October 1988.

**2.87** Mrs Debbie Clarkson (nee Graham) who was a gymnast at the AIS from September 1983 to December 1987 and was then an apprentice coach during 1989 said that she had heard of an incident where Mrs Tian had thrown a chair at Monique but had not witnessed it. She said she may have heard that from

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7 The Australian Gymnastic Federation informed the Inquiry that the Australian gymnastics team left Australia for Seoul on 3 September 1988.

Hollie Bevans or Kylie Shadbolt. Hollie made no mention of this incident in her written or oral submission notwithstanding being asked if she had any information about instances of alleged physical abuse. In any event Hollie did not commence at the AIS until October 1988.

**2.88** Both Mrs Tian and Monique firmly deny that the incident occurred.

**2.89** As a general rule chairs are not permitted on the floor of the AIS gymnasium. However, it was volunteered by both Monique and Mrs Tian that occasionally a judge's chair may have been left over from a practice competition. Mrs Tian denied that she would sit on the chair and included herself in the following comment, "I do not like coaches sitting in chair."

**2.90** Monique said that she remembered an occasion when she was in trouble with Mrs Tian because she could not perform her routine in the lead-up to the 1988 Olympic Games. She said she ripped off her hand guards and threw them on the ground. Monique described herself on that occasion as being "really lazy" and "tired". Mrs Tian ordered her from the gymnasium which was a most unusual event for Monique and she "pushed me towards the door". She said she went and sat in the toilets for half an hour, came back and finished her training. Whether both Monique and Mr Hardman have in mind the same day is unlikely, especially because an alleged incident of kicking in 1989 which is considered below appears to have had similar surrounding circumstances to the description given by Monique. It is likely that the description just set out applies to the day that the alleged incident of kicking occurred. In any event, the significant aspect of Monique's evidence is that she denies that Mrs Tian threw a chair at her on this or any other occasion.

**2.91** Mrs Tian seems not to have any clear memory of an event that has surrounding circumstances as alleged by Mr Hardman. However, she firmly denies that she has ever thrown a chair at Monique. Mrs Tian was asked whether something could have happened which Mr Hardman may have mistaken for throwing the chair at Monique. This might include knocking over a chair, or even dropping the chair in annoyance but without throwing it at Monique. Her response was to ask why should she make up a story to explain something that did not occur.

**2.92** Both the alleged wrongdoer and the alleged victim have denied that the incident occurred. They were confident and persuasive witnesses. There is

only one witness of substance to support the allegation: Mr Hardman. In those circumstances it would be very difficult to conclude that the allegation was proven.

**2.93** However, Monique and Mrs Tian are good friends. Although the incident as described by Mr Hardman is in some respects trivial, if the incident was found to have occurred, it would in all likelihood be very damaging to Mrs Tian in a symbolic sense. Hence, there is the possibility that Monique might be tempted to protect her much loved, former coach. Monique strongly denied doing so. She said that she had her own profile in gymnastics: "it's my identity that's at stake as well". She said that she has a lot of respect for Mrs Tian, but if there is a problem, it has to be fixed. She added:

*I think if a chair was thrown at me or hurled at me I'd remember, and I think I'd have a problem with it more than other people, if she had done that to me. I mean, I love her dearly, but certainly there's things you - you know, you just don't do.*

**2.94** Many people in gymnastics who know Mrs Tian well regarded the alleged incident as quite out of character, if not laughable. The action would have risked injuring a leading gymnast just before what could have been the major competition of her career. Mrs Tian did not impress as being a foolhardy person. The Inquiry was told that she is not the kind of person whose emotions and anger get out of control although she can become loud and passionate. Her coaching psychology is carefully tailored to the occasion and the gymnast. It is therefore very unlikely that she would deliberately or rashly throw a chair at Ms Allen.

**2.95** Furthermore, the Inquiry believes that Mr Hardman has a hostile disposition towards Mrs Tian. Although he was a careful witness, if not overly so, he impressed the Inquiry as being a person who is unusually sensitive to the ways of others. Mrs Tian's behaviour in the gymnasium when she became annoyed or passionate offended him considerably. Yet that same behaviour might be passed over by other observers. The Inquiry believes that his observation and interpretation of events could be coloured by his dislike of Mrs Tian. There is no proof of dishonesty on his part, but his dislike of Mrs Tian might influence his perception of whether the chair was thrown as opposed to some other movement, whether it would have struck Monique and whether Mrs Tian intended it to do so.



**2.96** Mrs Debbie Clarkson's observations are mere hearsay. Lisa McTiernan's comments reveal no more detail of the incident than what she said she had read in *Who Weekly*. Monique denied the allegation that she had discussed having a chair thrown at her as was alleged by Lisa. As is considered later in this report, Lisa has a strong dislike of Monique's mother, Mrs Robyn Allen, and might wish to embarrass Monique. The Inquiry makes no particular finding as to Lisa's veracity in this respect, but it is one of a number of significant uncertainties attendant upon this allegation.

**2.97** The Inquiry has concluded that the allegation has not been proved. Accordingly, the Inquiry rejects it.

#### **4. KICKING**

##### **a. General**

**2.98** On 17 April 1995, it was reported in the *West Australian* that "the gymnasts were ... kicked".<sup>8</sup> This was repeated in other major newspapers and the electronic media in the days which followed. This report is capable of suggesting that a number of gymnasts had been kicked on one or more occasions.<sup>9</sup> Given the report's sensational tone, a person might think that kicking gymnasts occurred with some frequency as a means of disciplining them or forcing them to do their training.

**2.99** The Inquiry has found that the report is incorrect.

**2.100** Subject to allegations concerning two incidents in the late 1980s - allegations which the Inquiry has rejected - not a shred of information concerning kicking of gymnasts came from the almost 200 submissions received. Many of the current and former gymnasts interviewed found the media reports surprising; a number of them laughed at any suggestion that they may have been kicked. No gymnast who made a submission said she had been kicked at the AIS or by an AIS coach. Some gymnasts qualified their

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8 Gene Stephan, "Young Gymnasts Abused: Parents", *West Australian*, 17 April 1995, 1.

9 Even allowing for having taken the quoted allegation slightly out of context, it contains some ambiguity.

comments by saying that at times they might have received a playful kick or, if they were sitting on the floor, a nudge with a coach's foot to tell them it was time to resume training, to point out a technical flaw during a stretching exercise, or to move them out of the way? However, all who made mention of such incidents, dismissed them as inoffensive social or technical contact.

**b. Mrs Tian and Monique Allen**

*i. Alleged Incident - 1988*

**2.101** It was reported on 29 May 1995 in *Who Weekly* that Mr David Hardman had alleged that in 1988 in the lead-up to the Seoul Olympic Games, Mrs Tian had kicked gymnast Monique Allen "because 'she was not performing satisfactorily'".<sup>10</sup> This allegation was described in the *Who Weekly* report as "typical of the allegations"<sup>11</sup> which had been made against the AIS gymnastics program. For the reason set out under the immediately preceding subheading, that description in *Who Weekly* cannot be regarded as correct.

**2.102** In his oral submission to the Inquiry, Mr Hardman alleged that Mrs Tian had kicked Monique

*on the outer leg below the knee - or just below the knee with the inside of her - her foot.*

**2.103** He said that "it wasn't a strong kick" and it landed on Monique's left leg. Monique did not fall over and he did not believe she had been hurt. Her leg was, however, "jolted". Later in his evidence, he said that he "could see the leg slightly buckle". He does not recall precisely what Mrs Tian was wearing on her feet. According to Mr Hardman, Mrs Tian might wear socks without shoes, soft gymnastic competition shoes or white running shoes. He said it was common for her to wear the competition shoes.

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10 Paul Pottinger, 'Miracle Worker or Whip-cracker', *Who Weekly*, 29 May 1995, 26, 27.

11 *ibid.* 26.

**2.104** The alleged circumstances leading up to this incident were very similar to what happened when Mrs Tian allegedly threw the plastic chair at Monique. It arose out of training on the uneven bars. Mr Hardman said:

*...through frustration at the athlete for not performing in the way in which the coach wanted her to - and I obviously imagine, the way the athlete herself wanted to perform.*

**2.105** He said that Mrs Tian was "yelling and shouting" in a manner that he described as "hysterical". Mrs Tian was allegedly walking back and forth and Monique was standing still. According to Mr Hardman, Mrs Tian had her back to him. He was about 15 to 20 metres away on the floor of the gymnasium coaching at the Roman rings. Mrs Tian approached Monique and suddenly kicked her on the outer side of her left leg.

**2.106** Mr Hardman alleges that this incident occurred about a week or maybe a month after the alleged incident of chair throwing. Again, it was on a Saturday afternoon with not many people around. He identified a group of young male gymnasts he was coaching at the time. He did not believe they would have observed the incident because they were chatting among themselves. The Inquiry was able to trace some of the boys and Mr Hardman's belief proved correct - they had no knowledge of any kicking incident. Mr Hardman does not recall Mr Forbes or Mr Calton as being in the gymnasium. He neither raised the incident with anyone at the AIS and in the wider gymnastics community nor heard any reports of the incident from others.

**2.107** No other person has claimed to the Inquiry that they witnessed the incident in 1988.

**2.108** Mention was made above of Lisa McTiernan alleging that Monique had made reference to what could be this incident of kicking. It is convenient to repeat the text from above:

*Lisa McTiernan who was a gymnast at the AIS from 21 October 1988 until 3 October 1993 claimed that when a group of gymnasts at the AIS were comparing coach stories, Monique Allen said something to the effect that Mrs Tian had "kicked me up the bum and threw a chair at me". Lisa said of Monique, "She didn't say it to me directly, but I was there when it was said." The only other*



*person present during this conversation who Lisa could remember was Kylie Shadbolt. Kylie declined to make a submission to the Inquiry. The impression which Lisa appears to hold is that it was a laughing matter amongst the girls. The incident allegedly occurred before she commenced at the AIS in October 1988.*

**2.109** Both Mrs Tian and Monique firmly deny that the incident occurred. Monique said that there was "really nothing more she could say".

**2.110** In considering Lisa's account of Monique's alleged statement, it may be noted that the kick is to the girl's bottom whereas Mr Hardman's account is of a kick to the lower leg. Also, a "kick up the bum" is a figure of speech suggesting the occasion for some severely worded encouragement. If the statement was made by Monique, it may have meant no more than that. Independently of any reference to Lisa's account, Monique volunteered to the Inquiry that she had been "kicked up the bum" by Mrs Tian when engaged in some playful activity in the gymnasium. She could have been referring to this when telling the "coach stories" mentioned by Lisa.

**2.111** The position in relation to this allegation is certainly no stronger than that which applies to the alleged instance of chair throwing. For corresponding reasons, the Inquiry concludes that the allegation has not been proved.

**2.112** However, that is not the end of Mr Hardman's allegation. Mr Calton and Ms Hollie Bevans have alleged that they saw Mrs Tian kick Monique Allen in 1989. The Inquiry has considered the possibility that Mr Hardman may be a third alleged eye-witness to that 1989 incident and that he is mistaken in fixing the date of the incident he alleges he saw as happening in mid 1988. There are some similarities between the alleged 1988 and 1989 incidents. Both involved the same two people and occurred over training issues concerning the uneven bars. However, the following factors have led the Inquiry to the conclusion that the alleged incident which Mr Hardman describes could not be the incident which Mr Calton and Hollie allege occurred.

**2.113** First, Mr Hardman was about as sure as he could be that his allegation related to 1988. He relied on the nature of the training routines undertaken by Monique as leading him "to believe that it was build up towards a major competition." Yet he cited the overall level of activity in the gymnasium as indicative of the relatively low key atmosphere for getting away the two

gymnasts to the Seoul Olympics compared with the greater activity of preparing a full team for a National or World Championship or other major event.

**2.114** Second, Mr Hardman said that he does recall Hollie, Mr Calton and Mr Xiong Song Liang as being present in the gymnasium when the alleged incident of kicking occurred and he is "fairly confident" that they were not there. As will be considered, their presence is central to the allegation of kicking in 1989.

**2.115** Third, the allegation of kicking in 1989 is linked to Monique being ordered from the gymnasium by Mrs Tian. Mr Hardman could not say whether Monique was ordered from the gymnasium in connection with the incident he observed. However, it would be quite surprising if he could have escaped learning of the eviction in 1989 because it appears to have created at least a mild sensation at the time.

**2.116** Fourth, the incident in 1989 appears to have involved Mrs Tian taking hold of Monique. Mr Hardman recalls no such action happened in the 1988 incident. In 1988, the only contact was the kick according to Mr Hardman.

**2.117** Thus, according to his own account of events, it is highly unlikely that Mr Hardman witnessed the incident alleged by Mr Calton and Hollie.

**2.118** The Inquiry has also discounted the possibility that Mr Calton and Hollie witnessed the incident of kicking which Mr Hardman alleges occurred in mid 1988. Neither Hollie nor Mr Xiong were at the AIS at that time - Mr Xiong plays a central part in Mr Calton's allegation.

*ii. Alleged Incident - 1989*

**2.119** Mr Calton alleged in his oral submission that in June or July 1989 - between the dates of the ACT championship and the Konica competition in Brisbane - Mrs Tian became very angry with Monique Allen over her training on the uneven bars. It was about 2 hours into a morning training session on a weekday. Mr Calton said that he was not happy with Monique's "antics" on the bars as well. Mrs Tian called Monique over to her, spoke to her, ordered her from the gymnasium and with her hand pushed Monique towards the door. At that point, Mr Calton alleges that Mrs Tian kicked Monique on her buttocks. It was all part of a shoving motion towards the door. He said,

*Then Ju Ping stood up and basically pushed her at the door and it was like hand push, hand push...and then - there was a foot came into it as well...the kick was to assist the shoving.*

2.120 Mr Calton believes that the kick was made with the side of Mrs Tian's right foot. Mrs Tian and Monique were standing close together and Mrs Tian's leg was bent at the moment of contact. This suggests that Mrs Tian was standing somewhat to the side of Monique. Mr Calton described the kick as "very firm" but "not lining up a goal at 50 metres". Monique was wearing a leotard and leggings and so Mrs Tian's foot would have come into direct contact with fabric rather than skin. Mr Calton did not suggest that Monique had been hurt by the kick. She gathered up her things and left the gymnasium immediately. Mr Calton acknowledged as "one scenario out of it" that Monique might not have realised that she had been kicked if she was upset, concentrating on other things, facing away from Mrs Tian and being pushed in the middle of her back all at the same time as the kick occurred.

2.121 Mr Calton said he was standing about 5 to 6 metres away; behind and slightly to the side of the direction of Monique's departure towards the door. He does not recall Ms Bevans, Mr Forbes or Mr Hardman as being present on the gymnasium floor at this time, although Mr Forbes could have been in his office upstairs.<sup>12</sup> However, he said that Mr Xiong was present because he had been videotaping routines earlier in the day. Mr Calton does not recall mentioning the incident to anybody at the time. He did not confront Mrs Tian or raise matters with Mr Forbes.

2.122 Hollie Bevans alleged that she saw Mrs Tian kick Monique while in the AIS gymnasium. She says this incident occurred "probably" in 1989, but it could have been 1988. If the incident did occur in 1988, it must have happened after 7 October 1988 which is when Hollie recommenced at the AIS following a three month stint in late 1987. She does not recall the time of year the incident may have happened. Hollie was about 12 years old.

2.123 It was in a morning session. She believes it was a Saturday, but says she could be wrong. She alleged that Monique had been working on uneven bars for "ages and ages" and was would not do what she could normally complete. Mrs Tian was said to have become "very angry", made Monique

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12 This office overlooks the gymnasium floor.

come down from the bars, told her to "get out of the gym" and kicked her. Hollie alleges that Mrs Tian "kicked her [Monique] a fair way across the gym and she was bruised for days". Hollie said the kick landed on "the back and backside and leg". She described the kick as "very forceful" but does not remember whether Monique was knocked to the ground by it. Later she said that she did not know whether the kick was "a glancing blow" or a "very hard" kick. The bruise was on Monique's hip, just which one, Hollie does not know. She does not know the size of the bruise: "It wasn't like her whole leg or anything major but there was something there." She says that there were a few other people in the gymnasium but she has no recollection of who they were. Hollie added

*I don't think it is a big thing, but I don't think it is necessary either.*

**2.124** Mr Xiong returned to the AIS on 8 May 1989 after a period of coaching in the USA. He remained at the AIS until July 1990 as a women's coach. He recalls Monique being ordered from the gymnasium by Mrs Tian. He does so specially because her voice was unusually loud and it was the only time he saw Monique ordered from the gymnasium. He is uncertain of the day of the week or whether it was a morning or afternoon training session, but he places the day in the same period between the two competitions as does Mr Calton. He was coaching two gymnasts on uneven bars: Hollie Bevans and another girl whose name he does not recall. He heard loud talk from Mrs Tian. It became louder and he turned to look. Monique was sitting on the mat, crying. He saw Mrs Tian approach Monique and point to the door. She said to Monique that she should get out of the gymnasium "if she doesn't like to train". Monique did not move. Mrs Tian walked away. He said this took two to three minutes. He turned to the two girls and told them to get on with their training. Everyone was looking at what was going on because of Mrs Tian's loudness. He did not see Monique leave nor did he see Mrs Tian kick or otherwise touch Monique. He acknowledged that such things could have happened after he turned his back. No-one, including Mr Calton and Hollie, said anything to him at the time to suggest that Mrs Tian had kicked Monique.

**2.125** Mrs Clarkson said that she was working at a computer in an office on the balcony above the gymnasium in 1989. It was a weekday morning, possibly at the end of a training session. She heard a commotion coming from the gymnasium floor, stood up and looked over her computer. She saw Mrs Tian walking away either with her hands on her hips or throwing them up in the air.

Monique was sitting on the mat taking off the hand guards she would use on uneven bars. She said that later in the day she was told that Mrs Tian had kicked Monique. Mrs Clarkson cannot recall who told her: whether it was Mr Hardman or a gymnast. (Mr Hardman is fairly certain of not having discussed with Mrs Clarkson the incident that he observed - which occurred before Mrs Clarkson was appointed as an apprentice coach.) She referred to stories told to her that Monique had been kicked in the ribs or on the bottom or hip. Asked who would have discussed the incident at the time, she replied, "I think all her [Monique's] team mates." Mrs Clarkson identified nine gymnasts as in this category. In the normal course of the Inquiry, six of the nine were interviewed. Of the six, only Hollie Bevans claimed to have witnessed or heard of this incident. Mrs Clarkson emphasised that she did not see the incident and she saw nothing to suggest any injury, such as a prominent bruise on Monique's hip.

**2.126** Mrs Clarkson said that she heard Mr Forbes say that he would have to tell Monique's mother about the incident. She says that later Mr Forbes said Mrs Allen had been told and had not expressed any concern. Mr Forbes did not say these things to Mrs Clarkson direct. She was unable to identify with any useful degree of certainty to whom Mr Forbes directed his comments. Hollie Bevans told the Inquiry that

*someone told Monique's mum and she, just sort of, rolled her eyes and kept walking.*

**2.127** Mrs Clarkson coached Hollie at the AIS and again a couple of years later when Hollie returned to Melbourne. It is likely that what Hollie knows about Mrs Allen's alleged reaction comes from Mrs Clarkson and what Mrs Clarkson knows about the alleged kicking (other than from her own observation of surrounding matters) comes from Hollie.

**2.128** Mrs Tian denies ever having kicked Monique Allen. She recalls the occasion of evicting Monique from the gymnasium. The background is of some importance. Mrs Tian and Monique held a strategy meeting. Mrs Tian said that they should aim for Monique to reach the final of the women's all round individual event at the World Championships later that year. This would mean a top 36 placing in the team competition for Monique in order to qualify her for the individual all round final. Monique said that if she was to achieve that goal, she would have to work much harder on the uneven bars which was her best



apparatus. It was agreed between them that Mrs Tian would set more challenging training and goals for her. The day in question was shortly afterwards. Monique was practising a giant circle with full turn and she was doing so in a way which had greater potential for danger. Mrs Tian instructed her to correct her technique. Monique did not respond in the way desired. The potentially dangerous technique was not changed. Mrs Tian told the Inquiry that she believed that Monique was not concentrating. She gave her an ultimatum: concentrate on the correct technique or leave the gymnasium. Monique just sat on the floor. Mrs Tian then told Monique to leave.

*'You go. That's the door.' I said, 'That's the door, you go.'*

**2.129** *Mrs Tian thinks she held Monique's arms when she was standing up. This was as she told her to leave. She may have picked her up although that is not clear from her submission. She admits to being angry with Monique. Why that anger might have arisen is clear given Monique's commitment to greater goals. Mr Calton also referred to Monique's "antics".*

**2.130** Mr Forbes said he was on the gymnasium floor coaching boys. He recalls hearing Mrs Tian tell Monique to leave the gymnasium. He continued:

*...and Monique was sitting on the floor, crouched, and Ju Ping ordered her to get out of the gym. Monique refused to go. Ju Ping went over and picked up Monique by the arm, turned her around and pushed her towards the door by the arm. In that process there was a stumble, a collision, on to the people, turning around to go to the door.*

**2.131** Mr Forbes said that Mrs Tian had approached Monique quickly and in picking her up had to turn her through almost 180 degrees in order to face the door. He attributes the speed of the approach and the need to turn Monique around as she was picked up as the cause of the stumble, if not collision. He says that he did not see Mrs Tian kick Monique. Mr Forbes denied speaking to Mrs Allen about Monique being kicked by Mrs Tian (at that time she was not a houseparent at the AIS) but did speak to Monique the next day. Mr Forbes speculated that Mrs Allen's reaction to Monique being evicted from the gymnasium would be that it was something for her daughter and Mrs Tian to sort out between them. Although he could not recall saying anything to that effect in front of Mrs Clarkson, he considered that it was possible that he had.

Mrs Allen denies any knowledge of the alleged kicking until the Inquiry came about. Specifically, she says that she has never discussed it with Mr Forbes.

2.132 Monique Allen firmly rejects any suggestion that she was kicked by Mrs Tian. She recalls having a "horrible day" in the gymnasium and "in hindsight" being "pretty silly and dangerous to myself". She confirmed that she was working toward new goals, that she had been evicted from the gymnasium and that the incident occurred on a weekday. However, she places it as occurring in 1988 rather than 1989. The Inquiry considers that she is wrong in that last respect given the convergence of evidence from Mr Calton, Mr Forbes and Mrs Tian.

2.133 Mrs Clarkson's evidence is not especially helpful. There does not appear to have been any sensation in 1989 among the gymnasts about Monique being kicked by Mrs Tian. Mr Forbes' observations are a more certain and plausible explanation for what she alleged to be Mr Forbes' comments about Mrs Allen.

2.134 Hollie Bevans' evidence is that of an 18 year old recalling what she saw as a 12 year old. Compared with Mr Calton's evidence, her description of the kick appears exaggerated and, at times, is contradictory. Gymnasts often have bruises on their thighs and lower legs for a number of reasons, including falling off the balance beam. Mrs Clarkson said that she did not observe any bruising and added that Monique's training was not interrupted. At various stages during her oral submission, Hollie's bitterness towards the AIS was evident and manifested itself in exaggerations such as "kicked her [Monique] a fair way across the gym".

The Inquiry has substantial doubts about the accuracy of Hollie's observations at the time as well as her recollection of them.

2.135 The respective descriptions of the incident presented by Mr Calton and Mr Forbes were the most detailed and bore considerable similarities. Mr Xiong's evidence is to similar effect as well - as far as it goes. There was nothing to suggest that those similarities derived from anything other than the witnesses' own observations of the incident. However, the evidence of Mr Calton and Mr Forbes differs in the most important respect: what Mr Calton interpreted as a kicking action at close quarters is what Mr Forbes observed as a stumble.

**2.136** None of the witnesses to the alleged incident can be regarded as totally independent or disinterested. The position in relation to Monique Allen, Hollie Bevans and Mrs Tian has been mentioned above. Mr Forbes is a close professional colleague of Mrs Tian of some 10 years' standing. A finding against her may reflect poorly on a program which he heads and to which he is very committed. Mr Calton is no friend of the AIS and Mrs Tian. None of this is to suggest that any of the witnesses have been dishonest because there is no specific evidence of that having occurred. However, these matters, together with an assessment of the witnesses' credibility when they appeared before the Inquiry, must be taken into account in considering the weight to be attached to their submissions.

**2.137** There are some other factors to consider. First, for Mrs Tian to kick Monique Allen was regarded by many witnesses as out of character. Second, if such an incident occurred, it might be thought to have attracted some notoriety - a notoriety which the Inquiry has not detected. Third, Monique Allen was Australia's top gymnast. She could be regarded as Mrs Tian's favourite. She has a placid personality. For her to be "kicked out" of the gymnasium for not being serious about her gymnastics was sensational. She said that being kicked out of the gymnasium happened only 2 or 3 times in her 10 year career at the AIS. Mrs Tian could remember this one time only. It was suggested to the Inquiry that being "kicked out" can easily become "kicked", especially in young and impressionable minds. While that may be so, that suggestion is not particularly influential in present circumstances.

**2.138** The allegation must be proven and the evidence presented to the Inquiry is significantly short of doing so. Accordingly, the allegation is rejected.

*iii. Further Observations*

**2.139** There are two further observations which can be made.

**2.140** Even if proved as alleged, the two incidents of kicking involved no malice, no brutality and no injury. They might therefore be regarded in some quarters as trivial. However, that a head coach might kick the top athlete sets totally the wrong example for others at the AIS and in the sport. It therefore becomes a serious matter.



2.141 Consideration was given to whether Mrs Tian's handling of Monique when she picked her up and told her to leave the gymnasium was in all the circumstances inappropriate. No specific allegation was made in this respect, but this action was integral to the allegation pertaining to kicking. Monique had been ordered to leave by someone who had the requisite authority. She was refusing to do so. Needless to say, coaches of children must exercise great caution in such matters. Judged by its nature (pick up and push) and the absence of a degree of force that was either substantial or physically harmful (especially taking into account that Monique was 17 years old and not much smaller than Mrs Tian), the Inquiry does not believe that disproportionate force was used. Any allegation of inappropriate conduct in this respect is rejected.

## 5. ROUGH HANDLING

### a. General

2.142 This section covers a variety of forms of physical abuse such as shaking, throwing and pushing. The Inquiry has found two allegations of inappropriate conduct proven: one of shaking and the other being an occasion when a gymnast was repeatedly pushed into the AIS gymnasium's foam pit.

### b. Strapped to Horizontal Bar

#### i. General

2.143 In the *Canberra Times* of 20 April 1995, Mr Hardman was quoted as saying,

I saw girls hand-strapped to the bar and left there for over 30 minutes.

2.144 In *The Australian* of 21 April 1995, Mr Hardman was quoted as follows:

*In training young girls were strapped to the bars for 30 or 40 minutes, constantly sobbing and asking for their mothers. Their wrists were blistered, bleeding and scarred.*

2.145 It was reported in the 29 May 1995 edition of *Who Weekly* that Mrs Tian

*had her assistants strap girls to men's high bars for 30 minutes at a time, leaving girls' wrists blistered and bleeding...*

**2.146** These are especially disturbing allegations. The scenes which the quotations depict suggest cruel and inhuman treatment. Given that the normal use of bars is to swing around and to hang from them, a reader might be forgiven for thinking that the girls were left to hang from the bars for at least 30 minutes.

**2.147** The Inquiry has found that nothing could be further from the truth. Not a shred of evidence has come to the attention of the Inquiry (other than from Mr Hardman) which would suggest any inappropriate conduct by AIS coaching staff in this regard. Indeed, Mr Hardman provided a fuller account of events to the Inquiry than appears in the media reports and it left a very different impression.

*ii. Mr Lu Ming and Lisa McTieman*

**2.148** The incidents alleged by Mr Hardman occurred on the men's bar, probably during 1989 or 1990. The coach involved was Mr Lu Ming.

**2.149** The following description of the use of the men's bar is drawn from a number of sources. Even though the men's bar is not an apparatus used by women in competition, it is commonly used to teach basic skills involved in circle movements. These skills are transferred to the women's competition apparatus, the uneven bars. Unlike the uneven bars which are made of wood, the men's bar consists of smooth steel. Gymnasts working on the uneven bars use hand guards and "white chalk" (magnesium carbonate) to protect their hands. When on the men's bar they place their hands inside what Mr Hardman described as pigskin or suede gardening gloves. Sometimes socks are used. These enable the gymnasts to glide around the smooth bar with less friction and with their hands protected. Owing to the speed and force generated by swinging around the bar, there is a real risk that a gymnast will lose her grip and fall to the ground thereby causing injury. To eliminate that risk a continuous strap made of a canvas-like material is looped around the wrists of the gymnast and the bar. Straps can come in different lengths. Some of the gymnasts refer to them as "chicken grips". It is in this sense that a gymnast is "strapped" to the bar.

**2.150** To get onto the bar, a gymnast will climb atop a spotting box which is to one side of the bar, loop the straps onto her wrists and the bar, adjust for appropriate firm pressure and comfort and swing across to the centre of the bar. She will complete her swings (this will take at most two or three minutes) and slide back to the spotting box. If there is a small group working on the bar, she will untie herself and jump down to the ground. While that girl has been undertaking her swings, another will have been strapping herself to the bar in readiness for her turn. Obviously, this saves time. The gymnasts will continue to take turns using the bar. In all, the period spent working on the bar (a rotation) will be in the order of 30 to 40 minutes and then the group will move to the next apparatus.

**2.151** If she does not untie herself, she will slide across to the box and sit or stand atop of it until she is rested and ready to undertake the next set. If she sits, she may have her arms raised slightly above her head. This can save some time because the straps can be quite awkward. Also, if the fit of the straps is comfortable the gymnast may not wish to interfere with that. The straps exert pressure on the gymnast's wrist and this can cause them to redden temporarily and in some cases can rub the skin so that there is a mild abrasion or blister. The degree to which this might happen will depend on the duration of the pressure and the fit of the straps.

**2.152** The foregoing describes a widely used practice in gymnastics that is regarded as proper.

**2.153** The essence of Mr Hardman's allegation is that Mr Lu Ming did not allow the gymnasts he was coaching to take their hands out of the straps. This is alleged to have occurred in 1987 or 1988. However, according to records supplied to the Inquiry by the ASC, Mr Lu Ming did not commence at the AIS until 1989. This error on Mr Hardman's part has no particular significance. Obviously, if a number of girls were working on the bar together, it would be impractical for all of them to remain strapped to the bar. Thus, the alleged events would tend to occur if the group was working on the uneven bars and one girl was sent across to the men's bar to practice a particular skill. Mr Hardman said the number of girls involved with this alleged inappropriate practice was about five, and that each of them was not allowed to take her hands out of the straps for the duration of her period at the bar. That could be for up to 40 minutes, although it would usually be less. This would have occurred for each gymnast on at least two occasions. Mr Hardman said:

*Because the Institute is so big you could afford to have one gymnast on one piece of equipment and quite often there could be one gymnast just on that bar and the coach could be quite some distance away keeping an eye, watching, and I can recall that: 'No, you're not allowed to come off, you stay there.'*

**2.154** He added that Mr Lu Ming would say something like, "Keep your hands strapped through the loops." Mr Hardman said the girls

*were emotionally distressed and quite often the hands and the wrists, in some cases, bleeding or severely blistered.*

**2.155** He qualified this by saying that he saw "bleeding and blistered wrists" on one occasion. Later he further qualified this by saying the girl had a

*blister that was bleeding, not dripping blood everywhere, but certainly both her wrists were raw.*

**2.156** He did not believe that medical attention was required. It appears that simple first-aid was sufficient. There was no allegation that any girl's wrists were "scarred". Mr Hardman identified the girl concerned in the incident of the bleeding blister as Lisa McTiernan.

**2.157** In relation to their emotional distress, Mr Hardman later said that only some of the gymnasts were crying.<sup>13</sup> He did not allege to the Inquiry that the girls were "constantly sobbing and asking for their mothers".

**2.158** Apart from Lisa McTiernan, he was unable to identify any of the other girls allegedly involved. He said that at no time were the girls required to hang from the bar - "they're not suspended". Apart from overheard instructions from Mr Lu Ming, Mr Hardman appears to have relied on intermittent observation while he was undertaking his own coaching to see that the girls did not take their hands out of the straps. Mr Hardman told the Inquiry that he did not protest to Mr Lu Ming or mention the incidents to any of the other coaches or any AIS administrator.

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<sup>13</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter 6, some crying is a common and accepted feature of gymnastics' training for girls.

2.159 Mr Lu Ming declined to make a submission to the Inquiry. Nevertheless, the Inquiry considers that the allegation can be resolved without hearing from him. Lisa McTiernan denied Mr Hardman's allegations insofar as they related to her. The following series of questions and answers occurred with her.

Q. *...if you have done your dozen [swings], would you completely unstrap and jump down to the ground?*

A. *If there's other people waiting, then you'd have to.*

Q. *What if there is not?*

A. *Then you'd just - you could unstrap if you wanted or you could just sit there like that. It would depend...*

Q. *With your hands above your head while you got your sense of balance back?*

A. *Yes.*

Q. *What would you do?*

A. *I'd usually just sit there. If there was no one, I'd sit there and just keep my hands in the straps.*

Q. *You were comfortable doing that?*

A. *Quicker than having to get all adjusted again.*

Q. *And you preferred to leave yourself tied to the bar?*

A. *Yes.*

Q. *With your hands above your head?*

A. *To the side.*

Q. *To the side?*

A. *Because there's boxes at the side of the bar... Sometimes I'd get undone if I needed to move my wrists around.*

Q. *Did you ever get told by the coach that you were not allowed to untie yourself?*

A. *No, no.*



Q. *No recollection of that. Did you ever have a situation where your hands were - would your hands get bruised or cut or blistered?*

A. *Yes, blistered from the straps if they were a bit tight, if you didn't get the right size.*

Q. *Oh, I see. And where would it blister, Lisa?*

A. *Under...[pointed to wrist]*

Q. *On the wrist? The wrist there?*

A. *Yes, because it sort of come around here - came around here.*

Q. *And would it make the skin raw and blister it a bit?*

A. *Like you'd get little blood blisters maybe if it pinched, or if you'd already had blisters there from the uneven bars it might bleed a little bit, but usually if you were bleeding you'd put a bit of tape around, sort of, to stop it rubbing. It was mainly from rubbing.*

Q. *Lisa, do you have any recollection of ever using the bars as we have described, say, for 45 minutes or something like that, with your wrists bleeding in that way and not being allowed to come down off the bars?*

A. *No.*

...

Q. *Not to come off the bars but to continue to do the giants [swings]?*

A. *No. If we had a blister, they'd let you put - we had some Xylocaine, sort of like an anaesthetic thing. You'd put that on and a bit of foam and tape to pad it a bit because it hurt, but never made to stay there.*

Q. *Never?*

A. *No.*

**2.160** Other young gymnasts from this era who were coached by Mr Lu Ming in the same group as Lisa McTiernan, namely Rebecca Jackson, Ruth Moniz and

Kristy Wilson, made no mention of or expressly denied any such practices as alleged by Mr Hardman. Gymnasts generally denied any knowledge of the alleged objectionable practice or of anything similar occurring at the AIS at any time. They were dismissive of blisters on wrists which can equally be caused by the hand guards used on the uneven bars. Mr Forbes and Mrs Tian had no knowledge of such matters.

**2.161** Mrs Clarkson who was the women's apprentice coach in 1989 when Mr Hardman was the men's apprentice coach said that Mr Hardman had told her about an incident involving Lisa McTiernan. The sketchy description she provided to the Inquiry bore a resemblance to the incident allegedly involving Lisa having a blister. However, Mrs Clarkson does not recall observing anything that was untoward in this regard and was reliant entirely upon what Mr Hardman had told her.

**2.162** Ms Debbie Maher has been the head coach of the Canberra United Gymnastics Club for 14 years and since 1994 she has been an acting administrator in the AIS gymnastics program. She recalls a day in the AIS when Mr Lu Ming had been instructing Lisa on the bar. Later she was told either Mr Hardman or Mr Ken Meredith, that Lisa had not been permitted to take her hands out the grips. Ms Maher says that she observed nothing untoward about the occasion. In 1989, Mr Meredith was one of the senior male gymnasts and from February 1990 he took up a position as men's apprentice coach at the AIS. He denies any knowledge of the incident and feels sure that Lisa would have said something to him about it if it had occurred because it was in her nature to be forthright and because they got on well together.

**2.163** Mr Hardman appears to have misinterpreted and overreacted to events. Overheard, shouted instructions from a person whose English was poor is not a sound basis for asserting a general direction not to release the straps. An overwhelming weight of evidence is against this allegation.

**2.164** In light of the Inquiry's findings, the newspaper reports quoted at the commencement of this section are outrageous.

**2.165** The Inquiry rejects Mr Hardman's allegation.

**c. Shaking: Mr Calton and Renee Trentini**



**2.166** It was alleged by a number of people that in late 1992 or early 1993 while in the AIS gymnasium, Mr Calton picked up Renee Trentini and shook her.

**2.167** Ms Jenny Clack, now of Perth, was an AIS apprentice coach in women's gymnastics from January 1992 until January 1994. Ms Clack was in the observation gallery in the AIS gymnasium. She said she was leaving to go to university and looked down into the gymnasium and saw Mr Calton with Renee at the far end in the vicinity of one of the trampolines. Ms Clack said:

*...basically he picked her up and just shook her like a rag doll. He was very angry and she was very upset...*

**2.168** Ms Clack said that Mr Calton shook Renee briefly: something like five to 10 seconds. She was unable to say exactly where his hands were placed on Renee because it was at the far end of the gym. Ms Clack said that Mr Calton did not shake Renee in a really rough manner, rather she was "very limp" and "not reacting at all". Ms Clack described Mr Calton's actions as "definitely inappropriate".

**2.169** Joanna Wilson who was a gymnast at the AIS said:

*Well, I was over the other side of the gym training and I just looked over and I saw him [Mr Calton] shouting and I think because she [Renee] was scared to do something or couldn't do it and he was yelling at her and shaking her.*

**2.170** Joanna said that Mr Calton had Renee by the shoulders and was shaking her backwards and forwards. Her head and torso were "wobbling". This action lasted for about five seconds. Joanna considered that Mr Calton had shaken Renee "hard" rather than "very hard" or "really hard". Joanna says that Renee was crying and that she was on bars at the time.

**2.171** Another gymnast Alyssa Harvey who has been at the AIS since January 1992 said that she saw Mr Calton shake Renee by the shoulders. Alyssa would have been about 10 years old at the time. She described the shaking Renee received as "can't get much harder". The shaking lasted about five seconds. She said Renee cried, although she cannot be sure of that.

**2.172** Kate Lam said that she had some memory of the event, but not a clear one. She said, "...he picked her up and shaken, I think, but I cannot tell you if it was a big shake or not".

**2.173** Renee thought the incident happened in early 1993 but she was not sure. She described it as follows:

*I was on the trampoline and when he spots you on the trampoline and I was trying to do a double back and I could not get the timing right with him, and like when he jumps you are supposed to jump too but I would always be out of time and I was still trying to do it, kind of thing, but I could not get it.*

**2.174** She said that Mr Calton became angry, picked her up and shook her. He grabbed her around the waist and shook her for "probably five seconds". She described the shaking in these terms:

*Like, it was not really hard but then again it was not as if it was just a play kind of shake kind of thing.*

**2.175** She said that she had been crying before being shaken, but that it had made her cry more. However, she was not physically harmed by the incident.

**2.176** Mr Calton denied the allegation. He offered the explanation that he did have occasion on the trampoline with Renee to take hold of her and physically straighten her body and make her hold herself taut. He said that this was a proper coaching technique and was followed in a number of gyms. In response to a suggestion that a gymnast who had been coached for some time would understand the difference between corrective touching by her regular coach and rough handling, Mr Calton suggested that may not necessarily be the case if the gymnast was already upset, as Renee was in this case.

**2.177** There are some clear differences in the evidence of the five witnesses (four gymnasts and Ms Clack). These are in relation to the apparatus being used, perhaps the force applied and where Mr Calton was holding Renee. Also, all the girls were about 10 years old at the time and some allowance must be made for the potential for unreliability. However, their accounts have many similarities. It must be expected that there will be differences in observation and recollection, especially of an event some years ago. The fact is that the

gymnast and Ms Clack all observed a shaking incident lasting in the vicinity of five seconds and they did not regard Mr Calton's actions as a normal part of tuition.

**2.178** The Inquiry has concluded that Mr Calton did shake Renee Trentini in a forceful manner but not with real violence. Some of the evidence of the force used is exaggerated. This was inappropriate conduct on his part. The Inquiry's recommended action is set out at the conclusion of this chapter.

**d. Repeated Pushing Into Foam Pit: Mr Calton and Renee Trentini**

**2.179** A substantial number of allegations were made that Mr Calton had "thrown" Renee into the gymnasium's foam pit and pushed her back in repeatedly when she tried to get out. Mr Calton does not deny that this incident happened. The issue in question is whether his behaviour was in all the circumstances appropriate.

**2.180** The AIS gymnasium has a two metre deep pit which is filled with cubes of foam. It is safe to dive or fall into the pit, even head-first. The foam pit is used for various training exercises such as learning to somersault from a height. The next two paragraphs are based on Mr Calton's evidence.

**2.181** Mr Calton was coaching Renee on a "double back" on the trampoline. It seems that Renee was encountering difficulty with that skill. During the course of the training session Mr Calton conceived an exercise which he hoped would create in Renee a sense of commitment and aggression which Mr Calton believed she needed to apply to the skill she was learning. With no real warning or explanation he told Renee to get into the pit and instructed her to come out of it by pushing past him as hard as she could.<sup>14</sup> There was a "crash mat" in the pit which helped her get the footing needed to get out. However, when she tried to do get out and push past him, he would push her back in. This occurred about five times and then he let her get out of the pit. Mr Calton said that Renee "might have been a little bit upset at the end of it" and "maybe a bit angry at me". He claimed that Renee went on to do the skill more successfully and with confidence after that point.

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14 Where she was trying to get out, a crash mat had been placed which enabled her to obtain a footing.

2.182 This particular exercise was one that Mr Calton had never performed before, nor has he done so since. He has not heard of anyone else performing it. Mr Calton did not plan the exercise in advance or discuss it with the head coach or with a sports psychologist. He said it came to him during the session as a possible way of solving some training problems facing Renee.

2.183 This incident occurred in mid-February 1993. According to Mr Forbes, the incident occurred within days of him counselling Mr Calton on other matters which he reported upon almost immediately to the Executive Director of the AGF, Miss Peggy Browne. Miss Browne's diary notes of that report are dated 25 February 1993.

2.184 Renee said the incident did not upset her because she was already upset. She says that she was pushed back into the pit only about twice. Asked why Mr Calton did this, she replied, "I don't know, because he was angry." Her voice was hollow when she discussed this incident, and although she was to some degree dismissive of it, it seemed to the Inquiry that she was dispirited.

2.185 Some of the young gymnasts thought Mr Calton was being mean to Renee. Alyssa Harvey said:

*He was being really smart - mean sort of smart. He said, "Renee, you don't try hard enough. Come on, get out of the pits," and Renee started to cry and she started to get out of the pit one side and Mark pushed her down again...finally he just walked away.*

2.186 Kate Lam told a similar story. She said that Renee flew through the air for about a metre before landing in the pit.

2.187 Ms Clack said Mr Calton's "voice and tone was quite aggressive" and "Renee was quite upset". She added:

*[Renee] was basically crying most of the time. I think, maybe towards the end she just got herself so worked up that she stopped, but definitely at the beginning she was in tears... But definitely it wasn't a wonderful experience for her.*

2.188 In her opinion, Mr Calton's behaviour was not appropriate. Ms Clack said that very little explanation or warning was given to Renee.

*...he basically just threw her in the pit, and said, "Come on, Renee, get out," you know, and pushed, you know, "Get mad and push," sort've thing, and he was very rough. Like, he didn't just tap her back in, you know, he's very strong... I wouldn't think that she would respond too much to what he was saying...he was loud. You know, he didn't just talk quietly to her. It definitely grabbed everyone's attention.*

**2.189** Ms Clack went on to say that Renee seemed to respond to the provocation, and her emotional upset propelled her to start pushing against Mr Calton. He then stopped. She described her own reaction as one of shock. She added:

*...it just seemed a very barbaric type of way of teaching someone...to become mentally tough...*

**2.190** However, she did not observe anyone try to stop the incident, nor did she do so herself.

**2.191** Ms Debbie Maher witnessed this incident involving the pit, although she incorrectly said it occurred in late 1993 or early 1994. However, that error is not significant. Ms Maher was on the gymnasium floor. She said that the incident

*could have gone on for two or three minutes. Could have been longer.*

**2.192** Renee was pushed back into the pit eight or nine times, but Ms Maher said she was not 100% sure. She described Mr Calton's manner in the way he handled Renee as "aggressive" but qualified that by saying, "it wasn't a real push so that she'd get a, you know, a huge distance out of it". Ms Maher told the Inquiry that she was more concerned with the psychological side of the incident than the physical. When informed of the motive for this behaviour, she said:

*...Renee was in tears; she was very, very distressed, and she was crying...you can't work in tears. You know, if someone is that distressed, I mean, its not proving anything. That isn't proving a little exercise of strength or courage, or, you know, motivation. No, I am sorry, I just totally disagree with that. If the girl wasn't in*



*tears, if she was fighting back and trying to get out and trying to push her way, and you know, then sure, but she wasn't; she was in tears, she was distressed.*

**2.193** Ms Maher's impression was that Renee was not trying hard to get out. "There was no effort." She regarded Mr Calton's behaviour as "definitely inappropriate". However, she did not observe anyone try to stop the incident, nor did she do so herself.

**2.194** Mrs Tian said she saw Mr Calton push Renee back into the pit two or three times, but her impression was that the exercise was already under way. She told the Inquiry that

*...my thinking is that he cannot push children like this...*

**2.195** The following series of questions and answers occurred:

Q. *Did you stop Mark from doing it or had it already stopped when you arrived?*

A. *No, no. I stop Mark.*

Q. *You stopped Mark from doing it?*

A. *If I cannot stop Mark I cannot say anything.*

Q. *Okay. So you went over to Mark and you stopped him from doing this?*

A. *Yes. I told Mark, 'You can't do that.'*

**2.196** Mrs Tian says that she asked Mr Calton why was he doing this. She says that he told her that Renee "was scared and she is standing here not doing anything"<sup>15</sup>. If Mr Calton did explain his motives for the exercise to Mrs Tian as he explained them to the Inquiry, it is clear that she did not understand him. She spoke to Mr Forbes and said she wanted him to speak to Mr Calton about the incident.

**2.197** Mr Forbes said he saw the incident. He was coaching boys on parallel bars. He turned around, saw Mr Calton push Renee into the pit and thought

nothing of it. He said that could be fun. He returned to his coaching, but then noticed that others were looking in the direction of the pit. He turned again and saw Mr Calton push Renee back into the pit three times. Renee was crying. Mr Forbes said,

*...and I yelled out, 'Mark, what are you doing?' And he - I don't know whether he actually heard me but he sort of stopped.*

**2.198** Later Mr Forbes said that he may have just yelled out, "Mark". He saw Renee get out of the pit and go and sit on the bench on the side of the gymnasium. About 30 seconds to a minute after the incident ceased he saw Mrs Tian and Mr Calton converge and speak. After lunch that day, Mrs Tian spoke to Mr Forbes and, according to Mr Forbes, referred to the incident, said that she had told Mr Calton it was no good and wanted Mr Forbes to speak to him about it. That happened a couple of days later. He said that he spoke generally to Mr Calton about the handling of the gymnasts, but it is clear that the discussion was dominated by the allegations of inappropriate handling referred to below under the heading **Sexual Abuse**. Mr Forbes cannot recall whether he spoke to Mr Calton about the pit incident expressly.

**2.199** Mr Forbes appears not to have been concerned about the physical force involved.

*I mean, it's not any physical force involved, you just have to tip them off the edge of the pit. I mean, there's no force in the push... Very gentle push, just enough to topple over and jump back into the foam.*

**2.200** Mr Forbes had no knowledge of the reasons which Mr Calton gave to the Inquiry for his actions. When told of them by the Inquiry, Mr Forbes said:

*...it appears to me to be extremely unusual and [in] my observation of it I saw it as inappropriate... I saw that the way he was handling the child was an inappropriate way for a coach to handle a child... To me she was upset and crying and she was in a position, I felt - in a position where - to me it wasn't a coaching technique and she was upset at the situation.*



**2.201** Mr Calton denies that Mr Forbes mentioned this incident to him during their discussion about the other matters. That is probably correct. He also says that Mrs Tian did not speak to him as she alleges. Mrs Tian's evidence that she *stopped* the incident appears incorrect. It is inconsistent not only with Mr Calton's evidence but that of Ms Clack, Mr Forbes and Ms Maher. However, the Inquiry's experience with Mrs Tian is that there can be no guarantee that she understood the questions accurately or that her efforts at expressing herself in English were always an accurate statement of events. In any case, this error is of no particular importance.

**2.202** The views of Ms Vicki de Prazer were sought. She is a sports psychologist at the AIS. She was understandably cautious about expressing an opinion without knowing both the coach and the gymnast. Their identities were not revealed to her. She described the exercise used by Mr Calton as a "little unusual". She believed it important to explain in advance to the athlete what was to happen and its purpose, and to secure the girl's agreement. Speaking generally about challenging athletes in various ways, she said "people do things that are not necessarily at first glance useful for their sport". Ms de Prazer made the following comments:

*...it seems like when you have got a large male being aggressive to a small female gymnast, it doesn't sound appropriate... [A]nother gymnast may laugh at that, and turn around and, you know, throw the foam at the coach. It is very much an individual thing, too... And she may not have been of the kind of personality that really could take that kind of exercise.*

**2.203** It is very important that this Inquiry avoid the temptation to merely substitute its judgment about what should be done in a variety of situations which are really the preserve of the expert coaches (especially when the Inquiry may have the benefit of hindsight). Further, coaches must be able to experiment, innovate, follow their intuition and hunches, and challenge athletes to achieve what they have not achieved before. That is their job. The time honoured expression, "We don't really know what will happen until we give it a go," is relevant. That an action does not succeed, or even has some negative result, does not necessarily prove misconduct by the coach or mistreatment of the athlete. On the other hand, there are limits to acceptable behaviour within which coaches must act. There are medical, ethical and legal limits. These are wrapped up in terms such as "sound practice".

**2.204** Mr Calton was presented with a very difficult but physically talented gymnast. He considered and tried a new exercise which he thought might produce results. He appears to have been innovative when that which was conventional had failed. He claims that Renee did perform better in a relevant respect afterwards. On the evidence of Ms Clack, Mr Calton did manage to arouse Renee, and her emotions focused her physical energies on the challenge of pushing him aside. Notwithstanding what Kate Lam may have implied and the views of Ms Clack, the Inquiry accepts the observations of Mr Forbes and, to a lesser degree, Ms Maher that excessive physical force was not used when Mr Calton pushed Renee back into the pit.

**2.205** However, the Inquiry considers that Mr Calton was plainly insensitive to the very special circumstances of the occasion. Renee was 11 years of age. Although they had worked with each other for some time, the difference in their respective body sizes and maturity would have placed Renee in a position of considerable disadvantage. She was upset to start with. There appears to have been insufficient discussion of what was to happen and why. His manner was overbearing and aggressive, if not frightening. The incident lasted about two minutes and Renee was pushed into the pit at least five times. This was an exercise that Mr Calton had never performed before, nor has he done so since with Renee or anyone else notwithstanding its claimed success. It is significant that the immediate reaction produced in four gymnastics coaches, three of them being very experienced, was that this was inappropriate conduct. Mr Calton's description of Renee's reaction to the incident and to him impressed the Inquiry as unjustifiably understated when viewed against the other accounts.

**2.206** In making these findings, it has to be recognised that some, but not all, of the witnesses might have reason to be hostile toward Mr Calton. However, the Inquiry did not detect anything untoward in this regard, although Kate Lam's evidence was probably coloured by her feelings. Indeed, those who might have less reason for hostility, such as Ms Clack and Ms Maher, spoke in the most critical terms.

**2.207** A final issue warrants some comment. Why did Ms Clack and Ms Maher fail to act when they saw what was going on?<sup>16</sup> Was it not as serious as made out? Ms Clack explained her inaction as due to her junior position. She had no

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16 The Inquiry accepts that the incident was largely over before Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes had a real opportunity to intervene.

authority to intervene. Ms Maher has known and worked with Mr Calton over a period of many years and said she had a "lot of respect for him". However, she did not feel at liberty to intervene because he would have said something like, "You don't have any right to be here." \*These are insufficient reasons for inaction. To be fair, both women probably now regret their inaction and at the time they were taken aback by the incident.

**2.208** While it is to be expected that there will be differences in the various accounts, there is a general uniformity in them which suggests that matters alleged have not been overstated to any significant degree.

**2.209** The Inquiry has concluded that Mr Calton did repeatedly push Renee Trentini into the foam pit in a manner which was in all the circumstances inappropriate. The Inquiry's recommended action is set out at the conclusion of this chapter.

**e. Repeated Forcing Through Backward Somersault: Mr Calton and Renee Trentini**

**2.210** Ms Maher alleged that on the same day as the incident involving the foam pit, or on a day near to it, Mr Calton was supporting Renee while she performed about 10 back somersaults. Renee was using an area of the floor surface where there is a "sunken crash mat". This enables a gymnast to take off from a firm floor surface, but land on a sunken soft mat which is roughly level with the surface. The technique and hand placement which Mr Calton was using to propel Renee through this skill were conventional. However, Ms Maher alleged that Mr Calton used his strength to force Renee through all of the somersaults when Renee did not wish to perform the skill. She presented no evidence as how she knew Renee did not wish to perform the skill other than that it was a skill she could perform and that she was crying at the time.

**2.211** Rebecca Jackson, then a 14 year old gymnast at the AIS, said that she thought Mr Calton's action "did not look the right way to go about it". She added:

*Like, he was just, like, helping her and pushing her back, and helping her and pushing her back, like he was not letting her walk back by herself or anything, he was just pushing her and helping*

*her and pushing. He was not letting her rest in between or anything like that.*

**2.212** Mr Calton said that at times Renee did become "scared on backward moving skills". On those occasions he would pick her up and turn her over to give her confidence that she could do the skill herself. Although he had no recollection of the alleged incident, he said that he could have assisted Renee through 10 consecutive backward somersaults. There would have been a brief pause for recovery between the somersaults.

**2.213** The evidence of Mr Calton's method being inappropriate is not convincing. Rebecca seems to consider that the somersaults were being performed in a series which was too quickly executed. This is denied by Mr Calton. Ms Maher points to an alleged negative frame of mind in Renee. On the other hand, Mr Calton says he was trying to assist Renee overcome fear. More importantly, what is alleged contains no real evidence that the physical handling was rough, hurtful, likely to unnecessarily risk injury or accompanied by any improper language or demeanour on the coach's part. It may be that some other coaches would have proceeded differently, but that does not necessarily make Mr Calton's conduct inappropriate.

**2.214** Renee made no mention of this incident in three interviews: the initial ones held over two consecutive afternoons and a third to deal with matters that had arisen in the meantime. The allegations made by Ms Maher and Rebecca came to the attention of the Inquiry after Renee's three interviews were complete. It was decided not to interview her again on this specific incident. It was clear that she was becoming upset over having to recount past incidents and the Inquiry saw insufficient reason to possibly aggravate matters.

**2.215** There is insufficient evidence to establish this allegation. Accordingly, it is rejected.

**f. Throwing: Mrs Tian and Unknown Gymnast**

**2.216** Dr Les Sharp is the head coach and founder of the Canberra City Gymnastics Club. He has a long and distinguished record of service to Australian gymnastics, particularly in the ACT.



2.217 He alleged that in the middle of 1994 in the AIS gymnasium he saw Mrs Tian "scream at a small girl, shake her, pick her up and throw her, probably a metre or a metre and a half". The girl was shaken four or five times - not in jest - and by the tone of Mrs Tian's voice, Dr Sharp believed that the girl was being criticised. Dr Sharp was on the observation balcony some distance from where the alleged incident occurred. He said that the gymnast was quite a young one (eight, nine or 10 years old) and that the incident occurred in the afternoon training session. When asked whether in his career as a coach he had seen a comparable incident or worse, he replied, "I don't think I have". He immediately mentioned that he did not think the gymnast had been injured. (It would seem that the girl landed on a soft mat.)

2.218 Dr Sharp was unable to provide the Inquiry with the name of the girl allegedly involved. He did not provide the names of any witnesses. He did not see the events which preceded the incident - his concentration was elsewhere and had been attracted only by Mrs Tian's voice. Dr Sharp acknowledged that some incident may have occurred which warranted a reprimand for the girl. He left the gymnasium almost immediately and did not see what happened to the girl.

2.219 Mrs Tian denied the allegation. She said that she did not coach girls of the age which Dr Sharp mentioned, although she might look at their trials. She was at a loss to explain the allegations. No other evidence relevant to this incident came to the attention of this Inquiry. It was not practical to identify the girl. Hundreds of young girls pass through the AIS gymnasium each year on various gymnastic competitions, trials and camps. Accordingly, the Inquiry rejects this allegation.

2.220 The Inquiry believes the special circumstances of this allegation warrant the making of some observations. The information which Dr Sharp presented to the Inquiry is clearly of a kind which the Inquiry is established to consider and must consider. Although that information lacks a crucial detail - the girl's name - it is possible that the girl's identity could have come to light from another source. In those respects, Dr Sharp's actions in reporting what he claims to have seen are proper. As it has transpired, Dr Sharp is the only source of information supporting this allegation. In the circumstances, the lack of the knowledge of the girl's identity means that the allegation must be decisively rejected. However, this process may have placed Mrs Tian in an unfortunate situation. While she can deny the allegation and the Inquiry can reject the allegation, it is entirely possible that there may be an inoffensive explanation for

the incident. Yet Mrs Tian is not really in a position to offer that explanation because she cannot be told the identity of the girl. She may be denied the benefit of more decisively clearing the air. Such a prospect is not fanciful. It has to be recognised that many allegations which have come before this Inquiry have depicted those accused in a harsh and unflattering light, but upon investigation the conduct has been shown to be innocent. There are also difficulties in this for Dr Sharp. He is a strong critic of the AIS gymnastics program. There may be some who will now question his motives for making this allegation.

2.221 Circumstances should never have been allowed to develop such that it became essential to have an Inquiry. That proposition can be supported by this particular incident. If events were precisely as Dr Sharp describes them, how could a situation arise where, for whatever reason, a person with the standing in gymnastics of Dr Sharp did not see it as imperative to discover the names of the girl and witnesses and take up the incident with Mrs Tian and, if necessary, the higher authorities in the AIS and the AGF? Such action should have had a reasonable prospect of remedying a problem if it existed or of allaying Dr Sharp's concerns if there was an innocent explanation, rather than allowing those concerns to fester.

**g. Pushing and Pulling**

2.222 Coaches have occasion to take gymnasts, especially the younger ones, by the arm to show them where they are to stand for some reason. On other occasions the coaches may give the gymnasts an encouraging or guiding push on the shoulder to signify that they have to go to a particular apparatus. There is nothing inappropriate about these contacts. The degree to which this occurs can vary between gymnasiums. They may have their own cultures in this regard. When gymnasts change gymnasiums and go to one which has a greater degree of touch, some adjustment is necessary. There were some suggestions made to the Inquiry that coaches from former Eastern Bloc countries tended to make these kinds of contacts more often than coaches trained in Australia. Whether or not that is the case is not the point provided the contact is of a permissible kind. One parent informed the Inquiry that her daughter did not like the volume of touching received from a newly arrived coach. She spoke to the coach and an appropriate change in style was implemented. The impression received by the Inquiry was that this was



sensibly handled. Mr Forbes said that he observes the coaches at the AIS and does "not have a problem" with the way the gymnasts are handled.

**2.223** However, a guiding push could become a rough shove if a coach is tired, frustrated, angry or merely careless. Such aggressive or careless behaviour can be inappropriate. Whether or not behaviour is appropriate can become a very subjective issue. It is important to avoid becoming trivial: patterns of rough behaviour rather than aberrations from good behaviour should be the target of remedial action. Two parents drew to the attention of the Inquiry what they believed to be rough handling by two coaches: one of foreign origin and one Australian born. Neither allegation was pressed seriously and on the available evidence appeared to be very minor, if not trivial. In the circumstances the Inquiry has not considered it necessary to investigate these matters.

**2.224** Mr Dimitrievitch alleged that Ms Liang had pushed gymnasts out of anger or frustration in a rough way. He did not identify any specific gymnasts who were involved or the number of occasions the alleged behaviour took place. As indicated above, Mr Dimitrievitch had clashed with Ms Jiang. He appeared to be more impressionable than many people in relation to these matters. For instance, he was preceded and succeeded in his position at the AIS by Ms Stephanie Burrige, the Artistic Director of the Canberra Dance Theatre. She has had about 10 years experience of teaching ballet in the AIS WAG program and has not observed anything which she regarded as untoward. Taking into account the foregoing as well as the stated satisfaction of Mr Forbes, and the general absence of concern by parents and gymnasts, the Inquiry rejects this allegation. Ms Jiang had already been interviewed when this allegation was received. At that time she was involved in overseas travel. Earlier, she had denied any inappropriate conduct in the nature of physical abuse and, in view of the weakness of the evidence of this allegation, it was decided not to interview her a second time.

## **6. SEXUAL ABUSE**

### **a. General**

**2.225** No allegations of sexual abuse or related inappropriate behaviour by a coach were made direct to the Inquiry. Notwithstanding, the opportunity was taken to ask a sample of gymnasts (past and present), families, medical staff and administrators who came before the Inquiry whether they had any

information concerning any such abuse or behaviour. None of them made the slightest criticism or said that they ever had any reason to feel uncomfortable about such matters. The AIS chaplain, the Reverend Peter Nelson made the following comments:

*...there needs to be touch from the coaches, for example, lifting girls up to the bar or catching them or turning them over to help them with their exercising... there are male coaches who do that and if there's ever an opportunity to take license it would be at that [point] but I have never seen anything but the highest standards kept.*

**2.226** On the basis of that evidence and from the Inquiry's assessment of those AIS coaches who were interviewed, it appears that in these respects the coaching program has been conducted according to the highest standards of propriety.

**b. Previous Investigation**

**2.227** However, in her written submission, Mrs Robyn Trentini of Canberra made the following comment about Mr Calton, who had been working in the AIS gymnasium during 1991, 1992 and early 1993:

*Then Mark disappeared from the scene and it was being put around the gym that he had left under a cloud, that he had touched up the junior girls and other like rumours... [Mrs Trentini said she] had never seen any hint of such conduct, nor had Renee [her daughter] any hint of this in her days with Mark.*

**2.228** In her oral submission, Mrs Trentini repeated her view that she had no evidence of inappropriate behaviour. The impression left with the Inquiry was that these rumours were circulating in the gallery of parents because no-one knew why Mr Calton had left.

**2.229** In a subsequent interview, Mrs Trentini was more forthcoming. She alleged that a young gymnast from a country town who had been to the AIS (probably for a training camp) returned home and, according to Mrs Trentini, the girl's parent told her that

*she was uncomfortable with him [Mr Calton]. She felt that he was touching her and she just wasn't going to stay there.*

**2.230** The Inquiry questioned Mr Forbes on the alleged incident. It emerged that in early 1993 an allegation had been made that a young, novice gymnast from a country town who was attending a training camp at the AIS had been touched improperly during a training session by Mr Calton in the AIS gymnasium. Although he was not an AIS employee, the girl was in the AIS gymnasium on an AIS sponsored camp and appears to have stayed in the Residence. Mr Forbes said that he had received a telephone call from the girl's home town coach who said that the girl's mother had felt that Mr Calton had touched the girl inappropriately. Mr Forbes conducted an investigation and consulted with Mr Peter Sharpe, the AGF's National Coaching Director to whom Mr Calton was answerable. He concluded that there had been no wrongdoing, and Mr Sharpe agreed.

**2.231** Mr Forbes explained his reasoning as follows. Girls coming from a basic club environment (as did the girl concerned) have not experienced very much physical contact from a coach. He said, "They do forward rolls and they push them over or - the coach would have very little hands on contact." However, in the elite program Mr Forbes said that it is vital that the coach play a more active role, especially in relation to skills that involve acrobatics. The coach will be required to physically assist the gymnast with some movements (such as to flip them over), to "spot" or catch them for safety reasons and to demonstrate by touch the correct way to position and hold their bodies. Assisting with skills or spotting cannot be done effectively or with safety just by holding a girl's arm or leg. The centre of mass is within the torso and the coach must make contact with such areas as the waist, lower back and chest above the breast area. There are clearly established protocols for observing propriety. Both Mr Forbes and Mr Sharpe had been able to observe Mr Calton's coaching style over many years. They had never observed or heard of anything which might give rise to concern that he would act without propriety. Mr Calton was informed of the allegation by Mr Forbes and strongly denied any wrongdoing. Mr Calton told the Inquiry that he had been "stunned" by it and that he had never before been the object of such an allegation. Mr Forbes and Mr Sharpe reasoned that the girl's inexperience at that level had led her to misinterpret what was normal coaching practice. Mr Forbes counselled Mr Calton on "how behaviour could be interpreted" and told him that he did not believe the allegation to be true.

The girl's home town coach was consulted and Miss Browne of the AGF was informed of the outcome of the investigation.

**2.232** The Inquiry interviewed the home town coach and he confirmed the above account insofar as he had direct involvement in events. He said that he had reported back to the girl and her parents following Mr Forbes speaking to him about the investigation. According to the coach, they were satisfied and considered the incident over.

**2.233** The Inquiry does not consider that any inappropriate conduct occurred and the incident appears to have been appropriately resolved by the AIS at the time.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS**

**2.234** That the AIS not permit Mr Calton to coach in the AIS gymnasium or to coach any AIS scholarship holder until he can establish to the reasonable satisfaction of a counsellor nominated by the Australian Sports Medicine Federation that he has successfully completed counselling

- a. to ensure that he understands the inappropriate nature of his conduct as set out in this Chapter, and
- b. to enable him to identify and control any tendency toward repeating conduct of that general nature.

*Observation.* The circumstances surrounding Renee Trentini were unusual and it might be thought that Mr Calton's behaviour is unlikely to be repeated. However, the Inquiry is not confident that Mr Calton will recognise that he has acted inappropriately. Counselling is therefore necessary. Inherent in this recommendation is the view that Mr Calton has a useful contribution to make to gymnastics coaching and the opportunity should remain open to him to participate as fully as he wishes after appropriate counselling.

**2.235** That Mr Calton's inappropriate conduct as set out in this Chapter be referred to the Australian Coaching Council and to the Australian Gymnastic Federation for such action as those organisations consider fit.

Observation. The intent of the first recommendation is that Mr Calton receive counselling. However, Mr Calton no longer coaches at the AIS and, if he chooses to stay away, there may be little incentive for him to seek counselling. Therefore, it is desirable to invite these other organisations to consider such action as they consider fit and are empowered to take.

Historical Document



### 3. GYMNASIUM - ALLEGATIONS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ABUSE

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

##### a. Media Allegations

3.1 A number of allegations concerned what may be collectively described as psychological abuse appeared in the media in April and May this year. *The West Australian* of 17 April 1995 claimed:

...gymnasts were...sworn at, intimidated and humiliated in front of their peers

3.2 ...[Mrs] Glen Bevans of...Melbourne...[referred to] what she described to *The West Australian* as mental torture, name calling and humiliation.

*An anonymous parent ... said ... the gymnasts were lined up to face Ju Ping. 'If any one of the gymnasts had gained weight, they were told to step forward and then called names, humiliated...'<sup>17</sup>*

3.3 *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 19 April said the Inquiry had been established to determine whether

*prospective Sydney 2000 Olympic gymnasts - girls as young as nine and 10 - have been the victims of brutality, including verbal and emotional abuse...*

3.4 That newspaper also said

*One letter from a parent graphically detailed the alleged ill-treatment. 'If any of the gymnasts had put on weight or was*

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17 Gene Stephan, "Young Gymnasts Abused: Parents", *The West Australian*, 17 April 1995, p.1.



*overweight that gymnast was brought forward and called a fat pig, humiliated...*<sup>18</sup>

**3.5** The Brisbane Courier Mail carried a similar report:

*The mother of a NSW girl ... said yesterday that gymnasts as young as nine were called "fat pigs" in front of other athletes as a humiliation punishment for weight gains.*<sup>19</sup>

**3.6** *Who Weekly* reported on 29 May 1995

*[David] Hardman claims ... gymnasts were physically and verbally abused by Ju Ping ... those overweight would have to step forward and be soundly humiliated and ridiculed in front of fellow athletes, then dismissed in shame.*

*Heather Cleland claims Ju Ping's assistants called [her daughter] Melinda 'silly girl' and 'lazy girl'...*<sup>20</sup>

**b. No Abuse Found**

**3.7** The people reported in the media including the anonymous parent (in all probability Mrs Sheryl Whitwell) made allegations to the Inquiry about these matters. Further allegations were made concerning some specific matters of humiliation.

**3.8** There has been a great deal of influential hearsay and rumour circulating in the gymnastics community about these matters. The Inquiry's investigations indicate that the origin of this rests with the same few people. Once that became reasonably clear, most of the allegations were rejected as contrary to an overwhelming weight of evidence from those people who were in a position to have direct knowledge of events.

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18 Jacquelin Magnay, "Girl Gymnasts Brutally Treated, Say Parents", Sydney Morning Herald, 19 April 1995, p.1.

19 "Probe of AIS Staff Action", Courier Mail, 19 April 1995, p.3.

20 Paul Pottinger, "Miracle Worker or Whip-Cracker?", *Who Weekly*, 29 May 1995, 26, 28-9.

**3.9** A handful of allegations were found to be substantiated in the sense that certain incidents did occur. However, the conduct and practices which were the object of those allegations were found not to be inappropriate in all the circumstances.

**3.10** The investigation of the only allegation of swearing was not able to be completed because the coach against whom it was made declined to speak to the Inquiry.

**3.11** All allegations within this category of psychological abuse have been rejected. However, certain issues to do with reprimands for weight variation are dealt with in Chapter 6.

## **2. LANGUAGE**

### **a. Introduction**

**3.12** Mr Gui Planes, a spokesman for a group of parents of New South Wales gymnasts was quoted in the Sydney Morning Herald of 21 April 1995 as saying that

*...from our point of view the methods applied to subjugate the kids - calling them names, ... - is terrorising them.<sup>21</sup>*

**3.13** Mr Planes told the Inquiry that he had no personal knowledge of these matters although he claimed to have "talked to some of the kids".

### **a. Swearing**

**3.14** The only allegation of swearing which came to the attention of the Inquiry was made by Mr David Hardman of Perth. As has been mentioned above, Mr Hardman was a men's coach in various capacities at the AIS gymnasium during the late 1980s.

**3.15** He alleged that in 1989 or 1990 Mr Lu Ming had called a young gymnast a "little bitch". Mr Hardman does not recall the identity of the gymnast and has no knowledge of what might have prompted Mr Lu Ming to make such a

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21 Jacquelin Magnay, "Racist' Claims Anger Parents", 21 April 1995 p.10.

comment. Mr Hardman could only say that the gymnast appeared "not happy" about something and that the comment was loud enough for her to hear it. He provided no further details of the incident.

**3.16** As has been reported, Mr Lu Ming declined to make a submission to the Inquiry. This is not a case where the evidence is so strong that a finding of inappropriate conduct could be made without hearing from Mr Lu Ming. The identity of the girl is not known. Although the use of the expression "little bitch" by a coach towards a young girl would very likely be inappropriate, the full circumstances in which the alleged comment was made are not known. To reinforce this very point, a story was told to the Inquiry about another incident involving Mr Lu Ming and the use of foul language. This story arose quite incidentally and had no possible connection with Mr Hardman's allegation. Mr Lu Ming arrived in Australia in 1989. He could not speak English and appears to have started at the AIS quite quickly. He had charge of a group of young girls. From all accounts he was very popular with them. They helped to teach him English. However, they played a mischievous joke on him. Needing to go to the barber and being unfamiliar with what to do and say, the girls told him that if he was happy with his haircut he should say "fuckin beautiful" to the barber. The expression is rude, but amusing in the circumstances. Mr Hardman's allegation is consistent with the repetition of such mischief. Further, nothing is known about whether the girl heard the alleged comment, her reaction to it if she did, and the tone and manner of delivery of the comment.

**3.17** The only question is whether to reject the allegation or to find that the investigation cannot be completed. Mr Hardman has raised a matter which is sufficiently seriousness to warrant concern, but so much is not known to the Inquiry that it cannot reach a conclusion. In these circumstances, the Inquiry finds that the investigation cannot be completed.

**3.18** Mr Hardman told the Inquiry that he had heard no other language in the gymnasium which he would describe as swearing. No other information came to the Inquiry's attention which suggested that the coaches at the AIS used language which could be described as foul or swearing.

**b. Name Calling**

*i. Lazy, Silly, Stupid*

**3.19** Two complaints were received. Melinda Cleland who was at the AIS from about early May 1994 to 5 August 1994 alleged that she was called "lazy girl", "silly" and "stupid". She said that she was trying as hard as she could. She was called these names by her two coaches Ms Jiang Shao Yi and Mr Yang Qing Hua, although most of the name calling probably came from Mr Yang. Melinda was nine years old at the time.

**3.20** She said that she was called stupid "once". In relation to this occasion she did not know whether she had done something stupid, "They just said these things." Later she said that she was called stupid "often".

**3.21** Ms Karen Hamilton from Sydney alleged that her daughter, Courtney Cruickshank, who had been at the AIS from late December 1993 to early February 1994 was called lazy by Ms Jiang. Courtney was 10 years old at the time.

**3.22** The ASC in its written submission to the Inquiry claimed:

*The use of the terms 'fat and lazy' have been criticised in the press. These terms are not used to cause psychological humiliation, they are commonly used in other high performance centres, and indeed are often used in many sports as a means for a coach to express dissatisfaction that the performance is not 100%.*

**3.23** Indeed, Mrs Hamilton told the Inquiry that at the State Sports Centre at Homebush in Sydney, Courtney had been called lazy.

**3.24** However, the ASC submission is far from convincing. The object of these complaints are very young girls; they are not mature or even teenage athletes. The circumstance that the alleged inappropriate conduct is repeated in other high performance centres does not justify it if it is inherently wrong in the first place. The manner and circumstances of the delivery of the words can be just as, if not more, important than the words themselves. After Melinda left the AIS, she went to the VIS gymnastics program where she says that she did not experience the use of these words. She has developed sufficiently in her skills to represent Victoria at her level at the 1995 Australian Championships.

**3.25** The use of the expression lazy is not denied. The Inquiry accepts that the words stupid and silly have been used as well. The question is whether their use is inappropriate in all the circumstances. In themselves, the words are inoffensive. They are quite acceptable terms for use by parents, teachers and coaches to describe the behaviour of young children in particular. They can describe a factual state of affairs. They might also be used to impart a challenge to see if a gymnast is trying as hard as she can, or is in fact taking it easy. Firmly used, "silly" and "stupid" warn a child against a situation where she exposes herself to danger.

**3.26** Many AIS gymnasts of all ages informed the Inquiry that over the years they had been told they were lazy, and with complete accuracy. No offence was taken, or, in their view, meant. Other girls of the same age and level as Melinda and Courtney did not take offence if they were called lazy.

**3.27** Both Melinda and Courtney were not progressing well in the gymnasium. Both were homesick and that can affect their gymnasium performance. It is not for the Inquiry to question the coaches' assessment of the girls' progress. In any event there is nothing to suggest that their assessments lacked any foundation whatsoever. There is no suggestion that the words were used in a way which was intended to be hurtful or that there was something in the delivery that was inappropriate. The question reduces to one of whether the words should be used at all. Certainly there are different ways of conveying these messages which are less blunt. As far as Melinda is concerned, it may be that VIS finds other ways of saying these things or perhaps the change of environment suits her better so she is applying herself with greater success.

**3.28** Mrs Cleland attributed the difficulty her daughter experienced to the limited vocabulary of Mr Yang in particular. However, if there is a factual basis for using the words in the coaches' honest opinion and the words are not delivered in an inappropriate way, the Inquiry cannot hold that the conduct was inappropriate just because there might be a less blunt or nicer way of conveying the message. In reaching this conclusion, the circumstance that comparably aged and qualified girls are not taking significant offence is important. Of course, any rebuke or sign of disappointment from a coach will upset a girl who is anxious to please whatever way it is worded. However, the question is whether matters have gone beyond that, and the Inquiry is not satisfied that is the case.



**3.29** It should also be mentioned that gymnasts told the Inquiry that terms such as "try harder" or "you can do better" are used as well. Which words are used will be a matter of personal style and vocabulary. Provided what is done is within overall acceptable limits, it is not the place of the Inquiry to dictate modes of speech.

**3.30** These allegations are rejected.

ii. *Fat Pig, Pig Feet*

**3.31** Three allegations came to the attention of the Inquiry that girls had been referred to in some way that linked them to pigs.

**3.32** Mr Hardman alleged that Mrs Tian had said, "You're fat; you look like pigs" and "You're fat; you look like fat pigs". This was a vague accusation in the context of allegations concerning alleged rages by Mrs Tian and he did not identify any particular gymnasts who were addressed in this way.

**3.33** Mrs Sheryl Whitwell whose daughter, Karinda, was at the AIS from September 1991 until April 1994 alleged that following an increase in Karinda's weight over the weekend, Mrs Tian said to Karinda:

*Well, your mother must've been feeding you too much food because you're a fat pig and you've put on weight.*

**3.34** Mrs Whitwell alleged that she had been in Canberra over the weekend and witnessed this incident in the AIS gymnasium when the girls formed an assembly line on the following Monday morning. This was alleged to have occurred in late 1991 or early 1992. She said that a few other people - parents and gymnasts - had told her that Mrs Tian had called gymnasts fat pigs.

**3.35** The third allegation relates to a particular incident and is considered below.

**3.36** Mrs Tian firmly denied ever having referred to any of the gymnasts as a pig. As far as the Inquiry can ascertain, these allegations are isolated. Numerous gymnasts and coaches denied ever hearing Mrs Tian refer to gymnasts as fat pigs or anything very similar.



**3.37** In relation to Mrs Whitwell's specific allegation, girls who were gymnasts for all or major portions of this time firmly denied ever hearing anyone called a fat pig. These girls included Kelli and Rebecca Jackson, Tracey Kwan, Lisa McTiernan (who was Karinda's closest friend), Joanna Wilson and Kristy Wilson. If Karinda had been called a fat pig in a line at an assembly, they could be expected to know of it because they would have been in the line as well. Also, the direct quote which Mrs Whitwell attributes to Mrs Tian is not the way Mrs Tian speaks. While Mrs Whitwell may have sought to put the words into better English, the meaning and words could change in a significant manner in that process. Finally, Mrs Marilyn Jackson, mother of Kelli and Rebecca, was one person who Mrs Whitwell identified as having told her that girls had been called fat pigs. Mrs Jackson very firmly denied it. The Inquiry considered it pointless to make inquiries of the others who had allegedly spoken to Mrs Whitwell. As is evident from the chapter on the Residence, the Inquiry considers that Mrs Whitwell has made or passed on a number of allegations which are false, unsubstantiated or exaggerated. She has little credibility as a witness.

**3.38** Mr Hardman's allegation is very general. He has not identified the girls allegedly concerned. The allegation is against the bulk of the evidence. For instance, Mr Ken Meredith was a senior men's gymnast for all the time Mr Hardman was coaching and probably was in as good a position to hear Mrs Tian as Mr Hardman. Although he is now an AIS coach and might be thought to be protective of the AIS, the Inquiry was impressed by his honesty and detachment. He had never heard Mrs Tian call a gymnast a fat pig.

**3.39** The allegations by Mr Hardman and Mrs Whitwell are rejected.

**3.40** The fourth allegation is made by VIS head coach Ms Fiona Bird. She alleged that in 1990 in the AIS gymnasium Mrs Tian called 11 year old gymnast Rebecca Jackson a "fat pig" and told her to "point her pig feet". At the time Mrs Tian was coaching Rebecca on the beam. Ms Bird said the coaching situation did require an instruction for Rebecca to point her feet, but that she thought it "very inappropriate" and "nasty" to use these expressions. According to Ms Bird, Mrs Tian "turned around and laughed". Ms Bird did not consider Mrs Tian to be malicious in making the comments. Rebecca showed no reaction and kept on training.

3.41 Rebecca Jackson told the Inquiry that Mrs Tian had on occasion told her to point "your piggy feet" and called her "piggie". She was unperturbed and had not been offended by it. Rebecca told the Inquiry that if she or some other younger girls were doing handstands Mrs Tian would come up and say "point your piggy feet". Rebecca said that Mrs Tian, "wouldn't yell it or anything like that. She'd just say it nicely." She regarded the matter as between her and Mrs Tian and was not offended. Rebecca's father Mr Don Jackson was aware of this and took no offence.

3.42 It appears that Mrs Tian's nickname for Rebecca is "Piggy". A Sydney gymnastics coach, Ms Kim Morris, told the Inquiry that this derived from Rebecca's unusual body shape for a gymnast which was like a "little brick", or as Ms Bird said, "square". Ms Morris said that she regarded the use of the nickname as affectionate. Mrs Tian readily acknowledged calling Rebecca by the nickname Piggy. She said:

*That's my love name. I hold hands. Everybody happy. But no make like 'the pig'.*

3.43 The Inquiry understands Mrs Tian's last sentence to mean that she did not call Rebecca a pig.

3.44 Although the words which Ms Bird alleges were used by Mrs Tian differ slightly from those which Mrs Tian and Rebecca say have been used on occasion, they are very similar and the incident did occur five years ago. The Inquiry regards it as more likely that Mrs Tian told "Piggy" to "point your piggy feet" or similar and that no offence was intended or taken. This was part of a recognised friendship between them. If the words had been meant maliciously or caused or were even likely to cause embarrassment, they may have been inappropriate. However, that is not the case and Ms Bird presumably was not aware of the full circumstances.

3.45 This allegation is rejected.

### 3. ANGER AND INTIMIDATION

#### a. Introduction

**3.46** A number of allegations were received relating to alleged displays of anger by coaches at the AIS. These were related to allegations of intimidating or demeaning gymnasts.

**3.47** Some of the allegations related to specific incidents, others to behaviour generally. For convenience it is proposed to deal with the allegations in a general way unless reference to a specific incident is necessary.

**3.48** Coaching gymnastics can be a very frustrating exercise. What a gymnast could master yesterday, she might not do today. The girls are young. They are impulsive and at times unpredictable. There is a carefully planned progression in the teaching of skills. It can be easily interrupted by injury, illness, loss of confidence or a significant change in body weight brought on by growth or over-eating. For gymnast and coach alike there can be considerable disappointment. While the Inquiry's impression of the many leading coaches from around Australia that it interviewed was that they were patient and understanding people, the frustration and disappointments they experience can turn to annoyance and anger. They have to be on guard to behave within acceptable limits. Wherever elite WAG is taught in Australia these factors apply.

**3.49** In relation to any allegation of display of anger, this Inquiry must determine whether the coach's conduct is inappropriate in all the circumstances. Anger may be accompanied by other actions which are clearly inappropriate in themselves such as hitting, kicking, other forms of physical abuse, use of indecent language, name calling, humiliating practices and intimidation.

**3.50** In determining whether a display of anger is inappropriate in all the circumstances, the Inquiry has to take into account a range of factors. These include whether there was reason to be angry or upset. Obviously, some anger for no reason at all is more likely to be inappropriate than a display of greater anger which is based on a very good reason. Tone and volume of voice, body language, duration of the display and the choice of words are all important too. Whether the display is in public or private, the ages of the parties, the respective positions of power and authority of the parties, whether the display is spontaneous or delayed, and the physical and mental condition of the person who is the object of the display are other factors.

**3.51** Most of these factors are capable of acceptably accurate measurement, but the further step of deciding whether the display of anger was in all the circumstances inappropriate is judgmental. In other words, how angry is a coach allowed to become in a certain situation before the behaviour is inappropriate? The Inquiry was not present to assess each situation. The Inquiry regards the impressions of those who see such displays as important in offering guidance on this question, in addition to the measurable factors identified in the immediately preceding paragraph. In turn, the Inquiry's evaluation of the ability of such witnesses to make fair, accurate and detached observations becomes important.

**b. Mrs Tian**

**3.52** A number of incidents are considered elsewhere in this report which are claimed to have been occasion for the display of excessive anger by Mrs Tian. Mr David Hardman made allegations in relation to the alleged incidents of kicking Monique Allen and throwing a chair at her (Chapter 2). Ms Michelle Telfer alleged inappropriate display of anger when Mrs Tian found members of the boys team in the hotel room of some female gymnasts at the 1991 World Championship in Indianapolis (Chapter 9). Mr David Rycroft made a similar allegation in relation to the occasion his daughter was caught having broken a curfew which triggered a police search (Chapter 9). The allegations by Ms Telfer and Mr Rycroft as they relate to anger have been considered already.

**3.53** Mr Hardman described Mrs Tian's anger which led to the alleged kicking and throwing of a plastic chair in dramatic terms. He said that at other times, Mrs Tian spoke to the young girls in a "harsh tone and it was delivered in a harsh manner". He found it "offensive" and "unacceptable" and there was "yelling and screaming".

**3.54** Mrs Bevans claimed that "all hell broke lose". However, she never saw that happen even though she was in the gymnasium quite frequently. Her source of information was the gymnasts.

*I witnessed the lot of them talking about it continually. There wasn't a lot of that if the gallery was full and parents were present, that was a little more controlled than when the girls were in the gym by themselves.*

**3.55** Mrs Bevans referred to "ridiculing and name calling" but "once again I was not there".

**3.56** Mrs Bevans' daughter, Hollie, was interviewed separately. She said that Mrs Tian would "scream" at her. Asked to clarify that expression, she said, "told you off". On one occasion, Hollie Bevans said Mrs Tian got "really angry" because she had been to the doctor without Mrs Tian knowing about it.

**3.57** Mrs Whitwell claimed that Mrs Tian would "go off her brain".

**3.58** A small number of other allegations and comments were made concerning displays of anger. They either add nothing to the general picture which might emerge from the above allegations, or they were based entirely on hearsay of doubtful reliability.

**3.59** Mrs Bevans did not claim to have personally witnessed anything inappropriate in terms of the display of anger. Yet her reports, which are based on hearsay, depict matters in a worse light than her daughter who presumably was one of her sources. Also, the gymnasium gallery is a public area to which the public have access whenever the gymnasium is open. Anyone can walk in at any time. A coach who calculated to behave inappropriately only when the gallery was vacant would run a considerable risk and over time would be caught out. The Inquiry did not find Mrs Whitwell to be a credible witness. Observations have been made elsewhere on what the Inquiry regards as Mr Hardman's unusual sensitivity. Also, caution must be exercised in assessing what is a yell or a scream. Often the Inquiry found that on closer examination these became a "raised voice" or a "stern voice", or what troubled one person did not trouble another.

**3.60** Notwithstanding these reservations about the strength of this evidence, it is inescapable that there is a substantial body of opinion in the Australian gymnastics community that Mrs Tian goes too far. This body reaches to quite high levels in the sport. However, in the main, it relies on hearsay and when personal observation is called upon, nothing which is clearly objectionable is to be found. Dr Geoff Sussman has been the President of the Victorian Gymnastic Association for about seven years. It was clear to the Inquiry that he is convinced that Mrs Tian does go too far in expressing her anger. However, as far as personal observation is concerned, he had this to say:



- A. *I mean, it is that fine line between someone who does a bad performance and the coach takes them to task because they know they can do better, and really, going that little bit further.*
- Q. *Have you ever witnessed them [the AIS coaches and Mrs Tian in particular] go that little bit further.*
- A. *Look, I cannot say that I have...*

**3.61** In other comments, he suggested that he had seen Mrs Tian go close to acceptable limits, but not beyond. He said that Mrs Tian was "very tough", "extremely demanding" and a "disciplinarian". He continued:

*Yes, and again, there is nothing wrong with any of those things because when you are dealing with a leading sport it is pointless having someone who cannot be disciplined, who cannot know how to focus and so on. Again, the problem is knowing that fine line between being stern, being disciplinarian, being tough and just overstepping the mark...and I cannot say that I have personally witnessed this [overstepping the mark].*

**3.62** However, Dr Sussman said that "concerns" had been expressed to him by "parents or people who were involved with the sport" that Mrs Tian's "methods can be a bit over the top". Although he did not say, it is entirely likely that Mrs Bevans was one of those parents because Hollie was a leading Victorian gymnast during the early years of Dr Sussman's presidency.

**3.63** It was similar encounters with other witnesses which served to take away most of the credibility which might attach to that body of opinion which says Mrs Tian goes too far. By a process of elimination, the Inquiry's investigation came back to much the same few people as the sources of concern.

**3.64** Mr David Zuker who was the physiotherapist to national gymnastic teams during the 1980s gave the Inquiry a very clear impression that Mrs Tian was masterful at going to the very limits of that which was acceptable - but not beyond - when the occasion warranted it.

**3.65** Mrs Debbie Clarkson (nee Graham) was a gymnast at the AIS from September 1983 until December 1987. She told the Inquiry that (at least in the



years 1985 to 1987) Mrs Tian would get "stuck in" to Monique Allen with "a lot of yelling and screaming, a lot of loudness..." She added:

*I believe that was how Monique and Ju Ping kind of got along. I don't think - I wouldn't say Monique enjoyed it and I wouldn't say Ju Ping probably enjoyed it, but I think Monique was possibly slightly frustrating to coach.*

**3.66** Mrs Clarkson continued:

*I was different altogether. I think some of us, Ju Ping only had to scream at us and we just about collapsed, I collapsed if she had to scream at me.*

**3.67** There followed some further discussion of these points and then these questions and answers:

Q. *What I am inferring from all of that is that that was a way in which Ju Ping could work with Monique to get the best out of Monique?*

A. *Certainly.*

Q. *Whereas if she was working with you to get the best out of you she would have to adopt a different approach?*

A. *Yes.*

Q. *And she did so, I take it?*

A. *Yes, yes, she had a completely different relationship with me, she only needed to say: It's a bit of a worry.*

Q. *And you would jump?*

A. *Yes.*

Q. *Whereas she might have to 'do her nana' a bit?*

A. *To get the same out of somebody else... I think Monique was possibly a frustrating kid to work with considering the talent she had and the physical ability to be able to do it.*

- Q. *That suggests to me that Ju Ping might be a fairly astute judge of character?*
- A. *Definitely, yes.*

**3.68** Mr Atsushi Shibaoka has a young daughter in the AIS program. He told the Inquiry that he observed Mrs Tian "getting stuck into" Ruth Moniz who is the AIS's senior gymnast. Mr Shibaoka said that Ruth was "really crying" and he said that Mrs Tian was saying words to this effect:

*You can do it. You really can do it. It's all in your mind, you know. Just think about it. Work it out. You can do it.*

**3.69** Mr Shibaoka continued:

*...but I see that to be sort of helpful coaching rather than some sort of verbal abuse. Well, it can be taken as verbal abuse I guess.*

**3.70** Other coaches and sports psychologists may differ as to whether Mrs Tian's approach on that occasion was the one most likely to produce the desired outcome. There is not enough information to say, but that is not the question for this Inquiry. It has to be asked, did Mrs Tian go beyond acceptable limits? At 17 years, Ruth is the eldest and most experienced gymnast. Two interviews with Ruth established that she holds Mrs Tian in fond regard, but also that she knows how to stand up for herself. Over the years Mrs Tian has gone out of her way to provide Ruth with compassionate support. These are not the actions of one who might be depicted as a "gym tyrant".

**3.71** However, Mr Shibaoka's views are valuable. He saw no abuse, but could understand how it might be seen that way. Mr Shibaoka is an intelligent and articulate minister of Christian religion who has no commitment to gymnastics or the AIS other than through his daughter's relatively brief involvement. A person, such as Mr Shibaoka, with a strong sense of ethics and caring and who is a relatively independent outsider would be well qualified to form a view on whether Mrs Tian's behaviour on that occasion was excessive. The fact that he did not consider it excessive is significant.

**3.72** Dozens of similar observations to those provided by Mr Zuker, Mrs Clarkson and Mr Shibaoka came from past and present gymnasts, their families, officials in the sport and other AIS staff.

**3.73** Mrs Tian is passionate about gymnastics and her vision for Australian gymnastics. She is in a hurry and is a meticulous planner. She becomes annoyed when her plans are disrupted. When she becomes passionate about something she speaks quickly and loudly, making it difficult to understand her. She has strong body language; in the words of one former gymnast, she is "an arms waver". This can give the impression of her being a "ranter and raver" - someone who is out of control - but the evidence is against that being so.

**3.74** As Dr Sussman said, she is tough and a disciplinarian. Expressions such as uncompromising, strong, demanding, persistent, perfectionist and not easy going were used to describe Mrs Tian. She has had vigorous disagreements, even arguments, with some officials in gymnastics over the years. In the early years, the girls had to become accustomed to a much more demanding way of doing things imposed by a person very different from that which they had experienced before. Some colourful and exaggerated stories circulated about this new "character". Knowing of the foregoing and upon hearing of an alleged "over the top incident of anger", someone not immediately involved might be readily inclined to accept the incident as true. In the Inquiry's view this is what has tended to occur.

**3.75** However, with very minor exception, no-one who presented evidence to the Inquiry claimed that Mrs Tian was vindictive, nasty or unkind. Numerous past and present gymnasts mentioned incidents of compassionate support, issuing of congratulations, and displays of affection and kindness. Indeed, Mrs Hamilton and Mrs Trentini who were critical of the AIS on other fronts told the Inquiry that they had no argument with Mrs Tian.

**3.76** The Inquiry has found that Mrs Tian is not generally disposed to inappropriate displays of anger or emotion. The weight of evidence is against the allegations. In relation to any specific incident which has been the object of complaint, the Inquiry is not satisfied that appropriate limits of behaviour have been exceeded, and so those allegations are rejected.

**b. Other Coaches**

**3.77** A small number of allegations and comments were made to the Inquiry concerning a range of incidents involving other AIS coaches. The background to these included: very occasional differences of opinion between coach and gymnast leading to sharp exchanges; gymnasts being told off for some reason with which they did not agree; and the personal style of the coach not meeting with the gymnast's approval. In a substantial program extending over a number of years, some irritations to its smooth operation are inevitable and to be expected.

**3.78** The Inquiry has investigated each complaint. Some of these arise in other contexts in this report. For those that do not, nothing which would establish an inappropriate pattern of behaviour by any coach emerged. Incidents were isolated and none of them displayed anything sufficiently serious to say that it could not be accommodated within the normal give and take of human relationships, as well as the fact that some coaches can be more popular than others. In this regard, if there was a dispute or friction, one of the factors the Inquiry looked at was to see whether the coach-gymnast relationship continued to function afterwards - it found that it did.

**3.79** Some comments were made to the Inquiry without the intention that they be pursued as separate allegations of inappropriate behaviour. The Inquiry does not consider it necessary to detail each allegation and comment because individually they are quite minor.

#### **4. SPECIFIC INCIDENTS**

##### **a. Ruth Moniz and Vault at 1995 National Championships**

**3.80** Ms Ruth Moniz competed at the 1995 National Championships in Perth. She had considerable difficulty with her run-up on the vault and baulked. However, the attempt had counted. She baulked a second time, but that run-up did not count and this left her with the second of her two attempts still available. Her three coaches from the AIS approached her to discuss the situation before she attempted the vault again. Ms Moniz was visibly upset and crying.

**3.81** This incident became the object of an allegation of mistreatment of Ms Moniz. Ms Margarita Cornelisson has connections with the Cheltenham Youth Club in Melbourne which is home to the VIS WAG program. She alleged that Ms Moniz was standing at the end of the vault run "with literally three coaches

with raised voices all coming at her from different directions". Ms Cornelisson said that she felt "very uncomfortable with [this] as a spectator". She told the Inquiry that this was because

*it's very difficult for the children to take direction from more than one person at a time, particularly in a stressful situation.*

**3.82** She added that she thought the behaviour was "inappropriate" and "loud". Ms Cornelisson told the Inquiry that she could not understand what was being said by the 3 coaches.

**3.83** Ms Kay Mahlook, the Executive Director of the Victorian Gymnastic Association witnessed the incident and said that she did not "know whether that [the incident] is untoward or not" but later said that it "was undue pressure".

**3.84** The three coaches concerned were Mrs Tian who had been watching the beam apparatus, Ms Jiang Shao Yi who had been watching the vault and Mr Qu Derui who had been spotting at the uneven bars. After the first attempt Ms Jiang spoke to Ms Moniz alone. After the second attempt Ms Jiang was first on the scene because she had been watching and had immediate responsibility. Mr Qu Derui came across because he is Ms Moniz's vault coach. Mrs Tian later arrived because there appeared to be unusual difficulty. They walked across to Ms Moniz in a calm fashion. There were no physical gestures or body language which might be regarded as threatening.

**3.85** Mr Peter Hassan from New South Wales was sitting at the judges' table a few metres away. He said that he saw nothing improper in the incident. He said, "They were just really concerned for Ruth's welfare." Mr Hassan explained that Mr Qu Derui was most concerned that she had baulked very late because a half attempt at a vault creates great danger. Mr Hassan could overhear the coaches' words and said that they were approaching the situation in the "quietest and softest but firmest way" and that they were being "extremely supportive". He regarded it as amusing that this behaviour could be regarded as mistreatment.

**3.86** Ms Kym Dowdell, the National Technical Director of the AGF, saw nothing inappropriate in the incident, although she did not witness it. While her view would depend on what the coaches said, Ms Dowdell considered that



having three coaches approach Ms Moniz did not present a problem because she was familiar with all three.

**3.87** Ms Moniz told the Inquiry that she had never done anything like it before. She said she was "worried and started crying". The coaches "calmed her down". She was not intimidated by their presence, they were not angry with her and she said, "I felt like I kind of needed them there at that stage." She did not think that the coaches spoke in loud voices.

**3.88** Mrs Tian saw nothing improper. She said that the coaches work as a team, but that had Mr Qu Derui been there to witness the incident Ms Jiang may have stayed out of it. However, she had to be there to explain to Mr Qu Derui what had occurred.

**3.89** Ms Cornelisson rejected the suggestion that her allegation of abuse was really about an issue of coaching style and practice and did not raise an issue of mistreatment or abuse. She regarded anything more than a one-on-one situation between coach and gymnast at a competition as "verbal abuse".

**3.90** While there is force in the argument that more than one coach speaking to a gymnast at a time risks causing confusion, coaches of the experience of the three involved recognise that. They were there to assist each other find out what was wrong and to solve an unusual problem. In any event, the Inquiry does not accept that anything other than a one-on-one situation necessarily involves abuse. Other factors must be present and here there are none. This conclusion is reinforced by the circumstance that the Inquirer witnessed the incident as well and observed nothing which might trouble an observer lacking a background in gymnastics. There is no evidence to support this allegation and it is rejected.

**b. Renee Trentini, Kate Lam, the Spotting Box and Mr Mark Calton**

**3.91** In late 1992 or early 1993, Mr Mark Calton told Renee Trentini and Kate Lam to stand on a spotting box placed in the middle of the main tumbling mat in the AIS gymnasium. A spotting box is about one metre in height. The box may have been turned on its end to increase the height. The main tumbling mat is where the floor exercises are performed and is the largest open space in the gymnasium. The mat was not in use when this occurred. To stand on the box



in that fashion makes the gymnast concerned very prominent; perhaps there is no more prominent position in the gymnasium.

**3.92** This happened to the gymnasts separately. Mr Calton recalls Kate standing on the box twice, but has no specific recollection in relation to Renee. Renee claims that she had to stand on the box four or five times. A gymnast from this period, Kristy Wilson, remembers Renee standing on the box but did not specify the number of times. AIS men's coach, Ken Meredith, recalls seeing Renee standing on the box once. Kate Lam's evidence is consistent with Mr Calton's in this respect.

**3.93** The Inquiry finds that this practice occurred on two times involving Kate Lam and at least once involving Renee Trentini. The number of times this happened to Renee is speculative, although the Inquiry considers it very unlikely that it happened as many as four times. Ultimately, the precise number does not matter.

**3.94** Did Mr Calton engage in inappropriate conduct? He told the Inquiry that Kate was refusing to get on with her training. Other measures to encourage her had failed. Mr Calton said that Kate had a habit of just standing there and not wanting to do anything. Renee thought that Mr Calton was annoyed or frustrated with her for not doing the skill. Mr Calton said that he gave options: leave the gymnasium and go back to the Residence, stand on the box, or go back to training. Kate recalls having the option of returning to training or standing on the box, but not of going back to the Residence. Renee appears not to have any recollection of this detail, other than that she had to stand up straight with her back to the balcony and that it was for about five minutes.

**3.95** Mr Calton said that the exercise worked and there was a return to training after about three to five minutes. He claimed that the exercise was not intended to embarrass but to discourage the girls from being silly about their training. However, both girls were embarrassed to some degree and there is an element of humiliation inherent in the exercise. Was this unacceptable?

**3.96** Ken Meredith thought that this action "was sort of a little bit probably over-the-top" although he acknowledged that he was not aware of the full circumstances. All he knew was that Renee had to stand on the box for 10 to 15 minutes and that Mr Calton spoke to her for about five minutes and then left her on the box. Ms Debbie Maher is the acting administrator of the AIS WAG

program and has been the head coach of the Canberra United Gymnastics Club for many years. She had no knowledge of the incident and, without revealing the identities of those involved, she was asked whether she thought the conduct appropriate. She equated it to standing someone in the corner with a dunce hat on. Her preference would have been to send the gymnast home if she was quite unwilling to proceed.

**3.97** At the time of being interviewed, Rebecca Jackson had just retired as a senior gymnast. She recalled being required to stand on the pommel horse while she became composed and did not regard that as inappropriate. That is not as prominent a position as the spotting box, but she considered that it would be all right if it did not last too long.

**3.98** No doubt some embarrassment occurred. However, neither Kate nor Renee was especially perturbed about it even though they did not like it. The duration proved to be short and the girls had a choice enabling them to come off the box quickly. Mr Calton's evidence is accepted in that respect. The incident was not repeated so often as to amount to some form of persecution. There is something to be said for isolating the girls in order to have them focus on the training and the problem they may have encountered for a short duration. On the other hand, Ms Maher and Mr Meredith agreed that the practice was inappropriate, although Mr Meredith had in mind a longer duration than the Inquiry has found applied.

**3.99** There must be significant reservations about this practice, but the Inquiry considers that inappropriate conduct has not occurred largely because of the very short duration of the conduct and the failure of other measures to produce results initially.

**3.100** The use of the spotting box in this fashion is not repeated at the AIS.

**c. Renee Trentini - Being Ignored**

**3.101** Renee Trentini and her mother alleged that she had been humiliated by being ignored by her coaches. Ms Jiang Shao Yi and Mr Lu Ming took over coaching responsibility for Renee when Mr Calton ceased to be the AGF itinerant coach in the gymnasium after a few months into 1993 and Ms Jiang and Mr Lu Ming are the objects of this accusation.

**3.102** Both Ms Jiang and Mrs Tian claimed that Renee had only one problem and that was fear. One day she could perform skills, the next day she could not. Ms Jiang added that Renee would "freeze" when her mother was watching. Mrs Tian was very surprised that this allegation was made because she believed everything to help Renee had been tried. After Mr Calton left, Renee had been moved to different groups, different coaches had looked after her, her mother had moved to Canberra in late 1993 to provide support and lift her confidence and Ms Jiang gave Renee extra hours of coaching time to the disadvantage of other gymnasts.

**3.103** Ms Jiang told the Inquiry that the other coaches had advised her to give up because Renee could not change.

*...they say, "They can't change." I said, "No, I think I still want to try, because I very like her. I think she's very good gymnast." I don't know; maybe I got a responsibility; maybe I'm not good enough, but I did try my best.*

**3.104** The position from Mrs Trentini's perspective is entirely understandable. She was told her daughter had extraordinary physical qualities to be a gymnast. While there is no evidence that promises were made about Renee becoming a good gymnast, some hope, if not expectation, to that effect would be natural. Mrs Trentini impressed the Inquiry as a devoted mother who wants the best for her children and is prepared to make sacrifices to that end. However, by the time that Mrs Trentini moved to Canberra,<sup>22</sup> it is very likely that not much more could be done other than hope that Mrs Trentini's presence would boost Renee's confidence. That did not happen and Mrs Trentini probably sensed that the coaches were not trying when in fact they had lost hope. Hence, the accusation of ignoring her daughter and humiliating her. Mrs Trentini thought that not enough "positive messages" were given by Ms Jiang and that at times Renee had trained on her own. In this latter respect it was alleged that in mid February 1994, Mr Lu Ming had Renee practising cartwheels for about 45 minutes until she could do 20 good ones. Renee left the AIS at the end of March 1994.

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22 She had other children studying there, so the Inquiry considers that the move had other attractions.

**3.105** The Inquiry rejects the allegation that Ms Jiang engaged in any inappropriate conduct in connection with the alleged humiliation of Renee Trentini. It was clear that Mr Calton had unusual difficulties in coaching Renee. His inappropriate behaviour towards her may have aggravated matters, although the Inquiry has no firm evidence of that occurring. Ms Jiang inherited a difficult situation. Mrs Trentini was aware of that to only a small degree, or at least suspicious that there had been prior incidents and coaching difficulties.

**3.106** Ms Jiang impressed the Inquiry as being quite honest about her feelings toward Renee and what she had done to rectify Renee's problems about being scared. Ms Jiang's statements received some indirect support from various gymnasts at the time to the effect that Renee was not generally ignored and did receive specialised coaching. It is entirely possible that at times Ms Jiang may have become frustrated and thought that her time was better spent elsewhere with other gymnasts because she had responsibilities to them as well. However, it cannot be said that the coaches ignored Renee to the point of humiliating her. They tried many things to rectify what they saw as the problem. Whether they could have done something else which might have been successful is outside the scope of the Inquiry's authority. Also, there is no evidence of any deliberate attempt to humiliate her. There is a difference between being callously ignored which might justify a sense of humiliation and being disappointed about not receiving enough attention which would not justify it; and there is insufficient evidence to establish that this was a case of humiliation.

**3.107** Both Mrs Tian and the Acting Executive Director of the ACC, Mr Gene Schembri, considered that practising cartwheels for 45 minutes may or may not be an inappropriate coaching technique depending on the circumstances. Mr Schembri said that if it was a punishment it would be wrong because the very activity that is to be improved should not be an instrument of punishment. Mrs Tian thought that normally to have a gymnast do cartwheels for 45 minutes was a waste of time and inappropriate. However, Renee was working in a group of six to eight gymnasts and a cartwheel would be an integral part of some their routines. If Renee would not perform the rest of the routine because of fear, Mrs Tian said she was at least practising that part which on that day she was prepared to perform. Renee did not regard it as a punishment because she was working on her technique. Mr Lu Ming watched her and spoke to her from time to time. Mr Lu Ming declined to make a submission to the Inquiry. This might warrant concluding that the investigation can be taken no further because

his evidence is crucial to determining the factual accuracy of the allegation and the issue of whether the incident was inappropriate given the comments of Mrs Tian and Mr Schembri. However, taken on its own, the incident is trivial. No physical or specific emotional harm was established. It is of significance only as an instance of the larger allegation which has been rejected. For that reason, this allegation in relation to the cartwheels is rejected as well.

Historical Document



## **4 ACCESS TO SPORTS MEDICINE AND SPORTS SCIENCE SUPPORT**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

**4.1** A variety of allegations were received that gymnasts were denied access to appropriate health care and sports science support while at the AIS.

**4.2** There were some suggestions that medical care was denied to gymnasts or "controlled" and in two instances there was an allegation that the care rendered was inadequate.

**4.3** Specifically, allegations were made that gymnasts were denied access to sports psychologists and nutritionists. Insofar as sports psychology is concerned, these allegations arose from alleged events in 1985 and 1986.

**4.4** The issue of access to AIS nutritionists is complicated by the proceedings taken by Ms Jennifer Richardson. This report deals only with allegations of this nature to the extent that they apply prior to March 1985 and after mid 1990.

**4.5** None of the allegations were found to be proven.

### **2. MEDICAL CARE**

#### **a. Introduction**

**4.6** The major portion of the Inquiry's efforts in relation to investigating the medical care of gymnasts was concentrated on the issue of training or competing with injury. It has become a common practice for gymnasts to continue with their training programs and even compete notwithstanding that they may be injured in some way. This is governed by two important principles. First, the training programs and competition routines are modified in order to protect the injury from aggravation. Second, this procedure is subject to medical supervision. The issue of training or competing with injury and the



relevant allegations of mistreatment are considered in the next chapter concerning **Training Practices**.

**4.7** There were some suggestions that medical care was denied to gymnasts or "controlled" and in two instances there was an allegation that the care rendered was inadequate. These allegations will be considered in this section.

**4.8** As a preliminary step to dealing with the allegations referred to in the two immediately preceding paragraphs, it is necessary to explain the arrangements for the medical care of gymnasts.

**b. Dr Peter Fricker**

**4.9** Any examination of the medical care of gymnasts must commence with Dr Peter Fricker. He has been at the AIS since the beginning of 1983 and during much of that time has been the medical officer assigned to the gymnastics program, although other doctors treat the gymnasts as well.

**4.10** Dr Fricker is now the Director of Medical Services at the AIS. He has administrative responsibility for medical care both at the Bruce campus and at all AIS programs across Australia. He is active not only in medical administration but in caring for athletes and conducting research and teaching. He is a fellow of the Australian College of Sports Physicians, the Australian Sports Medicine Federation and the American College of Sports Medicine. He holds the chair of Sports Medicine at the University of Canberra and has a number of significant publications to his credit, including specialist publications on the medical care of female gymnasts. Dr Fricker is a member of the AGF medical commission and an associate of the medical committee of the International Federation of Gymnastics. He said, "a large part of my work is, in fact, around gymnastics".

**4.11** Dr Fricker's qualifications are mentioned because the combination of his impressive international reputation and his close personal involvement over a long period in the medical care of the AIS gymnasts is an important factor in any assessment of the allegations which have been made.

**c. Arrangements for Medical Care**

**4.12** On the campus, the gymnasts receive general medical and specialist sports medicine care from AIS medical officers. They also receive physiotherapy, massage and acupuncture under medical supervision where appropriate. The services of medical specialists and radiologists are obtained off-campus.

**4.13** The medical centre is only a few hundred metres from the AIS gymnasium in the event of emergency. Physiotherapists visit the gymnasium on a number of nights each week to see the gymnasts. A recent innovation is the presence during training sessions of Dr Li Xiao Lu who is a qualified medical practitioner from China. She is available to render first-aid, massage and, under Dr Fricker's supervision, acupuncture. If a gymnast suffers an injury she will report it to the coaches (or it will be obvious if there is an accident). The coaches are the first point of contact. They will assess whether medical assistance is required immediately, or can wait. Sometimes basic first aid is sufficient. They might suggest that a sore muscle can be massaged after training.

**4.14** Those gymnasts who live in the AIS Residence have medical appointments made for them by the Residence houseparents. The AIS asks that those gymnasts who live in Canberra with their families have all their medical care undertaken by the AIS medical staff, not just sports medicine. There appears to be a variety of reasons for this including an interest in the gymnasts' overall health, the need to avoid conflicting treatment strategies, and minimisation of the risk of inadvertent infringement of rules against performance-enhancing drugs.<sup>23</sup> The parents of these gymnasts may make the appointments with the medical staff themselves or ask that the houseparents do so. If parents make the appointment direct, they are asked to inform the coaches or administrative staff of the gymnastics program that they have done so.

**4.15** The gymnasts have at least an annual full medical examination. For those gymnasts who compete at major national championships or go on overseas tours, they will have an examination in order to obtain a medical clearance certificate. If a gymnast has an injury that requires monitoring or

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23 Family doctors may prescribe drugs for the treatment of common ailments unaware that they contain substances which are prohibited by the AIS or the governing body of gymnastics.

some other health problem, she will receive more frequent examinations as required.

**d. General Satisfaction With Medical Care**

**4.16** The standard of medical care delivered at the AIS received very strong support from past and present gymnasts and their families. Some of their comments are set out below.

**4.17** Mr Peter Read, father of 1992 Olympic gymnast Lisa Read and former AIS resident, said of the medical staff:

*Excellent, excellent. I wouldn't fault them.*

**4.18** Mrs Cathy Lantry (nee Blake) who was at the AIS during 1983 and 1984 described the care as "very good" and "excellent" and she felt that she should know because she had a lot of injuries requiring much physiotherapy. Mrs Linda Kantek, mother of current national team member, Nicole Kantek said the medical staff, "couldn't be more helpful". Mrs Helle Weir whose daughter, Elise, was at the AIS from July until September 1993 said:

*I was quite happy about it [the medical care]. It was practical, no unnecessary medications or anything like that. It was quite good and quite efficient.*

**4.19** Mrs Valerie Hayward said, "[t]he medical care is brilliant". Her husband endorsed these remarks even more enthusiastically. Their daughter, Michelle, has been at the AIS since the beginning of 1994.

**4.20** The houseparents who were interviewed expressed their satisfaction with the medical staff. The Reverend Anne Turner (formerly Anne Briggs) who was the houseparent in 1986 said, "I was very pleased with them". Mrs Robyn Allen, who has been a houseparent since 1990 described her working relationship with the medical staff as "exceptionally good".

**e. Allegation of Inadequate Medical Care**

**4.21** One gymnast said that she was given incorrect advice in relation to the treatment of a condition from which she suffered. This gymnast will be referred

to as Gymnast A. A number of the gymnasts or their parents gave the Inquiry permission to obtain information about their medical histories from their confidential AIS medical files. To preserve their privacy, any such gymnast will be referred to by a letter of the alphabet.

4.22 Gymnast A was at the AIS in 1990 when she was 12 years old. She suffered from Osgood-Schlatters disease which is a condition in the knee associated with growth in active children and teenagers. Demanding training can aggravate the condition and in Gymnast A's case a small ossicle of bone had broken off and was floating in the knee behind some cartilage. Gymnast A said that a doctor at the AIS had recommended that her knee be operated on to remove the ossicle. Gymnast A said the recommendation was made because "it was really painful and it was really hindering my performance". However, Gymnast A claimed that it is "usually only operated on when you're 18 and stopped growing". She attributed this latter piece of information to Sydney sports medicine doctor, Dr Ken Crichton. Gymnast A did not recall the name of the AIS doctor who advised her.

4.23 This case history was discussed with Dr Fricker. It was of special interest to him because he has published academic work on this disease. Gymnast A had the disease before she started at the AIS. While at the AIS she experienced pain and was referred to a specialist, Dr Kevin Woods, for recommendation as to what to do. Her case appears to have been unusual because the ossicle had formed and broken off at a very early age. Dr Woods' opinion was explained to Gymnast A, Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes by Dr Warren McDonald of the AIS. There were three options: 1. continue as at present if the pain was tolerable, 2. treatments not involving surgery and 3. surgery. According to Dr McDonald's notes the third option was regarded as unattractive because the 4 to 6 week lay-off after the operation may well have put Gymnast A so far behind as to end her elite competitive career in any event. Dr Fricker told the Inquiry:

*So it [an operation] was seen very much as a distant prospect, not something that was recommended straight away. So the bottom line is, Warren McDonald's put here, "Was to continue gymnastics until knee symptoms limit activity and then consider above options which are either conservative or if that doesn't work, then go to surgery after that.*

**4.24** Dr Fricker gave no indication to the Inquiry that the foregoing had been handled in anything other than a proper manner. Gymnast A left the AIS later that year and an operation to remove the ossicle has never been performed.

**4.25** The Inquiry is satisfied that the AIS medical and coaching staff did not pressure Gymnast A to undergo an operation and that, to the extent an operation may have been an ultimate option, it was something that would have been recommended only on an independent specialist's advice.

**4.26** The Inquiry rejects this allegation.

**4.27** By way of observation, it is very likely that Gymnast A misunderstood the discussion about her knee. It is obvious that discussing such important and complex matters with one so young is fraught with the risk of misunderstanding. Matters may have been different if the child's parent had been present or the doctor had spoken to the parent direct by telephone.

**4.28** Gymnast B and her father alleged that in 1987 AIS medical staff failed to diagnose a condition associated with a weakened immune system which left Gymnast B tired and susceptible to illnesses. She returned home for some weeks and a local doctor identified the condition. According to Gymnast B's father, the condition was "a fairly new phenomenon and unheard of as far as" the AIS medical staff were concerned.<sup>24</sup> After a period of rest and treatment, she returned to the AIS and resumed training and competition. Gymnast B claimed that it took her about 6 months to fully recover her strength. The Inquiry sought her permission to obtain information from her confidential medical file at the AIS and to speak to the AIS medical staff about the allegation. Such permission was not received.

**4.29** There is no evidence to suggest that Gymnast B was denied medical treatment. At most, there was a failure to identify "a fairly new phenomenon". Without permission to interview the AIS medical staff, it is impossible to complete an investigation of this allegation. Accordingly, there is no alternative other than to reject the allegation. By way of observation, the detection of an ailment by one doctor which is missed by another does not necessarily prove

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24 The father of Gymnast B also took his daughter to a local doctor in Canberra and it would seem that this doctor did not detect the condition, although he recommended rest.



carelessness on the part of that other doctor. Further, even if carelessness had occurred, the Inquiry would not necessarily regard it as abusive. That would be a matter of circumstance and degree.

**f. Alleged Denial of Access to Medical Care**

**4.30** The Reverend Turner said that during her time at the AIS in 1986 Mrs Tian would supply the gymnasts with Chinese medical remedies to deal with injuries such as sprained wrists and ankles. She "seem[ed] to recollect" that Mrs Tian might supply remedies for ailments such as sore throats. If the Reverend Turner said to a gymnast, "I think you need to see a doctor", the girl might reply, "Well, Ju Ping says I don't need to and she's given me some Chinese medicine". Reverend Turner added:

*I know it was an issue with some of the parents that the girls couldn't get into the doctor, you know, couldn't see the doctor.*

**4.31** The Reverend Turner neither heard Mrs Tian issue a directive that any gymnast was not to see the doctor nor did she provide the Inquiry with any more details of this conduct than set out above.

**4.32** The use of Chinese medicines by Mrs Tian appears to have created some controversy at the time. According to one former gymnast, one of the ointments used to treat sprains lacked either an attractive appearance or smell. Dr Fricker described it as a "herbal poultice" and said that it was known as "chicken poo", although that was not its constitution. It is easy to see that young teenage girls might prefer to see a doctor than apply the ointment.

**4.33** Dr Fricker said:

*[Mrs Tian] has always given them [the Chinese medicines] to me and I've sent them off to the laboratory for analysis to make sure there are no banned substances... So, I think in that sense, she's always been ethical and been very cautious not to do something that there would be - cuts across say, doping guidelines or would be inappropriate medication. But she's asked me, you know, 'I have Chinese medicine which I can put on the ankle to help it get better, can I put it on?' I'll have a look at it and say, 'Look, that's fine, and tell me how it works.' So, I mean, I'm quite happy with*



*her - with her repertoire of medications and applications and so on, and anything that is ingested has been vetted by me first and analysed in the lab.*

**4.34** Coaches are trained and experienced in recognising sprains and related minor injuries which require only simple treatment. In these circumstances, it is the Inquiry's conclusion that it was appropriate for Mrs Tian to indicate that the gymnasts use the medications, at least as an initial measure, and not go to the doctors. Incidentally, some former gymnasts and parents told the Inquiry that these medications had worked satisfactorily.

**4.35** It was clear from the evidence received by the Inquiry that injuries which were more serious were referred immediately to the medical staff. Mrs Frances Crampton who was the administrator of the gymnastics program at the time said that she knew of no gymnast who needed medical care or had a concern about her health or an injury being told she could not see the doctors. Kellie Larter, who was an AIS gymnast from 1984 to mid 1988 gave similar evidence.

**4.36** Accordingly, any allegation that gymnasts have been denied access to medical care is rejected.

**4.37** Before Gymnast B returned to her home city, her father took her to a local doctor in Canberra. He said that he was "mildly reprimanded" for having done so.

*I recall we were told that we should not have done that. Not that we were not allowed to, but it was not necessary and that she is under the care of the care of the Institute doctor who has a sort of background history...*

**4.38** Obviously, the AIS quite rightly cannot object to parents taking their children to external doctors, but it does have a legitimate interest in knowing that it occurs.<sup>25</sup> This is an administrative issue, not one of mistreatment.

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25 However, there may be some confusion on this issue as one set of Canberra based parents told the Inquiry that they understood that they had to take their daughter to the AIS medical staff for all health care, emergencies excepted.

**4.39** Similar considerations apply to the making of appointments to see the AIS medical staff. Parents are able to make appointments direct with the AIS medical centre, but gymnastics program coaching and administrative staff like to know when this occurs so they can be aware of the gymnasts' health status as early as possible. Also, different financing arrangements for different groups of gymnasts can cause administrative complexity for the medical centre's staff who may not necessarily be aware of those arrangements.

**4.40** An insistence on the coaches and administration being informed when medical appointments have been made has led some parents to think that access to the medical services are "controlled" or, perhaps, restricted. Ms Julie Gregory is the mother of Nadia Knight who was at the AIS from April to June 1994. She told the Inquiry that the coaches had to give permission to see the doctor or physiotherapist: "You just couldn't go." Ms Gregory did not have any personal knowledge of this procedure; she said that she had been told that by another parent. However, interviews with a number of parents whose children were at the AIS with Ms Gregory's daughter, as well as parents of current gymnasts, demonstrated that the system works satisfactorily as explained in the immediately preceding paragraph and that Ms Gregory's information was incorrect.

### **3. SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY**

#### **a. General**

**4.41** Media reports in April this year alleged that AIS gymnasts had been denied the services of the sports psychologists at the AIS. Perhaps the most strongly worded report appeared in the Brisbane *Courier Mail* on 18 April 1995. It claimed that

*...gymnasts were...denied urgent help from AIS psychologists.*

**4.42** Most other reports were to similar effect with the exception that the word "urgent" was omitted.

**4.43** The Inquiry has found that at present a sports psychologist, Ms Vicki de Prazer, is assigned to the gymnastics program. Her involvement has been for a period which is approaching 2 years. Prior to that and since the end of 1986, sports psychology and psychological counselling has been conducted or co-

ordinated by Dr Fricker. A number of instances of gymnasts being referred to psychologists since 1986 were drawn to the attention of the Inquiry.

4.44 During 1985 and 1986 which were Mrs Tian's first two years the AIS, a number of changes were made to what had been pre-existing arrangements for sports psychology. For reasons which the Inquiry has found to be associated with technical coaching issues, group sports psychology sessions were deleted from training. If this measure can be construed as denying the gymnasts the services of sports psychologists (which is not necessarily the case), the Inquiry has concluded that the measure was not inappropriate in all the circumstances.

4.45 No specific instance of a gymnast not being permitted to consult an AIS psychologist for sports psychology or general counselling has been proven.

4.46 The immediately following sections of the report will consider the position as it applies currently and then the allegations.

**b. Current Practice**

4.47 Gymnastics more than many other sports is a "mind sport". Mental powers of concentration and the absence of fear and nerves are crucial to success in the sport.

4.48 Coaches who were interviewed - both AIS and non-AIS - were adamant that psychology was a very important part of their coaching role. They had to understand the psychological make-up of the gymnast, identify and overcome mental obstacles to learning and maintaining gymnastic skills, and develop total trust between gymnast and coach. Mr Kazuya Honda who preceded Mrs Tian as the head women's coach at the AIS told the Inquiry that "I have to be a psychologist".

4.49 Ms de Prazer said that gymnastics did not use psychologists as much as other sports. She said

*I can understand it because the role of the coach is slightly different in working with a young gymnast in that they are using a lot of psychological techniques, I suppose, in developing the performance routines with athletes anyway. They're dealing with issues of confidence and fear and those sorts of issues on a day-*

*to-day basis, and I believe a lot of them are quite skilled in that area.*

**4.50** Depending on the personal style and qualifications of the coach, he or she may use a sports psychologist for special problems to do with sports performance issues related to technique, confidence and preparation for competition. Also, there may be a role in general counselling on life issues. However, it seems to the Inquiry that the coaches are reluctant to involve psychologists in the core of coaching because here psychology is their role, and they do not want to risk someone else interfering with the fundamentally important relationship they have with their gymnasts.

**4.51** Ms de Prazer said that her involvement with gymnastics so far had been in relation to counselling families on issues connected with joining and leaving the AIS program, inter-personal issues facing gymnasts and some aspects of athletic performance - principally to do with confidence and preparation for competition. Although she did not consider that she had a "really strong involvement" in the gymnastics program she felt that it was "growing and developing". At first she heard rumours that psychologists were not welcome in the gymnastics program,<sup>26</sup> but she believes that she has a "good relationship" and is "comfortable" with Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes. She said that they had sought her out when they believed that there was an issue she could assist with and "we've worked well together".

**4.52** Mrs Tian regards Ms de Prazer as "supportive" of the program. By this she means that Ms de Prazer is willing to come out of her office and into the gymnasium to learn about the sport and thereby service its needs better.

**4.53** Gymnasts who are now at the AIS or have been there over the past two years and their parents informed the Inquiry of having been referred to Ms de Prazer for assistance, or as having approached her direct. The parents of two gymnasts who had consulted Ms de Prazer in the first half of 1994 believed that

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26 Ms Fran Hill, the mother of Jessica Hindle-Hill who was at the AIS from January 1993 to March 1994, said that in early March Ms de Prazer "wasn't really warmly accepted" in the gymnasium but was attending with Dr Fricker on a weekly basis. This seems to be consistent with the case of a new person easing her way into an established system rather than evidence of gymnasts being denied access to psychological services.

the psychology resources of the AIS were being under-utilised by the gymnastics program, but that is a very different situation from one where those services are denied inappropriately.<sup>27</sup>

**4.54** No evidence was presented to the Inquiry that would indicate that gymnasts are being denied access to available sports psychology and counselling services at the AIS. Accordingly, insofar as the reports in the media contained allegations that gymnasts were denied these services either currently or in recent times, those allegations are rejected.

**c. John Crampton - 1985-86**

**4.55** Mr John Crampton was the AIS psychologist who was assigned to the gymnastics program prior to the time when Mrs Tian commenced at the AIS in March 1985. He conducted two or three one-hour sessions per week<sup>28</sup> with the gymnasts in his office in a building separate from the gymnasium.

**4.56** After Mrs Tian had settled into her new position, she had the sessions phased out during 1985. It is this action which appears to be the origin of allegations that gymnasts have been denied access to AIS psychologists.

**4.57** The principal reason for this action was her belief that in the program she was instituting, there was insufficient time for the sports psychology sessions. Mrs Tian explained to the Inquiry that she was required to prepare a team to compete in the 1985 World Championships in Montreal in the space of six months. In her judgment, the gymnasts' skills were underdeveloped and they were not physically prepared. The limited time available was better spent on skills and physical preparation (strength and fitness) than on psychological preparation. Mrs Tian said that it was of no benefit if the mind was

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27 Another mother believed that her daughter ought to have been referred to a sports psychologist for assistance over a lack of progress with certain skills. The coaches took the view that such a step would not assist. This is not a case of mistreatment; it is a decision about whether using an available resource would be worthwhile and such issues of judgment are not the province of the Inquiry.

28 Mrs Crampton alleged two sessions while Mrs Tian said there were three sessions.



*really good, [but] the body still can't do it... You can't just psychologically make champion.*

**4.58** Mrs Frances Crampton (nee Thompson) married Mr Crampton during 1985. She was the administrator of the gymnastics program during this period. She described Mrs Tian's reasons for ceasing the sports psychology sessions as follows:

*She said there was insufficient time, that the program was too intense and there was too much to be done just in straight gymnastics because the gymnasts were so far behind the rest of the world and had so many technique faults and all those sorts of things and so they needed to spend all their time purely on gymnastics and not being sidetracked or having their thoughts taken away elsewhere.*

**4.59** Mr Mark Calton was the assistant coach to Mrs Tian. He said of Mrs Tian's decision to cease the sessions:

*I agree with Ju Ping at that point that the sport psychology program was really pitched at quite a high level and the standard of gymnastics was really quite a low level so the sport psychology program should either be pitched at a much lower level at that point in time or as Ju Ping felt then that it was not appropriate to have one in the program.*

**4.60** Mrs Crampton described the sports psychology program as varying according to the age of the gymnasts but included things such as

*how to handle the media and how to acknowledge a sponsor and all those sorts of things and relaxation...*

**4.61** Ms Kellie Larter whose years at the AIS included 1985 and 1986 said that "[m]ainly we'd do relaxation things on the floor of his office". Mrs Debbie Clarkson (nee Graham) was another gymnast from this period. She said they did "public relations" things. She said that she worked really well with Mr Crampton but "there were other kids who just couldn't stand it". She added



*...it was taken away and I wouldn't say it was to the detriment of my gymnastics...*

4.62 Mrs Tian told the Inquiry that she informed the gymnasts at an assembly that the formal sports psychology sessions were to cease but she says that she never instructed the gymnasts that they were not to see Mr Crampton outside of training hours. Also, she said that she would not have stopped any gymnast from seeing him, but none asked to do so.

4.63 On the other hand, Mrs Crampton told the Inquiry that she was sure that Mrs Tian had told the gymnasts that they were not to see Mr Crampton and that it was not necessary that they do so. She never heard this herself. However, she said that the girls told her it had been said, and her husband later told her that some of the girls would sneak in to see him rather than do so openly.

4.64 The girls' houseparent, the Reverend Turner said:

*Well, now that's not something that I have any direct knowledge of; only that one or two of them expressed the desire to be able to talk to the sports psychologist like the other athletes did in the residence and that Ju Ping discouraged this - they didn't need to, they could talk to her - and that was them telling me.*

4.65 The Inquiry interviewed three gymnasts in relation to this issue. They were at the AIS in 1986 which was the year when matters came to a head between Mrs Tian and Mr Crampton. Leanne Noack (nee Rycroft) could not recall that Mrs Tian had expressly instructed them not to see the sports psychologist. She said:

*I just remember that they [the group sessions] weren't on any more. I can't remember her [Mrs Tian] actually ever saying: that's it, you're not to see that person any more. The sessions were as a group anyway. It wasn't an individual thing.*

4.66 Debbie Clarkson said that the formal sessions had just stopped. She made no mention of being told not to see Mr Crampton, although she did not expressly deny that it had ever been said. She said that she understood the reason for ceasing the group sessions to be related to "time".

**4.67** In her written submission, Kellie Larter said:

*Ju Ping eliminated our access to the Institute's psychologist saying 'They don't understand how gymnasts must think.' Girls in need of counselling were denied access to this valuable service which was offered to all other sports.*

**4.68** In her oral submission, Kellie Larter alleged that Mrs Tian told the gymnasts during an assembly that "we would no longer [be] having contact with the psychologist because...[she]...did not feel it was necessary." Although she referred to both group sessions and individual sessions with Mr Crampton in her oral submission, the Inquiry believes from the context that the cancellation of the group sessions was foremost in Kellie Larter's mind when this comment was made.

**4.69** Leanne Noack and Kellie Larter told the Inquiry that they were disappointed that the group sessions ceased because they had found them of benefit. These are probably the girls who complained to Reverend Turner. Referring to the major role of the gymnast's coach in relation to psychological issues and that therefore the formal sessions may have been dispensable, Reverend Turner said:

*...certainly from where I sit now I can understand what Ju Ping was on about. That didn't make it easy for the girls to understand that or accept it...*

**4.70** The Inquiry finds that Mrs Tian reduced and then ceased the formal psychology sessions because she regarded the time as better spent on physical and skills training. In this decision she was supported by her assistant coach, the men's coach (Mr Forbes) and senior AIS management. She was opposed by Mr and Mrs Crampton. Mrs Crampton believes that Mrs Tian lacked "understanding of what modern day sport psychology can do to help an athlete".

**4.71** The Inquiry also finds that Mrs Tian did not expressly instruct the girls that they were not to see Mr Crampton outside training hours. She told them at an assembly that the sessions with Mr Crampton would cease completely and that the time was better spent on training. In that respect the sessions were not necessary. In making this decision there is little doubt that Mrs Tian would

have been strengthened by gymnastics coaching orthodoxy that it is for the coaches to deal with the principal psychological issues relevant to performance.<sup>29</sup> The Inquiry finds that at some point she indicated to the gymnasts that she could deal with the day-to-day psychological problems that arise in training and competition.

4.72 In accepting that Mrs Tian did not expressly instruct the gymnasts not to see Mr Crampton outside of training times, the Inquiry has given very careful consideration to the evidence of the various witnesses, especially that of Mrs Tian. her own. The Inquiry has concluded with some confidence that her objectives were to cease the group sessions and indicate to the gymnasts that she was able to deal with psychological issues in training and competition. She clearly envisaged a role for the specialist sports psychologist who understood gymnastics.

*But you can't just take the gymnasts to the psychologist and no training. During training time, I need to look after. Special time, I need a psychologist to help.*

4.73 If a special problem had arisen which she could not resolve, there is a strong likelihood she would have sent the gymnast to Mr Crampton or another AIS psychologist.

4.74 However, Mrs Tian's actions of ceasing the group sessions and indicating her own availability to assist with psychological matters, did create in the minds of some of the gymnasts the impression that they should not see Mr Crampton. One of these gymnasts is probably Kellie Larter. This would account for the comments made to Mrs Crampton and the Reverend Turner.

4.75 There are other factors relevant to understanding the allegations of denial of access to psychology services. Mrs Tian believed that Mr Crampton interfered with coaching matters. At the 1985 World Championships in Montreal she claims he went onto the competition floor and "tried to coach the girls". This made her angry because she regarded this as creating the prospect

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29 Mr Peter Read, President of the NSW Gymnastic Association and father of former Olympic gymnast Lisa Read, said that he believed Mrs Tian's "abilities in applying sports psychology were really quite strong, far better than most coaches you will find anywhere in Australia."

of causing confusion leading to injury because the gymnasts were receiving instructions from two sources. Mr Crampton had been appointed to the team, but Mrs Tian nevertheless saw this as interference. Also, she was critical of his work because he did not come into the gymnasium to understand the sport and work supportively with the coaches.<sup>30</sup> Late in 1986 she learned of what she was told were attempts by Mr Crampton to provoke a concerted challenge to her authority by some of the gymnasts.<sup>31</sup> This appears to have been linked to an escalating dispute between Mrs Tian and Mrs Crampton, especially in 1986, over a range of matters to do with the gymnastics program.

**4.76** It is not the province of the Inquiry to comment on the detail of the matters referred to in the preceding paragraph or for present purposes to suggest who may have been right or wrong. Also, Mr Crampton has not made a submission to the Inquiry so his version of events has not been heard. However, the significance of these matters for the Inquiry is that the gymnasts sensed growing friction between Mrs Tian and the wife of the sports psychologist (a number of them told the Inquiry of it) and it is possible that Mrs Tian may have displayed to the gymnasts some disapproval of Mr Crampton, even inadvertently (although there is no specific evidence of that occurring). Also, it was standard practice for the gymnasts to inform Mrs Tian if they needed to go to the doctor or other sports science people. Thus, if a gymnast wished to see Mr Crampton on a sports psychology issue, it would not take very much for her to think that she should "sneak" in rather than do so openly and inform Mrs Tian; especially given the impression of not being allowed to see Mr Crampton outside of training which was identified above.

**4.77** The view among some of the gymnasts that they were not allowed to see the sports psychologists became part of their culture to be passed on to new arrivals. This survived for a few years after 1986.

**4.78** The decision to cease the formal sports psychology sessions was a coaching and management matter about how to structure the program. While

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30 It would appear that Mr Crampton did visit the gymnasium from time to time. Kellie Larter told that Inquiry that she recalled him on the gymnasium floor helping her with things to think about during her approach to the vault.

31 It seems that Mrs Tian was oblivious to this until it was likely that Mr Crampton would leave the AIS. Others knew before she did.

such decisions about structure might lead to mistreatment in some circumstances, in the Inquiry's view there is nothing in that decision which can be characterised as mistreatment of the gymnasts or an abuse of their welfare. No gymnast complained of having suffered an adverse effect apart from, in the view of some gymnasts, missing out on some useful sessions with Mr Crampton (and that would have to be weighed against the benefits gained in other directions).<sup>32</sup> Also, it was not as if the removal of the group sessions left a void in terms of performance related psychological services. According to gymnastics coaching orthodoxy, the primary deliverer of psychological services is the coach.

4.79 As far as access to sports psychology services at other times is concerned, the Inquiry has found that an *impression* arose among some of the gymnasts that they were not allowed to see the sports psychologists, notwithstanding that there was no instruction to that effect. However, the Inquiry is not satisfied that this is a mistaken impression which has produced any adverse effect in the nature of mistreatment. Further, to the extent that Mr Crampton may have previously provided counselling on what Ms de Prazer called inter-personal issues, the gymnasts still had support and advice available to them from their families and friends, fellow gymnasts, medical staff such as Dr Fricker, houseparents, administrative staff such as Mrs Crampton, tutors and the coaches.

4.80 The Inquiry rejects any allegations of denial of access to sports psychology and counselling services during this period.

**d. Dr Fricker's Supervision - 1987-93**

4.81 Mr Forbes told the Inquiry, that towards the end of 1986 the situation with Mr Crampton and psychology services to the gymnastics program had reached what he called "a crisis point". He said that

*Mr Crampton was not fitting in with the program and doing what Ju Ping wanted the psychologist to do.*

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32 The respective values to be assigned to these benefits is a matter for coaches and management, not this Inquiry.



**4.82** He said also that accusations of the girls not being allowed to see the psychologist had surfaced elsewhere and that Mrs Tian was unaware of that.

**4.83** A meeting was held which was attended by Mrs Tian, Mr Forbes, Dr Fricker, Mr Geoff Bond the then head of the psychology department at the AIS, and senior AIS management, perhaps including the Director. Neither Mr nor Mrs Crampton attended. According to Mr Forbes, it was decided with Mr Bond's agreement that any psychology issues would be referred to Dr Fricker at first instance. If they were of a kind which a general practitioner trained in sports medicine might deal with he would seek to resolve them. If they were more complex he would refer them to the sports psychology department.

**4.84** Dr Fricker drew the Inquiry's attention to situations where he had referred gymnasts to an AIS psychologist, Mr Chris Horsley, over this period.

**4.85** Mrs Robyn Allen who has been a houseparent since mid 1990 said that before Ms de Prazer became involved with the program she referred a couple of gymnasts to AIS psychologist, Mr Clark Perry, in relation to inter-personal issues. She said that normally she would tell Mrs Tian about doing so but felt under no restriction in terms of dealing with the psychologists, other than to obtain parental permission.

**4.86** However, the culture of gymnasts persisted with the belief that the gymnasts were not allowed to see the psychologists. Lisa Read who was at the AIS from the beginning of 1988 until the end of 1992 said

*I got the impression that you weren't allowed... I can't remember like whether she said we weren't allowed to or not, but - it's hard to answer, I can't remember.*

**4.87** Notwithstanding Lisa Read's uncertainty on this point, Mr Read organised for his daughter to see Mr Bond in late 1988 and he told the Inquiry that Mrs Tian reacted "positively" to that initiative.

**4.88** However, Lisa McTiernan who was at the AIS from October 1988 to October 1993 told the Inquiry that when she first went to the AIS she claimed that Mrs Tian had told her that the gymnasts were not allowed to see the sports psychologists. Lisa McTiernan claimed that Mrs Tian said, "No, don't see these people." She was 11 years of age at the time and this is the only occasion



when she claims that Mrs Tian made such a comment. This comment is inconsistent with the experience of Mr Read at more or less the same time. A number of gymnasts including Megan Scriven (January to July 1988) and Tracey Kwan (October 1990 to February 1992) expressly denied ever having been told not to see the sports psychologists and many more gymnasts made no mention of any such directive. Lisa McTiernan's allegation is against the weight of the evidence. At the time she was 11 years of age. If Mrs Tian had said that part of her role as coach was to help the girls with psychological problems and they would not be needing to see the sports psychologists (aside from intractable or special problems), that could easily be regarded by an 11 year old as a direction that the girls were not allowed to see the psychologists, especially when there might have been a belief that to effect passed on by some older gymnasts. While there is an element of speculation in this, when taken with the weight of evidence which contradicts Lisa McTiernan's recollection, the comment attributed to Mrs Tian is most likely a misinterpretation.

4.89 In any event, Lisa McTiernan said that she never felt the need to consult a sports psychologist and there is no evidence of anybody being prevented from seeing a sports psychologist or having suffered harm from not seeing one during this period.

4.90 The Inquiry rejects any allegations of denial of access to sports psychology and counselling services during this period.

#### 4. NUTRITION

##### a. General

##### i. Media Allegations

4.91 Media reports in April this year alleged that AIS gymnasts had been denied the services of the nutritionists at the AIS. These reports were in virtually identical terms to those which related to sports psychology. Again, perhaps the most strongly worded report appeared in the Brisbane *Courier Mail* on 18 April 1995. It claimed that

*...gymnasts were...denied urgent help from AIS...nutritionists.*

**4.92** Most other reports were to similar effect with the exception that the word "urgent" was omitted.

**4.93** An allegation of denial of access to AIS nutritionists is more likely to suggest a general state of affairs of specified or unspecified duration than an incident or series of incidents.<sup>33</sup> Most of the allegations which appeared in the media do not specify any particular time when access was alleged to have been denied.

*ii. Richardson Proceedings*

**4.94** Access to advice about diet is at issue in the legal proceedings commenced by Ms Jennifer Richardson. This report cannot deal with matters which touch upon those proceedings. Ms Richardson appears to have been at the AIS for some part of 1986 and 1987.<sup>34</sup>

**4.95** The task facing the Inquiry is to report on media allegations of denial of access to nutritionists which are unspecified as to time and identity of gymnasts, while avoiding touching upon Ms Richardson's legal proceedings. These are conflicting requirements. The position is complicated by the circumstance that an allegation of denial of access suggests a general and continuing state of affairs rather than a particular incident or incidents. The Inquiry has decided that the solution is for this report not to make any reference to what may have been the state of affairs in either 1986 or 1987 as well as in a "buffer" period either side of those years.

**4.96** The legal proceedings are against both Mrs Tian and the ASC, of which the AIS is part. Mrs Tian commenced at the AIS in March 1985. This date will be the commencement of the buffer period. A concluding date cannot be fixed on the same basis because Mrs Tian is still at the AIS. The Inquiry has decided

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33 An incident may occur within the umbrella of the state of affairs such as taking some action to implement a general direction. For instance, a general direction that the gymnasts were not allowed to see the nutritionists could lead to a gymnast's specific request to see a nutritionist being denied.

34 The Inquiry is uncertain whether she was present for the whole of each year or for a shorter period. Three sets of dates, all of which conflict, have come to the Inquiry's attention.

to fix mid 1990 as the conclusion of the buffer period. This is a convenient date. At that time the commencement of new personnel in the Residence and in the area of nutrition at the AIS meant that any direct connection with what may have occurred in 1986 or 1987 was unlikely. Also, there had been a sufficient turnover of gymnasts to remove any substantial connection with Ms Richardson's involvement.

**b. Pre-March 1985**

**4.97** During this period, all the gymnasts were housed with local families who supplied their meals. No specific allegation of denial of access to nutritionists pertaining to this period was received and no evidence which suggested a denial of access came to the attention of the Inquiry.

**c. Mid-1990 to Present**

**4.98** No specific allegation was received by the Inquiry that any gymnast had been denied access to or help from AIS nutritionists in the past five years.

**4.99** The AIS nutritionist who has worked with the Gymnastics program since about late 1990 is Dr Louise Burke. She has been at the AIS since 1990 and is the Head of the Sports Nutrition Program. She is well respected in her field.

**4.100** Her involvement with the nutrition of the girls in the Residence is set out under the heading **Meals** in Chapter 7. This includes having established a number of principles and rules for the gymnasts diet which are applied by the houseparents, as well as eating a meal with them about once every six weeks.

**4.101** For those gymnasts who live at home with their families in Canberra (which is the large majority of gymnasts), Dr Burke has held meetings to discuss appropriate diet and a range of issues to deal with practical aspects of children's eating habits. She told the Inquiry that she aims to have one or two such meetings a year. Specifically, many parents of current younger gymnasts spoke of a meeting with Dr Burke which was held earlier this year which they found helpful.

**4.102** Former gymnasts recalled their first meeting with Dr Burke as having occurred in 1991. A number of meetings since then were reported by various current and former gymnasts.

**4.103** The usual practice is for parents to be informed upon induction of their daughters that Dr Burke is available for consultation. Mrs Karen Orpin, mother of current gymnast, Candice Orpin, said:

*We could see the dietitian here if we want to...*

**4.104** The senior houseparent, Mrs Robyn Allen, will refer families to Dr Burke if she believes that a gymnast's diet or eating habits are inappropriate. Mrs Allen is in a position to do this for all gymnasts because not only is she aware of what is occurring among the girls in the Residence, she is able to observe the eating habits of the other gymnasts because they all eat meals in the AIS dining hall from time to time.

**4.105** A number of parents and gymnasts told the Inquiry of having attended personal consultations with Dr Burke to address a variety of issues such as general diet, over-eating, dietary deficiencies, the need to put on weight and disordered eating. These consultations arose from their own initiative or from referral by the coaches, doctors or houseparents.

**4.106** Insofar as the allegations which appeared in the media in April and May of this year may apply to the period since mid-1990, the Inquiry received no evidence to support them. To that extent those allegations are rejected.

## **5 FLUID BALANCE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

**5.1** A number of allegations were received by the Inquiry to the effect that the coaches, particularly Mrs Tian, did not understand the need for water intake and imposed inappropriate restrictions upon it. Some medical disorders were alleged to have been suffered as a result: namely, kidney failure and constipation.

**5.2** The Inquiry received a very large amount of evidence on this topic. All allegations of inappropriate conduct or practice have been rejected. Some misunderstanding of Mrs Tian in her early years at the AIS due to her inability to communicate clearly in English did occur, but no mistreatment has been established. The most serious of the allegations proved to be no more than somewhat disgraceful gossip.

### **2. CURRENT PRACTICE**

#### **a. Introduction**

**5.3** The Inquiry did not receive any allegations of inappropriate restrictions on consumption of water which related to either current or relatively recent times. The current practice is set out below; this is for the dual purpose of demonstrating that the current practice does not involve any inappropriate conduct and to assist in understanding those allegations which have been made in respect of earlier times.

#### **b. Access to Water**

**5.4** Training sessions last for up to four hours, sometimes longer. However, gymnasts will not be exercising continuously for all of that time. Exercise comes in short intensive bursts. While there is always variation, the period of exercise may be as little as 30 minutes over a session. Thus, despite the lengthy time spent in training session, the water consumption of gymnasts is



thought to be less than, say, footballers and marathon runners.<sup>35</sup> Even so, it is important for their health and gymnastic performance that they maintain adequate hydration.

**5.5** In the AIS gymnasium building, a corridor runs the length of one side of the gymnasium space. In that corridor there is a drinking fountain or bubbler. This is the main source of water for gymnasts while training. Off the corridor are toilet and shower areas with washbasins. Some gymnasts also use the taps in the washbasins to obtain a drink.

**5.6** AIS gymnasts do not take water bottles out onto the floor of the gymnasium. Two reasons were given for this measure. First, the ready presence of water bottles can lead to gymnasts drinking more often than they need to - it becomes an unnecessary habit. Ms Kym Dowdell, the National Women's Technical Director of the AGF agreed with this and said:

*...it becomes a habit. The girls waste time going over and getting a drink of water all the time. If they want to have a drink of water they should leave the training, go out and have a drink and come back in rather than continually picking up a water bottle all the time...*

**5.7** Second, drink bottles on the floor can lead to spillage which in turn results in accidents. This second reason is not the main reason and is probably relatively unimportant because it seems that visiting gymnasts who wish to bring water bottles onto the floor are not prevented from doing so.

**5.8** No evidence came to the attention of the Inquiry which suggested that the current practice at the AIS involved any inappropriate limit on what the gymnasts could drink. No one who needed a drink was denied it. Also, no evidence was presented that any current AIS gymnast is lacking sufficient fluid or is dehydrated. Numerous current gymnasts told the Inquiry that they never went thirsty and that they did not feel under any pressure to restrict their water consumption. They mentioned being told by the coaches to go and have a drink at various points during a training session. Those gymnasts who were

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<sup>35</sup> A scientific survey by AIS nutritionist Dr Louise Burke into fluid intake and sweat loss during training is in the planning stages at the AIS. This will be modelled on surveys undertaken for other sports at the AIS.



questioned on the point - including younger ones - seemed to understand that water which was consumed would, after a short interval, pass through their bodies and be excreted. Parents said that they did not have any concerns.

**5.9** Dr Fricker is satisfied that drinking practices are appropriate from a medical viewpoint. The impression formed by the Inquiry is that the older, more advanced gymnasts have their health monitored quite closely and that Dr Fricker checks that they are consuming an appropriate amount of fluid per day. Mr Bill Weatherstone, the principal of Aranda Primary School which is attended by 18 gymnasts said that he had never received any reports during his six years at the school of the gymnasts being dehydrated.

**5.10** Mr Sheryl Whitwell whose daughter, Karinda, finished at the AIS in April 1994 claimed that Karinda had scaly skin and was dehydrated when she came home. Access to her medical records to investigate this report was not received. Karinda refused to speak to the Inquiry. There was no allegation that this was due to not being allowed enough to drink. On the sketchy evidence given by Mrs Whitwell, if some degree of dehydration did occur, it may have been the result of her daughter voluntarily not drinking rather than any instruction from her coaches. This matter cannot be investigated further and any allegation must be rejected.

**5.11** There are, however, a number of practical restrictions on drinking. These are set out in the next section.

**c. Practical Restrictions**

**5.12** The coaches do not like gymnasts drinking a lot of water at one time. They may feel sick as a result. Thus, expressions such as "don't drink too much", "just have little sips" or "have a little bit" are used to instruct the girls in proper habits. These are the girls' recollections of the coaches words. Some of the girls are as young as 10 and 11 and so their memories may not be especially reliable. However, it was clear that they were drinking enough so as not to feel thirsty.

**5.13** Typical are the comments of Sandi McKelvie who is 11 years old and was at the AIS in February and March this year. She told the Inquiry:

*Sometimes they'd say, 'Oh, don't drink too much, because otherwise your stomach might feel sick when you start doing the trampoline.'*

**5.14** Another consideration is the timing of drink breaks. The coaches do not like a girl going for a drink when her group is engaged in a "rotation" on an apparatus. They may ask a gymnast to wait until the rotation is complete. A rotation may last for up to 45 minutes. If the request comes near the end of the rotation, the gymnast may be asked to wait, if it comes earlier the gymnast is told to go, but "be quick".

**5.15** Also typical of comments in this regard are those of 12 year old Lisa Valletta who was at the AIS in January and February this year. She said:

*...if you were about to do a routine or something they'd say wait until after this routine.*

**5.16** Some girls dawdle at the drinking fountain and to prevent that happening, coaches may discourage any more than essential visits to it.

**d. Finding**

**5.17** There has not been any allegation made to the Inquiry of inappropriate practices concerning fluid balance and consumption. No evidence has come to the attention of the Inquiry which would indicate that any inappropriate practice is pursued.

**3. ALLEGATIONS OF PAST INAPPROPRIATE PRACTICES**

**a. 1985-1988**

**5.18** Three gymnasts from the early years of Mrs Tian's time at the AIS alleged that she had imposed inappropriate restrictions on their fluid intake. Those gymnasts are Mrs Debbie Clarkson (nee Graham) (September 1983 to December 1987), Ms Kellie Larter (January 1984 to July 1988) and Mrs Leanne Noack (nee Rycroft) (January 1985 to December 1988). Mrs Frances Crampton (nee Thompson) who was the administrator of the gymnastics program during 1985 and 1986 supported those accusations. Ms Judith Gillen

who was an assistant houseparent and tutor during 1986 made a separate allegation.

**5.19** The alleged conduct of Mrs Tian may be grouped as follows.

**5.20 Not to drink during training.** Mrs Clarkson, Mrs Noack and Mrs Crampton alleged that Mrs Tian told the girls that they were not allowed to drink water during training. Mrs Crampton was asked what were Mrs Tian's words and she replied:

*'You not drink water. This make you fat. You not have water.' Words to that effect, I mean, I can't give you, 10 years later, the very, very precise words, but in her sort of broken English and the girls would be very confused.*

**5.21** Mrs Noack said:

*She would just say don't drink water during training, you can have a little bit before and maybe a little bit after, but not during training and she also said that it wastes time if you went off and had a drink.*

**5.22 Water makes you fat, heavy, puts on weight.** Mrs Tian was alleged to have said that, "Water will make you too heavy," (Ms Larter), "water makes you fat" (Mrs Crampton), and "water makes you fat, or water makes you heavy, you put on too much weight if you drink water" (Mrs Noack). Mrs Clarkson said, "she definitely believed that water made you fat".

**5.23 One glass of water per day.** Mrs Noack said that Mrs Tian told her to drink one glass of water per day. Mrs Crampton said that Mrs Tian had told her this as well.

**5.24 Unscientific theories.** Mrs Clarkson, Mrs Noack and Mrs Crampton said that they understood Mrs Tian to believe that by drinking water a gymnast would put on fat. Mrs Noack also thought that Mrs Tian believed that there was an effect on the blood. She said:

*It was something to do with either making your blood thick, or something to do with your muscles and the water either helps*

*promote the fat in your body or something along those lines, I really cannot remember.*

**5.25** Mrs Crampton believed that Mrs Tian had brought "old-fashioned" ideas about hydration with her from China. She said she took Mrs Tian to Dr Fricker and then to AIS nutritionist, Ms Vicki Deakin, to have them explain about the need to drink water. She said that Ms Deakin lined up "eight little cups of water" to demonstrate the ideal quantity to be drunk during a day. Mrs Crampton said that after these meetings, Mrs Tian did not take any notice and said that Dr Fricker and Ms Deakin did not understand that "gymnasts are not like normal people".

**5.26** **Not to drink too much with the evening meal.** Ms Gillen recalled being with the girls in the dining hall during 1986 on several occasions at evening meal time when Mrs Tian would tell the girls

*...not drink too much water, to only have half a glass of water, that you mustn't drink lots of liquid, that it's not good for you to drink too much.*

**5.27** The Inquiry received a substantial volume of evidence which conflicted with the preceding allegations. However, before considering it, some further information about the allegations and surrounding circumstances must be set out.

**5.28** None of the people making the allegations said that they had witnessed or knew of any occasion when a gymnast had been stopped from having a drink. Mrs Noack said:

*...she [Mrs Tian] didn't, sort of, put a lock on the water. If you went to the toilet and you really wanted a drink, you could have one, but that's just what she said for us not to do. That didn't mean that no-one drank during training.*

**5.29** Although Mrs Clarkson claimed that Mrs Tian had told her not to drink during training, it seems that her primary concern was to avoid putting on weight during training rather than obeying the alleged direction. She told the Inquiry that she used to drink from the taps in the toilets during training.

**5.30** Mrs Noack said that she did not drink at all during training in her four years at the AIS. However, she did drink more than the one glass of fluid per day allegedly stipulated by Mrs Tian. She said that she spent a couple of days in Hawaii with her parents following an international competition. She did not realise that she had not had a drink all day and required medical attention when she developed a migraine headache in the evening. She recovered quickly when told to drink four cans of lemonade. Mrs Noack claimed that she had just become used to not drinking. Apart from this incident, none of the people making the allegations said they knew of anyone suffering any harm from not drinking sufficient fluids.

**5.31** A number of gymnasts from this era denied the allegation that they were told not to drink water during training. These were Monique Allen (1984 to 1992), Mrs Cathy Lantry (nee Blake) (1984 and 1985) and Ms Megan Scriven (September 1987 to July 1988). Ms Scriven told the Inquiry that on occasions she had been told by Mrs Tian to take a break, go to the toilet and have a drink. Although Ms Larter did not expressly deny that Mrs Tian had told them not to drink during training, her evidence was unquestionably inconsistent with any such direction having been given.

**5.32** The two main WAG coaches from this period, Mrs Tian and her assistant Mr Mark Calton, denied that the girls were told not to drink water during training. Mr Forbes agreed. Dr Fricker did not know of such a direction. Ms Vicki Deakin visited the gymnasium once a week for three years from 1985 to 1988 and cannot recall hearing anything to that effect being said by the coaches. Mr David Zuker is a senior and respected sports physiotherapist from Melbourne. During this period he was team physiotherapist to many touring gymnastics teams of which Mrs Tian was coach. He had no knowledge of fluid intake being restricted in any way on these tours. The parents of a number of gymnasts from this period who were either scholarship holders or in regular attendance at AIS camps said they had not observed any restrictions on water intake being mentioned or applied by the coaches at the AIS.

**5.33** The Inquiry is satisfied that Mrs Tian was instructing the girls "not to drink too much" or words to similar effect. Her object in doing so is best explained by Ms Allen. She said that Mrs Tian had told her:

*Not to drink, like, heaps at once, just to drink small amounts, sort of, all the time, because gymnastics, you know, is a real weight*

*thing, and the heavier you are the harder it is on your body, and to drink a whole lot at once would - is really heavy... just to drink small amounts all the time, but just little bits so your body wasn't sort of, I guess bogged down.*

**5.34** Ms Allen said that this was what Mrs Tian said to her from the time Mrs Tian started in 1985 until when Ms Allen finished in 1992. She added:

*...people might have thought - misconstrued it. You know, she said, you know, don't drink a lot, but basically from the time when she first - you know, when she first started coaching me, we'd say, 'Can we go and get a drink?' and she'd say, 'Yes, yes, but just a little bit,' you know, just drink a little bit.*

**5.35** Ms Allen recalled Mrs Tian saying "Don't drink too much" and "Don't drink too fast".

**5.36** Ms Larter said:

*If she saw you going to the water fountain too often she could get angry at you and say, 'You drink too much.' And you'd, sort of - you wouldn't go again because you would get into trouble. [Emphasis added.]*

**5.37** She added that Mrs Tian "would only let you have, like, tiny little sips."

**5.38** The following questions and answers between Mr Caiton and the Inquirer occurred:

Q. *Were gymnasts ever denied water while you were in the gym?*

A. *The gymnasts were told to restrict the amount of fluid that they would - you know - if they got out for a drink, but in terms of preventing them from going outside to have a drink, no.*

Q. *So they could have a drink if they wished?*

A. *Yes.*



Q. When you say 'restrict the amount' that they had, to what end?

A. Basically don't gulp in 20 mouthfuls.

Q. Do you think that was sensible?

A. I thought that was sensible... if you're feeling very thirsty and you go and sort of take in 20 mouthfuls of water you've got this big pool of water sloshing around in your stomach.

5.39 Dr Fricker said:

*...early on Ju Ping was known to use expressions like 'Don't drink too much water; water makes you fat.' [In discussion with Dr Fricker]...Ju Ping would agree...that athletes need to drink and rehydrate after training and so on. And then she would say to me, 'Oh yes, but I don't want them to drink too much because it makes them heavy,' and you know, all this stuff about they can't tumble, spin and they get injured and so on.*

5.40 In her evidence above, Mrs Crampton speaks of confusion among the girls and of language difficulties. She made the following comments which the Inquiry regards as significant:

*...the girls would come to me and say, 'Ju Ping said we mustn't drink water', and I would try to explain to them that she didn't really mean them not to drink water, but she didn't want them to have a lot of water in their stomach before they started training. When I spoke to her about it, she told me that I didn't understand that water makes you fat. We had several discussions about this, and she said to me, 'If I give you a glass of water and I put you on the scales, you will be heavier,' and I said, 'Yes, but if I exercise and I perspire or I go to the toilet, I will be back to the same weight.' And we had several discussions about it, and she was just absolutely convinced that the girls should not drink water.*

5.41 A number of points emerge from this statement. First, the girls were receiving clarifying comments from Mrs Crampton which, although intended to help, risked causing further confusion because of conflicting messages and might have inadvertently caused some feelings of resentment or suspicion

towards Mrs Tian among some girls. Second, when Mrs Tian speaks of water making a person fat, she does not mean that water puts on body fat, rather her concern is about an immediate increase in weight caused by a quantity of water in a person's stomach. According to Mrs Crampton's account, Mrs Tian equated becoming fat with becoming heavier immediately after drinking water. Third, it appears to the Inquiry that Mrs Tian and Mrs Crampton were speaking at cross purposes. While Mrs Crampton's concern was to point out the correct proposition that fluid loss through perspiration and excretion over a period of hours would negate the effect of becoming heavier through water consumption, Mrs Tian's concern was about avoiding situations where too much water was consumed too quickly. That this was Mrs Tian's concern receives strong support from most of the evidence. Apart from avoiding gymnasts feeling bloated and unwell while performing various acrobatic exercises, that concern derives from training considerations which are discussed in Chapter 6.

**5.42** The allegations of Mrs Clarkson and Mrs Noack that they were told not to drink water during training are rejected. The suggestion of confusion among the girls and the powerful contradictory evidence mean that these allegations cannot be accepted.

**5.43** Mrs Crampton claims that she heard Mrs Tian make comments such as, "You not drink water." She said these may not be the precise words given that these events occurred about 10 years ago. Mrs Crampton was an impressive witness. She is a much respected administrator in the sport. Her claims are not to be taken lightly. However, they are against the weight of evidence and due allowance must be made for the chance of some confusion at the time owing to language difficulties and faded recollection of events 10 years ago. This allegation of inappropriate conduct is rejected.

**5.44** The second grouping of alleged conduct of Mrs Tian related to statements to the effect that 'water makes you fat, heavy, and puts on weight'. Some observations have been made above about these statements. Mrs Lantry said that Mrs Tian had spoken about "too much water not being good for you because it does make you weighty". However, she clearly understood that water did not make her fat. Mrs Tian in her oral evidence rejected any suggestion that water makes a person fat and it is clear from Mrs Crampton's evidence alone that Mrs Tian did not believe that to be so in these early years as well.

**5.45** However, in those early years the Inquiry accepts that Mrs Tian did use expressions such as "water makes you fat". A majority of people in the gymnasium understood immediately or quickly what she meant and put this down to language difficulties. There were others such as Mrs Clarkson who insisted that Mrs Tian believed that water made you fat and that Mrs Tian had no language difficulties. However, Mrs Clarkson knew that water did not make her fat in any case.

**5.46** The Inquiry finds nothing inappropriate in Mrs Tian conduct in these respects.

**5.47** The third grouping of alleged conduct of Mrs Tian related to claims by Mrs Crampton and Mrs Noack that Mrs Tian had told the girls to drink only one glass of fluid per day. Mrs Crampton said that Mrs Tian told her this in discussions they had as well. Mrs Noack said that she drank more than one glass of fluid in any event.

**5.48** The proposition that an athlete who is training twice a day should drink only one glass of fluid per day is extraordinary. If followed, it would lead to illness among the gymnasts very quickly. No-one else appears to know anything about it. Mrs Tian described the allegation as "rubbish". She drew attention to the unreality of expecting people to confine themselves to one glass of fluid per day. Mrs Tian is an intelligent person. She has had physical education training in China. She had the support of medical staff at the AIS. In these circumstances, the Inquiry cannot accept that she would advocate such an unrealistic and extraordinary practice. This allegation is rejected.

**5.49** The fourth grouping of alleged conduct of Mrs Tian related to claims about Mrs Tian holding unscientific theories. The allegation about water making a person fat has been considered above. Mrs Noack's allegation concerning water making the blood thicker and so forth is quite confused and Mrs Noack herself can no longer remember precisely. Mrs Tian denies anything of the sort. Given that, and the misunderstandings that the Inquiry considers Mrs Noack was under in relation to other matters, this allegation is rejected.

**5.50** In relation to Mrs Crampton's efforts to educate Mrs Tian about hydration, Dr Fricker cannot remember anything in the nature of Mrs Crampton formally bringing Mrs Tian to him for a consultation. Mrs Crampton's account of

events was read to him from the transcript and he appeared quite baffled by it and had no recollection of events as described. He was disinclined to disbelieve Mrs Crampton. He did recall something about Mrs Crampton speaking to Ms Deakin about eight glasses of water, but he was not present to see that. Dr Fricker said that he may have had discussions with Mrs Tian about hydration but:

*I wasn't telling her these kids aren't drinking enough. I mean, I've never said that to Ju Ping, that I remember. I have never said to Ju Ping, 'Hang on, I am now wondering why these kids aren't drinking or aren't drinking at all. You must let them drink.'*

**5.51** Ms Deakin no longer works for the AIS. She could not recall Mrs Crampton bringing Mrs Tian to her and eight cups of water being lined up as Mrs Crampton alleges.

**5.52** Faded memories make it impossible to know precisely what occurred. However, the question for the Inquiry must be whether Mrs Tian was stopping the girls from drinking enough. Mrs Crampton had her concerns, but these seem to rest on the claims about "one glass of water per day" and "not drinking during training". Both of these claims have been rejected. More importantly, Dr Fricker did not have concerns about the girls not drinking enough.

**5.53** There is insufficient evidence to substantiate this allegation.

**5.54** The fifth grouping of alleged conduct of Mrs Tian related to Ms Gillen's claim about Mrs Tian telling the girls to have only a half glass of water with an evening meal. Mrs Tian provided the following evidence to the Inquiry:

*I said especially in the summer time always teach my children in the dinner table or lunch time they drink glass water or half glass, doesn't matter, is slowly, drink a little bit. You don't - too much water drunked you got a stomach full, you can't eat any food because in summer, you know, everybody want to drink, want ice cream and drink everything, and don't want eatings. If all water in stomach you can't any food, couple of days, you've got no energy.*

**5.55** Mrs Tian's concern is that girls not drink so that they lose their appetite for their meal, especially in summer when the temptation might be to drink quite

a lot with a meal. She wants to ensure that they receive necessary nourishment. The reference to "drink a little bit" is to the speed of drinking with a meal. There is nothing in this evidence from Mrs Tian or from Ms Gillen which suggests a restriction on drinking at other times.

**5.56** The Inquiry finds that on occasion Mrs Tian has encouraged the girls to have half a glass of water (rather than more) with their meals and that this has been motivated by her desire to ensure that they have their full measure of food rather than lose their appetite through drinking too much. This is not inappropriate conduct by Mrs Tian and the allegation is rejected.

**5.57** Accordingly, all the allegations that Mrs Tian imposed inappropriate restrictions on the gymnasts's fluid intake during this period are rejected.

**b. 1988-1993**

**5.58** Four gymnasts who had contact with the AIS during the period 1988 to 1993 alleged that Mrs Tian and some other coaches had imposed inappropriate restrictions on their fluid intake. Those gymnasts are Ms Hollie Bevans (October to December 1987 and October 1988 to June 1990), Ms Brooke Gysen (May to October 1993 and, while as a WAIS gymnast, training camps pre-1993), Ms Lisa McTiernan (October 1988 to October 1993) and Ms Michelle Telfer (training camps up to mid 1992 as a WAIS gymnast). Mr Hardman who fulfilled various roles as a junior coach in men's gymnastics in the AIS gymnasium from 1987 to 1990, both years inclusive, made a separate allegation. Dr Geoff Sussman<sup>36</sup> who is President of the Victorian Gymnastic Association made allegations concerning the 1992 Olympic team of which Mrs Tian was head coach.

**5.59** The alleged conduct of Mrs Tian may be grouped as follows.

**5.60 Prohibited from drinking during training.** Ms Bevans alleged that "we were not allowed to drink" during training. The following questions and answers occurred.

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36 Dr Sussman is a pharmacist.



- A. *...[a]ll I know is that I was restricted and that all the older girls were. Like, it wasn't something that was enforced upon us every day, but it was just told to us and it was something - it was just assumed knowledge the whole time I was there.*
- Q. *So how often did Ju Ping tell you this?*
- A. *Only a couple of times. It was just something that - I'm not saying that in 1990 if I had've gone and had a drink that she would've abused me or something, but it was just assumed knowledge and you would've never dared do it.*
- Q. *So when would she have given you these instructions not to drink during training?*
- A. *I don't know. 88 or something I guess. I don't really remember.*

5.61 Ms Bevans said that she drank from the taps in the toilets and the impression gathered by the Inquiry was that she never went without water. If the instructions were given in 1988, Ms Bevans would have been about 12 years of age. She knew that other girls at about her own age and level were allowed to drink provided they "did not drink too much".

5.62 The Inquiry does not accept this allegation. It has been found that the older girls were under no such restriction as Ms Bevans asserts - foremost among these girls would have been Monique Allen. Just as some girls before her misinterpreted Mrs Tian's instructions, it is most probable that Ms Bevans did so as well. Ms Bevans alleges inappropriate conduct based on her recollection of instructions allegedly given seven years ago when she was about 12 years of age and on what she calls "assumed knowledge". She did not obey these instructions and drank from the taps in the toilets. It is quite curious that she thought that she could, at least later on, openly go and have water without getting into trouble and that other girls much her own age and level were always able to have water too, yet at the same time she allegedly held to the belief that she was not to drink during training. Allowance must also be made for the circumstances that Ms Bevans is hostile towards the AIS and Mrs Tian and in her oral submission was prone to put matters in exaggerated terms.



**5.63** Apart from Monique Allen, other gymnasts who told the Inquiry that they were not prohibited from drinking during training included Katie Bourne (October 1988 to March 1989), Rebecca Jackson (October 1988 to July 1995), Tracey Kwan (October 1990 to February 1992), Lisa McTiernan, Lisa Read (January 1988 to December 1992) and Kristy Wilson (February 1988 to December 1993). Ms Jackson said that she would be told to "go to the tap" by the coaches.

**5.64 One or two glasses of water per day.** Ms Brooke Gysen alleged that in about April 1993 shortly after she commenced her scholarship at the AIS, Mrs Tian had told to her to limit her drinking to "maybe one or two glasses a day". Ms Gysen said that this wasn't forced on her and she did not follow the instruction. She drank openly at training and in the AIS dining hall and had no restrictions placed on her, or were any comments made.

**5.65** Mrs Tian has denied issuing any instructions of this kind (see above under the heading **1985-1988**). This is a weak allegation. If the instruction was given, why was there no follow-up action when it was openly disobeyed? The comments made above in relation to rejecting similar allegations by Mrs Noack and Mrs Crampton are relevant to Ms Gysen's allegation. Also, it appears that Mrs Tian allegedly gave this instruction when the two of them were discussing fluid intake and the need not to drink too much during training. Ms Gysen said that she did not understand Mrs Tian's explanation of her reasons for this - "I didn't quite catch all the theory because I didn't understand it" - and it is possible that some confusion arose out of that.

**5.66** There is insufficient evidence to substantiate this allegation and it is rejected.

**5.67 Water makes you fat.** Ms Telfer told the Inquiry that Mrs Tian used expressions such as "water makes fat", "water makes face fat" and "too much water make girl fat". Ms Telfer rejected the possibility that Mrs Tian meant that too much water would make a girl heavier and that her use of the word "fat" was due to language difficulties - she said Mrs Tian had been in Australia too long. Ms Telfer recognised that consumption of water did increase body weight temporarily. Also, she referred to a cartoon in her diary which had been drawn by AIS gymnast Kylie Shadbolt. This depicted Mrs Tian saying, "Too heavy, water make face fat."

**5.68** Ms McTiernan recalled that once the gymnasts were told that water was as fattening as beer, but that was quickly corrected. She thought that this was attributable to English language difficulty. She declined to identify the coach who had made this statement.

**5.69** As a WAIS gymnast, Ms Telfer was a relative outsider to the AIS. She was less understanding of Mrs Tian's odd use of vocabulary. Ms Telfer's claim that Mrs Tian had been in Australia for long enough to know the correct use of the word "fat" is a reason for why she should know that meaning, rather than proof of whether or not Mrs Tian was in fact using the word correctly. The overwhelming evidence is that Mrs Tian used "fat" to describe "weighty" and "heavy" and may have used them interchangeably at times. Ms Shadbolt's cartoon caption hints at that. The Inquiry finds that the comments attributed to her by Ms Telfer reflect vocabulary difficulties and do not represent a misunderstanding by Mrs Tian of the causes of accretion of body fat.

**5.70** Ms McTiernan's recollection of events requires no finding. The issue of language difficulties will be returned to below.

**5.71 Unscientific theories.** Ms Telfer's allegation about Mrs Tian claiming that water made a gymnast fat has been considered above.

**5.72** Ms Gysen claimed that Mrs Tian told her that if she drank water she would expand like a balloon and that this was the reason that she should not drink too much during training.

**5.73** Ms Telfer claimed that Mrs Tian told her that by drinking water you would have "to pump more blood for your training session". Ms Telfer interpreted this to mean that water thinned the blood and increased blood volume and made the heart work harder. Ms Telfer is studying physiology and told the Inquiry that there is some thinning of the blood, but that Mrs Tian's theory is false.

**5.74** What has occurred is very clear to the Inquiry. Both girls came from WAIS. Personalities and ways of doing things are different from the AIS and that is both to be expected and normal. The girls were accustomed to their ways and confident in them. They did not adjust easily to different ways of doing things, especially when those ways were explained in a manner which was not easy to understand.

**5.75** Ms Telfer has placed a particular interpretation on Mrs Tian's comments. An alternative and more likely explanation is that an increase in body weight caused by drinking "too much" (even if a temporary increase) will make a girl's heart work harder because there is more weight to propel. She will expend more energy and not train as well. This may seem minor, but as has been observed above: it is the little things that make all the difference in the competitive world of elite gymnastics.

**5.76** Mrs Tian's alleged comments to Ms Gysen are an exaggerated way of explaining what happens if too much water is consumed.

**5.77** The Inquiry had lengthy interviews with Mrs Tian. It was very apparent how misunderstandings can occur. The comments attributed to Mrs Tian by Ms Gysen and Ms Telfer do not reflect unscientific theories held by Mrs Tian about fluid balance.

**5.78 Drinking restricted during training.** As has been discussed under the heading **1985-1988** above, Mrs Tian would make comments like "don't drink too much water", "take little sips", "don't drink too quickly". She was also concerned that girls did not dawdle at the drinking fountain. They might be asked to wait until they were finished what they were doing. Further, it has to be recognised, that going for a drink is one way of securing an extra break from training irrespective of whether a drink is needed. Occasionally she suggested that they rinse their mouths out rather than have a drink. Ms Read explained that if she was doing "a full floor routine and building up" she would feel really tired and not like drinking anyway. The implication was that by swishing some water around her mouth a gymnast could refresh herself without putting water in her stomach. In any event, she said she would take a "couple of sips".

**5.79** Mr Hardman explained at considerable length that he believed that the girls were not given enough opportunity to go for drinks and that about twice a week he heard Mrs Tian tell a gymnast that she should wait. Given the considerations set out in the immediately preceding paragraph, Mr Hardman did not prove convincing. Mr Hardman considered that the boys went more frequently, but there was no clear evidence of girls being denied water in any unreasonable way. The essence of Mr Hardman's concerns was over judgments by coaches as to the timing of drink breaks. He impressed the Inquiry as an unusually sensitive person who might be likely to seize on any

instance of a small girl complaining about not being able to go for a drink just when she desired.

**5.80** Ms Telfer in her written submission alleged that she

*was strongly advised not to drink water during training sessions (often lasting up four hours at a time).*

**5.81** Mrs Tian was alleged to have given this advice.

**5.82** During her oral submission, it became clear that this allegation was exaggerated. Ms Telfer said

*...[Mrs Tian] used to say, 'Well, if you have to have to drink some [water] then drink a little bit'. So it was not like if you drank any you were in huge trouble.*

**5.83** The words attributed to Mrs Tian are capable of innocent meaning. Just as a parent or teacher might say to a child who wants to do something which interrupts the flow of events or causes some minor inconvenience, "Well, if you have to do it, do it this way or quickly," so are Mrs Tian's comments in the same vein. It may be wrong to read into them a message of discouragement. Rather the message could be one of mildly reluctant acquiescence in the interruption or inconvenience.

**5.84** However, Ms Telfer said that she understood the words to signify a preference not to drink any water, but if she needed water she could have it provided she did not drink a lot. This is an arguable but harsher interpretation of those words.

**5.85** Notwithstanding her statements at this stage of her evidence that she was not prohibited from drinking water, later on she slipped into speaking about not being "allowed to drink water" - a slip which was corrected with her approval. This and other comments suggested to the Inquiry that in Ms Telfer's mind she was convinced that she was prohibited from drinking water during training even though she acknowledged that was not the case.

**5.86** Ms Telfer was hostile towards Mrs Tian and on occasions she adopted a negative interpretation of events in both her written and oral submissions. However, these factors must be taken into account in weighing her evidence.

**5.87** Ms Gysen and Ms McTiernan indicated that they felt a pressure to limit their consumption of water. Ms Bevans would have to be regarded as in the same position. However, with one exception, the Inquiry regards that pressure is referable to the factors set out at the beginning of this section; namely, not to drink too much water and not to waste time. The Inquiry does not regard these pressures as inappropriate. The exception referred to will arise where a gymnast is to be weighed either during or after training. In that event, she may be tempted to defer her consumption of water until weigh-in.

**5.88** These allegations concerning restrictions on drinking are rejected.

**5.89** Dr Sussman alleged that at the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992, "the general attitude appeared to be to strongly encourage them not to drink a great deal". The evidence which Dr Sussman relied on to make this claim was that one day in the canteen he heard Mrs Tian say to unidentified gymnasts that they "should not drink too much water". Otherwise, he had "impressions that they did not seem to take a lot of fluids". Dr Sussman said that he had no knowledge of any gymnast suffering health difficulties because of lack of water. He said of Dr Fricker, who was the gymnastics team doctor in Barcelona, that "he would not be promoting inappropriate levels of fluid". However, he added that Dr Fricker "cannot stand over Ju Ping's shoulder every day".

**5.90** Ms Telfer extended her allegation about restrictions on drinking water during training referred to above to the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992. The considerations in answer set out above are relevant. Also, Dr Fricker had this to say of the Barcelona Olympic Games and the training camp at the AIS which preceded it:

*My comment on that would be that Ju Ping certainly would have said, "I don't want you gymnasts to drink lots of water during training," for all the reasons we've discussed earlier. She certainly never denied any athlete fluid and I used to see the gymnasts run off the floor and have a drink from time to time.*

**5.91** The allegations by Dr Sussman and Ms Telfer are rejected.



**c. Observations and Suggestion**

**5.92** Dr Fricker suggested that Mrs Tian might make comments such as "don't drink too much water" almost out of habit or as a constant reminder. That would be consistent with what the Inquiry detected as an approach to coaching which left as little as possible to chance.

**5.93** However, to the extent that any gymnast was under an incorrect impression, the constant reminder would have the inadvertent effect of reinforcing that impression.

**5.94** The allegations which have been considered in this chapter have numerous and complex causes. They include language difficulties. In some respects Mrs Tian's English is quite good and the gymnasts seem to understand her fairly well. Indeed, it appears to the Inquiry that over the years, the ASC has made substantial provision for English language training for its foreign born coaches. However, the fact remains that Mrs Tian's spoken English leaves much to be desired. She has difficulties with diction and the choice of some words. Of the Chinese born coaches she has been in Australia longest, but the English of her colleagues, Mr Qu Derui and Ms Jiang Shao Yi, is much better (in fact, fairly good).

**5.95** Mrs Tian has indicated to the Inquiry that after the 1996 Olympic Games she would like to take time to study English full-time. Although the Inquiry has not found that any inappropriate conduct or practice has occurred, and is therefore not empowered to make a recommendation, it would be remiss not to draw attention to the potential for misunderstandings based on language difficulties to be repeated in some form. Rather than make a recommendation, the Inquiry suggests that should Mrs Tian wish to pursue further English language studies, the ASC take into account the background represented by this Chapter.

**4. SPECIFIC ALLEGATIONS OF HARM**

**a. Monique Allen's Alleged Renal Failure**

**5.96** The Inquiry was informed by a number of people that in 1991, high profile AIS gymnast, Monique Allen, had been hospitalised in Canberra suffering from kidney failure due to deprivation of fluids at the AIS. While it was

no particular secret that Ms Allen had been hospitalised, none of the informants had any direct knowledge of the reason for hospitalisation. They told the Inquiry that they had heard of her alleged kidney failure "on the grapevine". Notwithstanding those words of qualification, it was clear to the Inquiry from the choice of words and demeanour of a number of these witnesses that they believed this story to be true. These people were well connected in Australian gymnastics. This is a particularly serious allegation and it has considerable scope for causing alarm. For instance, it was evident to the Inquiry that Mr Barry Logan, the leader of a parents' group in Western Australia, was very concerned about what had allegedly happened to Ms Allen, particularly when the story appeared to be circulating vigorously in Western Australian gymnastics circles at a very high level.

5.97 One source of information concerning this incident was Mr Kazuya Honda and Mrs Rhonda Honda. Mr Honda was the AIS WAG head coach up until early 1985 when he was succeeded by Mrs Tian. He continued to work in the AIS gymnastics program until the end of 1987. Mrs Honda is a gymnastics coach in New South Wales. The following is extracted from the transcript:

*Mrs Honda: And then Monique Allen has been reported as being in hospital and we were told it was something else yet one of the people at my university said it was actually because she didn't have enough water in her body... It was one of the lecturers because we were just talking and he said, 'Well what do you know about Monique' and it just came up.*

*Mr Honda: He has some report from the hospital.*

*Mrs Honda: Because he told me about it. It was actually reported when she got back from the Olympics. It was either before or after and they covered up what was wrong with her, like, Peggy Browne got on and said it was something else and no one ever actually found out but that's what he said it was because he was doing some research into the area.*

*Inquirer: He is a nutritionist?*

*Mrs Honda: He's a nutritionist, that's his area, he's a nutritionist.*

**5.98** Mrs Honda identified Mr Hugh Pinnington of the Australian College of Physical Education in Sydney as the lecturer. He lectures in exercise and physiology, nutrition and aquatics.

**5.99** Mr Pinnington denied having told Mrs Honda that he had a report on Monique Allen's kidney failure. He said:

*I haven't seen any medical report, nor was I aware that Monique Allen was the person associated with the reported kidney failure. I might add that the report of kidney failure that I became aware of was I believe, if I recall, is that it was a press report in the newspapers.*

**5.100** Monique Allen denied ever having had kidney failure. She told the Inquiry that apart from this rumour, she had heard from media journalists that her hospitalisation was due to her having a baby and taking weight loss drugs. She claimed all of this was untrue. Ms Allen very kindly gave the Inquiry permission to examine her AIS medical records and to report its findings.

**5.101** The medical records were examined with Dr Fricker. Ms Allen was admitted to Calvary Hospital in Canberra in October 1991. The discharge report dated 25 October 1991 states that she was under the care of Dr Peter French and that the diagnosis on discharge was that Ms Allen suffered from a retrocaecal appendix. Dr Fricker said:

*...in other words the clinical suspicion was that she was suffering a form of appendicitis that did not require surgery... I think its a fairly clear case of, you know, what they call a retrocaecal appendix which means it's an appendix that tucks up behind one part of the bowel and produces an abdominal pain, a fever, you're quite unwell and there's a question about whether you need to operate on those or not. But as she settled down, they said, 'That's fine, you don't need an appendectomy, you can go home,' and never looked back.*

**5.102** According to Dr Fricker the notes of the treating medical staff show that there was "...absolutely no evidence of renal failure or anything anywhere near

it." Part of Ms Allen's treatment included intravenous administration of antibiotics. The Inquiry suspects that someone saw Ms Allen in hospital while being administered these antibiotics and matters got greatly out of hand.

**5.103** Dr Fricker described the rumours as "a total fabrication".

**5.104** Any allegation that Ms Allen's hospitalisation was due to kidney failure brought on by deprivation of fluids at the AIS is untrue.

**b. Constipation**

**5.105** Ms Fiona Bird, head coach of the VIS WAG program, alleged that during the Olympic training camp at the AIS in mid 1992 a couple of the AIS gymnasts were constipated. She said, "I remember just in my mind thinking: oh, they're not getting enough fluid". However, she said she was unaware to what extent there is a relationship between fluid intake and constipation.

**5.106** Dr Fricker did not consider that constipation in an athlete would necessarily indicate dehydration. He said, "...there's so many reasons for being constipated and dehydration would be the bottom of your list." He acknowledged that constipation and dehydration could be consistent but said:

*by the time you got constipated with dehydration, you'd be...fatigued, you'd look dry, you'd look sallow, you'd be very thirsty, you wouldn't be performing particularly well. And there are lots of other reasons.*

**5.107** He described the prospect of any of the AIS gymnasts as suffering from constipation as a result of dehydration as bizarre. He had absolutely no knowledge of any dehydration induced constipation in the one gymnast which Ms Bird had identified by name as being constipated.

**5.108** Dr Peter Barnes, who is the sports medicine practitioner servicing the gymnastics program at the South Australian Institute of Sport, said that he agreed generally with the comments of Dr Fricker quoted above, although he would not place dehydration at the bottom of the list of causes of constipation.

**5.109** This allegation is rejected.

## **6: PERFORMANCE ISSUES: WEIGHT AND TRAINING METHODS**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

**6.1** This Chapter covers a variety of important issues associated with gymnastic performance. The first is the importance of weight in gymnastics and the consequences which flow from that importance. The second concerns what may be called the AIS approach or philosophy towards training in gymnastics. The third is training or competing with injury or illness.

### **2. WEIGHT**

#### **a. Overview of Allegations**

Many, if not most, of the allegations of abuse which appeared in the media in April and May 1995 were connected with body weight. These allegations were wide ranging and concerned nutrition and the alleged consequences of not achieving or maintaining the desired weight. Those consequences included psychological abuse, punishments by way of extra training and the use of the sauna for instant weight-loss.

#### **b. Content**

**6.2** The content of this section is limited in three ways.

**6.3** First, to a significant extent these allegations are dealt with elsewhere in this report: nutrition and access to nutritional advice (Access to Sports Medicine and Sports Science - Chapter 4; The Residence - Chapter 7), reprimands for weight increases (Gymnasium - Allegations of Psychological Abuse - Chapter 3) and punishments and the sauna (see below in this chapter)

**6.4** Second, many of the issues associated with weight are inherent to the sport as it is now structured. Some of these are very controversial: the relationship between heavy training and puberty, minimum age restrictions for major international competitions, and the advantage that the scoring system in the sport gives to short, light women (girls) over taller, heavier women (adults)



because it is only the former who can perform the complex acrobatic feats necessary for international success. All of these issues are effectively outside the Inquiry's terms of reference. The reason is that one of the circumstances against which the conduct and practices of the AIS must be judged is that the sport exists and is structured in a particular way. Thus, if weight is inherently an important consideration in the sport, the conduct and practices of the AIS must be judged in that light. For instance, given that the sport does favour short, light women (girls), the issue for the Inquiry is whether the AIS manages issues of weight relating to the gymnasts in an appropriate manner - not whether girls should be favoured by scoring systems, or even excluded from the sport's highest levels.

6.5 Third, investigation of the issue of weight is complicated by the proceedings taken by Ms Jennifer Richardson. This report deals only with allegations relating to weight to the extent that they apply prior to March 1985 and after mid 1990. However, in relation to incidents alleged to involve the sauna, no reference is made to late 1986 and all of 1987.

**c. Richardson Proceedings**

6.6 Diet and weight are issues in the legal proceedings commenced by Ms Jennifer Richardson. This report cannot deal with matters which touch upon those proceedings. Ms Richardson appears to have been at the AIS in late 1986 and all of 1987.

6.7 As was the case with the issue of access to nutritionists dealt with in Chapter 4, the task facing the Inquiry is to report on media and other allegations many of which are unspecified as to time and identity of gymnasts, while avoiding touching upon Ms Richardson's legal proceedings. These are conflicting requirements. The position is complicated by the circumstance that some allegations suggest a general and continuing state of affairs rather than a particular incident or incidents. The Inquiry has decided that the solution is for this report not to make any reference to what may have been the state of affairs in either 1986 or 1987 as well as in a "buffer" period either side of those years. That period is from March 1985 until mid 1990. The reasons for fixing those dates are the same as stated in Chapter 4.

6.8 Slightly different circumstances apply to the alleged inappropriate use of the sauna. The Inquiry received allegations of specific incidents that can be

fixed in time. In relation to allegations concerning the sauna, this enables the period excluded from the scope of the Inquiry to be limited to the period during which the Inquiry believes Ms Richardson was present at the AIS, namely, late 1986 and all of 1987.

**d. Importance of Weight**

*i Three Reasons for the Importance of Weight*

**6.9** There was widespread agreement among those who made submissions that weight is a very important issue in gymnastics. There were three reasons given to the Inquiry.

**6.10** The first concerns a gymnast's ability to perform the acrobatic feats which have become such an integral part of the sport over the past two decades. Power to weight ratio is crucial. Lighter, shorter gymnasts have a better chance of performing those feats than do taller, heavier gymnasts. There are exceptional individuals, but the averages point in the direction of shorter and lighter gymnasts. This is reflected in talent identification programs in this country and overseas. A related consideration is that a number of past and present gymnasts told the Inquiry that they found training easier if they were lighter. They said that as they performed their skills they could feel an extra 0.5 to 1.0 kg on their bodies.

**6.11** The second reason is safety. The Inquiry detected two aspects to this reason. The first derives from the great stresses placed on the human body. The forces exerted upon landing from an apparatus can be body weight multiplied a few times. The factor of multiplication will depend on the circumstances. Joints in particular take a pounding. The greater a gymnast's weight, the greater the pounding leading to injuries described generically as overuse injuries. As the gymnasts grow older and progress with their skills, the forces which are exerted become greater because of the dual effect of larger body size and the greater speed and power in the more complex routines which they are able to perform. Also, there appears to be a greater risk of immediate trauma such as sprains and fractures for a gymnast who is "overweight".

**6.12** The second aspect is that sudden variations in body weight can affect motor skills. The more complex skills practised by the top gymnasts involve an

almost incredible mechanical or scientific precision, especially for an activity described as "artistic". There is little, if any, room for error. A variation in body weight or weight distribution can disrupt the normal pattern of painstakingly learned motor skills. This may lead to miscalculation producing a fall from an apparatus. There is risk of death, major paralysis or other serious injury. Some examples from the United States are to be found in *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes*.<sup>37</sup> No examples of death or major paralysis in elite WAG in Australia were drawn to the Inquiry's attention. The Inquiry was told by AIS coaches that some gymnasts withstand sudden weight changes better than others before motor skills become affected in a significant way. This will depend on such factors as the individual gymnast's muscularity and body shape. An increase of 0.6 kg may be significant for one gymnast while another will have been tolerant to a 1.0 kg increase.

**6.13** The third reason is aesthetic. It is claimed that leaner gymnasts look better and give a "cleaner line". While this reason is receiving less attention in Australia and internationally because of growing concerns over issues of body image and links to disordered eating and eating disorders, it appears that some people regard this reason as no longer openly acknowledged but as still important.

**6.14** It should, however, be recognised that gymnasts are not fat or obese people. Typically, they are lean and muscular. To describe an AIS gymnast as fat in a literal sense is ludicrous. However, in gymnastics the word is used in well recognised specialist sense to describe someone who for the reasons above could afford to lose some "surplus" weight.

*ii Ethical and Legal Implications*

**6.15** There are some important ethical and legal implications arising from the reason to do with safety set out above. The AIS and the coaches have ethical and legal obligations which relate to protecting gymnasts from suffering injuries which might be attributable to weight. The two aspects to safety which were described suggest that larger and more advanced gymnasts are at greater risk of injury. Risk in this sense is a function of likelihood and gravity of harm. Relevant in that regard is that as gymnasts approach a major competition, the intensity and complexity of training increases thereby expanding the scope for

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37 Joan Ryan, *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes* (1995).

injury. Furthermore, the possible adverse consequences of an injury increase at that time because it could deprive a gymnast of the chance to compete at what may be the pinnacle of her career.

**6.16** A number of conclusions may be drawn from this.

1. There is an obligation to monitor the weight of a gymnast with a view to taking action to protect her from injury.
2. The extent of monitoring will increase as the risk increases.
3. Gymnasts who are especially at risk will be those who are
  - a. overweight by reference to safety considerations;
  - b. display a history of sudden fluctuations in weight, allowing for the gymnast's ability to tolerate those fluctuations without creating danger,
  - c. the presence of factors which might magnify the chance or adverse effects of injury, such as the approach of major competitions.
4. In the event of a risk being discovered, proportionate safety measures will be required. These might include stopping or varying a training program and, in the longer term, education in relation to diet.

**6.17** In seeking to achieve an appropriate body weight for a gymnast taking into account the three reasons of performance, safety and aesthetics, it is important that adverse side-effects are not created. There is a growing recognition that disordered eating<sup>38</sup> and eating disorders<sup>39</sup> can occur amongst the ranks of elite WAG gymnasts in this country and overseas. A number of people who made submissions including coaches and health professionals

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38 This includes improper balance of food groups and bingeing on chocolates and lollies.

39 The principal relevant eating disorders are anorexia nervosa and bulimia.

considered that focus on weight and body image can, depending on many different circumstances, contribute toward disordered eating and eating disorders.

**6.18** For the Australian gymnastics community, not just the AIS, this presents a dilemma. There is a balance to be struck between seeking superb performance with physical safety on the one hand and avoiding triggering an adverse side-effect on the other. There is a further issue associated with identifying and responding to side-effects if and when they occur.

**6.19** The Inquiry received an immense amount of evidence concerning weight and related sub-issues. It is impractical to consider it in detail, even by confining it to the past five years. Much of that evidence was trivial, including most of the complaints. To report on this issue, the Inquiry has decided to assess in a general way the evidence received in the light of the considerations set out above. The commentary reflects the evidence received by the Inquiry from many sources. Sometimes individuals claimed experience or observations different from the bulk of the evidence. Generally, those claims were not accepted unless special circumstances were proven. The evidence applies to the past five years at the AIS.

**e. Monitoring**

**6.20** Monitoring is undertaken at the AIS by three principal measures: vision, weighing and skinfold tests.

*i Vision*

**6.21** A number of gymnasts claimed the coaches, especially Mrs Tian, could tell that their weight had changed - even slightly - just by looking at them. The impression gathered by the Inquiry was that other coaches in Australia had similar capabilities. Notwithstanding, the AIS coaches seem to rely on the scales for an accurate measurement. Some coaches at the AIS and elsewhere claimed to know the weight of a gymnast by her "feel" when they spotted her or helped her onto the uneven bars.

*ii Weight*



**6.22** The gymnasts are weighed once a day on electronic scales in a room adjacent to the main gymnasium space. Sometimes the gymnasts measure their own weight and record it in a book or on a notepad which is kept nearby. Sometimes the coach will supervise, and record the weight. The Inquiry found that gymnasts who have weight problems in the sense of being overweight for safety reasons were weighed twice a day: morning and afternoon. Principally, these were gymnasts whose weight was trending upwards. Senior gymnasts who were preparing for major competitions were also weighed twice a day. Some very young gymnasts are weighed a few times a week. These findings reflect the evidence provided by the general body of past and present gymnasts over the past five years.

**6.23** This approach accords with the principles above in that weight is monitored and the monitoring is increased in accordance with risk. A further issue is whether the monitoring is too frequent. The Inquiry heard from a number of prominent coaches on this topic. They all seem to have their own approaches ranging from preferring to "feel" the gymnast weight's through to weighing more frequently than the AIS. Some gymnasts do become anxious about their weight, but that might apply irrespective of how much they are weighed. Those gymnasts may weigh themselves many times a day.

**6.24** The AIS follows a method which is referable to appropriate criteria. It adopts a very detailed approach to many aspects of its program and regular weighing is part of that. There is no persuasive evidence before the Inquiry that the current practice is producing negative side-effects in any general way.

*iii Skinfold Test*

**6.25** A skinfold test is a scientific measurement of body fat. It involves a "pinch test" at a number of sites on the body - about eight. There is some scope for human error in the test. Body fat content changes only slowly. Therefore, this measurement is related to longer term issues such as the power to weight ratio which influences the capacity of the gymnast to tolerate sudden changes in weight without affecting safety.

**6.26** The AIS tests gymnasts once a month. Younger gymnasts are tested every few months.

6.27 This approach is more or less consistent with other elite training centres in Australia.

**f. Response to Monitoring**

6.28 The Inquiry found that there were a number of levels of response to the monitoring of weight in the event of a weight increase. These were reprimands and counselling, exercise and diet. A discussion of these issues will lead into consideration of allegations of the sauna as a means of weight-loss.

*i Reprimands*

6.29 The coaches monitor the daily measurements of weight. They look for trends and sudden fluctuations.

6.30 There were certain times that the Inquiry identified as commonly giving rise to problems. These were on Monday mornings after a weekend's rest from training and on return from holidays. As might be expected, substantial numbers of gymnasts would have increased in weight significantly.

6.31 This would attract a reprimand at the morning assembly line, and occasionally a "dressing down". If an individual had a problem, then she would be questioned and counselled on the need to keep her weight under control. Usually this was done privately.

6.32 Generally, gymnasts were not made to step out in front of the line and newspaper reports suggesting humiliation in that respect are rejected. What has occurred is that after events such as Christmas breaks, those gymnasts who have increased in weight such that it is considered unwise for them to continue with normal training, are told to step forward, leave the gymnasium and go for a run. Although that may embarrass some gymnasts, it is not inappropriate conduct.

6.33 Issues associated with alleged psychological abuse are dealt with in Chapter 3. There is no doubt that there have been times when some gymnasts have been spoken to firmly. It is only to be expected that there will be cases where the tone of voice or circumstances might cause some resentment. However, these have to be dealt with as part of the give and take of human

relationships. The Inquiry did not discover patterns of inappropriate behaviour or individual instances which went beyond the limits of appropriate conduct.

*ii. Exercise*

**6.34** If a gymnast's weight was up substantially the practice was to modify training by incorporating extra running and strength circuits, and by removing work on the apparatus where there might be danger. Again, this depended on the individual gymnast's ability to train safely while heavier than usual.

**6.35** What has given the Inquiry concern is that some claims were made that quite small amounts of weight increase, such as 0.3 kg, would trigger a change in training program. Of course, such small amounts can be the product of normal food and water consumption. There were, however, only a handful of claims to this effect. The experience of the large majority, was that there had to be an increase of at least 0.5 to 1.0 kg before anything was said. An exception applied to those gymnasts whose weight was regarded as high and should have been coming down. Those few claims which were not resolved on that basis were denied by the coaches and there was insufficient evidence to substantiate them. Accordingly, they are rejected.

**6.36** When a program was changed to incorporate more running or circuits, the work required did not impress the Inquiry as exceeding appropriate limits. Some of the circuits were extremely demanding, but the balance of medical and coaching opinion (as well as the views of former gymnasts) was that they were within acceptable limits.

*iii. Diet*

Diet is discussed elsewhere in this report: for gymnasts living in the Residence, meal arrangements are considered in Chapter 7; for gymnasts living at home in Canberra with their families, access to advice on nutrition is discussed in Chapter 4.

**6.37** Advice given to the Inquiry by nutritionists, doctors and coaches was that weight is lost by a combination of exercise and healthy diet. The Inquiry was also told that the dietary needs of gymnasts are to some degree specialised and must take account of their exercise patterns as well as their small size. A

growing and impressive array of information is available to elite gymnasts and their families about good nutrition at the AIS, and at VIS and WAIS in particular.

**6.38** The nutritional guidance which the AIS gymnasts receive from Dr Burke and the houseparents provides for treats such as lollies and ice-cream within reason. However, in an era of junk food, it takes extraordinary self-discipline to resist the temptations which are on offer. If a gymnast has a problem with controlling weight, or dealing with junk food, Dr Burke and, an AIS psychologist, Ms Vicki de Prazer, are available to help. The Inquiry was told of situations where they had been asked for guidance.

**6.39** In the event that weight monitoring detects increases in weight or an inability to lose unnecessary weight, the Inquiry is satisfied that appropriate practices are in place to assist the gymnasts.

**6.40** The Inquiry received information and complaints about events which in themselves were quite minor, but they reflect the views of a number of people that inappropriate dietary practices are pursued at the AIS by Mrs Tian and Mrs Robyn Allen, the senior houseparent. The origin of most of these complaints are gymnasts on national teams who travel under the charge of Mrs Tian, and Mrs Allen who may act as chaperone. They are not AIS gymnasts. The repeated complaint is that "food is taken off their plates". This information comes to the Inquiry via various officials in the sport. It is sufficient to deal with two aspects to this. First, in relation to airline travel, the Inquiry was told by Mr Forbes that sometimes food intake is restricted because of the long period of travel without exercise means that food needs are less. Second, in her written submission, Ms Michelle Telfer said that at the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992, "food was taken off our plates at meal times". Ms Telfer was asked to provide details of this occasion and the following questions and answers occurred between her and the Inquirer:

A. *There was one occasion in Barcelona where I was told to take food off my plate because*

Q. *You had too much bread. How much bread did you have?*

A. *Two small rolls.*

...

Q. *And what were you asked to take off the plate?*

A. *One of them.*

...

A. *...She wanted me to take the bread off my plate and to get meat...It wasn't the volume of food was too much. It was just the types of food that she didn't want me to eat.*

**6.41** Ms Teifer went on to explain her nutritional reasons for why she wanted to eat bread and what she thought would have been Mrs Tian's reasons for wanting her to eat meat as a source of protein. The Inquiry is not in a position to adjudicate on who was right, nor is it appropriate that it do so. Given her position as national coach which entitled her to make such requests, there is nothing in Mrs Tian's request itself to suggest that eating some meat instead of bread is in all the circumstances inappropriate conduct.

**g. Sauna**

*i. Media Allegations*

**6.42**

One of the most startlingly allegations which appeared in the media concerned the alleged inappropriate use of the sauna at the AIS. The West Australian of 17 April 1995 claimed:

*...gymnasts were...forced to run, fully clothed, in a sauna.*<sup>40</sup>

**6.43** This allegation was repeated widely in the media.

**6.44** In The Sydney Morning Herald of 21 April 1995, Mr Gui Planes claimed that the AIS was "forcing them in the sauna".<sup>41</sup>

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40 Gene Stephan, "Young Gymnasts Abused: Parents", *The West Australian*, 17 April 1995, p.1.

41 Jacquelin Magnay, 'Racist' Claims Anger Parents, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 April 1995, p.10.



ii. *Current Practice*

**6.45** The Inquiry was told that use of the sauna has benefits in aiding recovery from exercise, especially if used in conjunction with a spa or plunge pool. Moving from one to the other changes the "heat load" and Dr Barnes said that serves to create a shift of fluids across circulation cell membranes theoretically removing waste products such as lactic acid. The sauna may be used also for relaxation and warming up.

**6.46** The three sports medicine doctors who provided advice to the Inquiry, Dr Barnes, Dr Fricker and Dr Sando, advised against the use of the sauna for instant weight loss. Saunas are used for this purpose in sports such as boxing and horse racing where weight limits have to be met. Apart from being ineffective (weight is restored with consumption of fluid), sustained use of the sauna risks dehydration and heat injury.

**6.47** The Inquiry found no evidence to suggest that the sauna is used by the coaches in the gymnastics program other than in a way which is appropriate according to the above medical advice.

**6.48** Numerous current gymnasts mentioned how they use the sauna and spa on a regular basis. There was general denial of the use of the sauna for weight loss.

iii. *1986 Incidents*

**6.49** Mr Mark Calton alleged that during 1986 and 1987, Mrs Tian required gymnasts to go to the sauna wearing padded ski clothing and to jog lightly for periods of eight to 10 minutes. This was alleged to have occurred on at least five or six occasions with groups of various gymnasts. Mr Calton alleged that Debbie Graham, Leanne Rycroft and Caroline Stewart were among those involved at various times. Mr Calton claimed to have reported the incidents to Mr Forbes. The Inquiry makes no comment or finding on this allegation insofar as it may apply to late 1986 or any of 1987.

**6.50** Mrs Leanne Noack (nee Rycroft) claimed that in 1986 she was directed by Mrs Tian to exercise in the sauna following going for a run. She was fully clothed and wore a semi-waterproof "spray jacket" which the gymnasts referred to as "sweat suits". She claimed this occurred "maybe three, four times". While

in the sauna the gymnasts exercised by jogging on the spot. She described these occasions as lasting for "maybe 10, 15 minutes" and involved "just the older girls". She knew of no-one suffering any negative effects. She did not feel ill, "maybe just exhausted".

**6.51** Ms Kellie Larter claimed that she was required to run on the spot in the sauna after completing 400 metre sprints and stair climbs at Bruce Stadium. She claimed in her written submission that the gymnasts were still fully clothed and that they ran on the spot "for five minute intervals, three times. Many were near exhaustion and one girl almost fainted." She identified that girl as Debbie Graham. In her oral submission she said that some gymnasts stood outside while others went in for two or three minutes. They rotated like this three times, but it could have been two times. Ms Larter claimed that Debbie Graham looked as if she was going to faint. She thought that this incident occurred in January 1986 just after the gymnasts returned from a break.

**6.52** Mrs Debbie Clarkson (nee Graham) claimed that she and other gymnasts were told by Mrs Tian to jog in the sauna for three minutes with the door shut and that Mrs Tian timed them with a stop watch. This occurred on two consecutive days after they had returned from a break and were found to have increased in weight. She thought the break followed the 1986 Commonwealth Games which would have placed the incident about mid August 1986. However, she described her memory on this as "clouded". She could not recall such an incident occurring to her again or witnessing one. She said that Kellie Larter, Leanne Rycroft, Caroline Stewart, Monique Allen and Leanne Murray were present. She described Leanne Murray as ready to vomit. She described herself as ready to pass out. Upon leaving the sauna she left training and returned to her room in the Residence.

**6.53** Ms Monique Allen recalled an occasion when the gymnasts had come back from a break from training and they had all put on some weight. They went to the sauna for what she thought was a two or three minute period following some running. Mrs Tian supervised them. She said this incident occurred in either 1985 or 1986.

**6.54** On 24 June 1986, Mr David Rycroft, the father of Leanne Rycroft, wrote to the Executive Director of the AIS drawing attention to the incidents allegedly involving his daughter. The letter was marked to the attention of Mr Peter Bowman who was the Assistant General Manager - Sports at the time.

**6.55** Mr Bowman told the Inquiry that news of the use of the sauna in this way had spread quickly in the AIS and he did not recall precisely how he had come to hear of it. He regarded it as inappropriate and had spoken to Mr Forbes about it who told him it had ceased. He does not recall whether he spoke to Mrs Tian directly, but considered that he did not need to do so after having spoken to Mr Forbes. He places these events at mid 1986.

**6.56** The administrator of the gymnastics program, Mrs Crampton, told the Inquiry of her disapproval of the use of the sauna in this way and regarded it as representing outdated ideas on weight loss.

**6.57** Mrs Tian could not remember whether there were one or two incidents. They occurred in 1985 or 1986 after a holiday and involved the gymnasts in a group. She said it was cold at the time and there had been difficulties with the heating in the gymnasium in that sometimes it did not operate effectively. The gymnasts had been for a run and had come inside. She said:

*I told the gymnast because you running and finish your heart is still like this 'din, din, din'. Right, you don't sit down straight away. You continue to move. Couple of minutes we go to gym, start still the training, everything, continue to do the warm up.*

**6.58** She denied that this action was for the purpose of reducing weight and said that it was a part of a training program. She could not recall precisely but thought the time spent in the sauna was two or three minutes. She wanted the gymnasts to be warmed up before they went to train in the cold gymnasium and that the run did not warm up the upper halves of their bodies sufficiently - the sauna provided the extra warming up which she wanted. If the gymnasium had been warm, this would not have been required. However, she also indicated that she had been stopped from using the sauna in this way, most probably by Mrs Crampton although she was vague on this aspect.

**6.59** A word of caution is necessary here. After considerable questioning and with assistance from Mr Forbes, the Inquiry believes that the immediately preceding paragraph more or less accurately represents Mrs Tian's stated intentions. However, she proved especially difficult to understand.

**6.60** There is substantial divergence in the evidence as to the duration spent in the sauna, the number of occasions the sauna was used this way and when

they occurred. However, it would seem that most probably there were two incidents which had occurred before 24 June 1986 (the date of Mr Rycroft's letter). The same girls may not have been involved in both incidents which would account for the evidence of Ms Allen and Ms Larter who said they went to the sauna only once. The incidents lasted around three minutes each, although the evidence of Mr Calton, Ms Larter and Mrs Noack is that they went for longer. The incidents created controversy in the AIS which prompted Mr Bowman to make inquiries.

**6.61** Mr Forbes confirmed that on occasion there was a problem with the temperature in the gymnasium. However, the gymnasts' core body temperature ought to have been raised by the running. As far as warming up the upper halves of the bodies, if Mrs Tian was referring to the muscular-skeletal system then exercise rather than being in the sauna would seem more appropriate for that purpose.

**6.62** On the other hand, the activity might also be consistent with endeavouring to achieve instant weight loss. However, little weight loss might be achieved by spending three minutes in the sauna lightly jogging on the spot which might suggest that weight loss was not a predominant motive.

**6.63** The Inquiry was told by Dr Brian Sando, Chief Medical Officer to the Australian Olympic team, that behaviour of this kind

*had the potential for heat injury and dehydration if that's sustained for any length of time.*

**6.64** Dr Barnes and Dr Fricker expressed similar views. The implication of Dr Sando's opinion is that a short period such as three minutes would not necessarily cause any harm. Exercising in the sauna was something that Dr Barnes "normally wouldn't recommend". He added that gymnasts should wear as little clothing as possible when in the sauna and stay no more than 10 minutes. All of the doctors did not regard the use of the sauna as an appropriate means of weight loss.

**6.65** Even so, there were seven or eight gymnasts<sup>42</sup> running or jogging on the spot in the confines of the sauna for three minutes while fully clothed. Mr

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42 This number was provided by Mrs Tian.

Calton thought it to be inappropriate. So did Mrs Crampton and Mr Bowman. The Inquiry accepts the evidence of Mrs Clarkson that she and one other gymnast were visibly distressed. The gymnasts with the exception of Ms Allen who was non-committal, considered the incidents inappropriate. Even allowing for some discrepancies between the accounts of the gymnasts, some possible exaggeration about how they felt, and for the relatively short period in the sauna, the Inquiry finds that the use of the sauna in this fashion on these two occasions was inappropriate in the circumstances.

**6.66** As indicated above, the Inquiry is satisfied that incidents of this kind are not current AIS practice, and it would be most unlikely that they would ever be repeated in the future. Looked at in isolation, it would be sufficient for the Inquiry to acknowledge that the incidents occurred 10 years ago, were considered inappropriate at the time and contemporaneous managerial action was taken. Thus, there would be no occasion to recommend that any further action now.

**6.67** However, the Inquiry believes that these incidents cannot be readily isolated and have had an impact on subsequent events.

**6.68** First, they created suspicion in some sectors of the gymnastics community about the use of the sauna at the AIS. That suspicion continues to today.

**6.69** Second, the incidents influenced the folklore of AIS gymnasts. Appropriate uses of the sauna became tainted by these incidents. This was clear in the way that a minority of gymnasts viewed events when another gymnast was asked to go to the sauna. The Inquiry received a number of complaints from former gymnasts that one or other of their colleagues had been sent to the sauna to lose weight whereas further investigation proved that the reason for the visit was appropriate. These situations are dealt with below.

**6.70** Third, the incidents might be linked to the gymnasts' individual actions to lose weight. A number of gymnasts subscribed to the view that using the sauna was something to do in order to lose weight. A significant number of incidents of gymnasts using the sauna to lose weight were reported. While this occurred without the knowledge of the coaches and seems to have died out in the past year or so, it appears to have originated with the gymnasts of the 1986 era. It is difficult to say what effect that the incidents of 1986 had in this regard.



However, reports have been made to the Inquiry that gymnasts have exercised and worn clothes while in the sauna for the purpose of achieving weight loss. These are dealt with further below.

**6.71** Fourth, the ASC's response to Mr Calton's allegation of inappropriate use of the sauna produced some inconsistency before the Inquiry between medical, coaching and administrative staff over what were appropriate uses of the sauna. While this was clarified and was claimed to result from a lack of communication within the AIS in relation to the preparation of the submission, it served to demonstrate that a capacity for misunderstanding exists.

**6.72** Thus, with a view to removing suspicion lingering from, and misunderstanding traceable to, the 1986 incidents, the Inquiry recommends that a protocol be established for the use of the sauna bearing in mind its therapeutic and training benefits and possible abuses and dangers. The protocol needs to be established quickly and the Australian Coaching Council and the Australian Sports Medicine Federation should be consulted for appropriate medical, scientific and coaching advice. Once established, the protocol should be expressed in a set of rules and guidelines which can be clearly understood by gymnasts, families, houseparents and coaches. Procedures for publicising and enforcing the rules should be made. An ongoing education process should be established so that new gymnasts at the AIS are aware of the position.

**6.73** The protocol will have the incidental benefit of serving as an educational tool for good practice for gymnasts and coaches in the future.

*iv. Post 1987*

**6.74** About one dozen accusations were received by the Inquiry to the effect that gymnasts had been sent to the sauna to lose weight. Most were linked to accusations that the gymnasts were either required to wear clothing or to exercise while in the sauna.

**6.75** Most of these were readily proved to be innocent events and their details do not warrant being set out here. Some concerned situations where gymnasts had been away from training for a period, such as over Christmas, and had put on weight. Related claims concerned cases where gymnasts had put on significant amounts of weight within a very short time. One gymnast who has



left the AIS told the Inquiry that she had put on about 1.2 kilograms over a weekend (Saturday afternoon to Monday morning). She just had a "big binge" on "chips, biscuits, lollies - anything I could buy." In these circumstances the gymnasts were not permitted to train on the apparatus. The Inquiry was told that such large<sup>43</sup> and sudden increases in body weight risked unbalancing the finely developed motor skills required for the apparatus. The prospect of falling off the apparatus and being injured was increased accordingly. In these circumstances, the gymnasts were sent running and were required to complete demanding strength circuits involving various exercises such as sit-ups, chin-ups, push-ups and handstands. The detail of this varied with the circumstances. The Inquiry was told this action had the benefit of maintaining fitness and condition even though normal training was not followed, as well as burning off excess calories. Afterwards, gymnasts went to the sauna for recovery and relaxation. While there, they might be asked to do stretching. Misinterpretation arose because some gymnasts who were either involved in these events personally, or observed others in that position, "assumed" that this was part of a weight loss program and made allegations to the Inquiry accordingly. Furthermore, investigations in one case revealed that gymnasts who were meant to be the object of misuse of the sauna denied having been sent there for the purpose of losing weight.

**6.76** On some other occasions, what appears to have been personal visits to the sauna for weight loss reasons and without the knowledge of the coaches (such as after training) have been attributed by others to being at the direction of the coaches. Some gymnasts who the Inquiry was told had been sent to the sauna, denied having been in the sauna at the relevant time. Hearsay and gossip had a considerable role to play in this as well.

**6.77** No-one claimed that any of the coaches had instructed them to go to the sauna for the express purpose of weight loss. A substantial number of gymnasts and various medical and specialist personnel, such as Stephanie Burridge who is the artistic director of the Canberra Dance Theatre and has been the ballet teacher at the AIS for much of the past 12 years, had no knowledge of the sauna being used in this way.

**6.78** Kristy Wilson who was at the AIS from February 1988 to December 1993 told the Inquiry that

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43 This could represent 4-5% of body weight.

*Ju Ping was really against the sauna because she said it's not good for you, you know, it dehydrates you, which is true. And she was really against it. Sometimes, after training, some of us would maybe sneak down there to see if we could lose a bit of weight.*

**6.79** She added that if they were caught, they got into trouble. Ms Wilson overheard Mrs Tian telling other gymnasts not to go in the sauna. On one occasion after training Ms Wilson had been in the sauna for 10-15 minutes and was wearing a tracksuit. As she came out of the sauna she was challenged by Ms Jiang and given a "lecture" on the topic.

**6.80** Also, at one point some years ago, the sauna's automatic humidifier was not working. Rather than the air inside being moist, it was dry. There was a suggestion made at the time that if gymnasts did use the sauna, they should wear a tracksuit to prevent burning their skin. It is not known whether anyone ever did this, but it could explain some allegations.

**6.81** A number of allegations were vague. Such as "girls were sent to the sauna" but no details of the identity of the girl, instructing coach, and surrounding circumstances were provided.

**6.82** There are some allegations which need to be dealt with specifically. These must be regarded seriously if only for the reason of the prior incidents in 1986. In these circumstances, the Inquiry considers that it needs to be well satisfied of the accuracy of any allegation before making a finding of inappropriate conduct.<sup>44</sup>

**6.83** Ms Michelle Telfer alleged that former AIS gymnast Kylie Shadbolt had told her that

*Ju Ping was standing outside the sauna looking in the little window and they were doing push-ups and running on the spot in their blue AIS jackets which have got the sheep skin.*

**6.84** This incident was alleged to have occurred sometime before 1991 and Ms Telfer asserted that Ms Shadbolt had been involved, but it was clear to the Inquiry that she really did not know. Indeed, she was cautious in her

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44 See Chapter 1.

description of the event because, as she stated, she obtained her information second hand. Ms Shadbolt declined an invitation to make a submission to the Inquiry. With some embellishment, this allegation bears a resemblance to the 1986 incidents. Ms Allen, who was at the AIS through 1986 until late 1992 denied any knowledge of a repetition of the 1986 incidents. Mrs Tian also denied it.

**6.85** In Ms Shadbolt's absence, it is not possible to investigate this allegation fully. There is reasonably strong evidence to suggest that Ms Shadbolt may have been speaking about the 1986 incidents, although she was not at the AIS at that time. It is speculative as to where the embellishments about the push-ups and sheep skin coats originated. However, a cautious approach suggests that the Inquiry should find that it is unable to investigate this allegation fully because of the absence of the key witness.

**6.86** Patricia Kirkham was at the AIS for about four to six months in the second half of 1990. She was 12 years old at the time. She alleged that on about four occasions she was sent running followed by a visit to the sauna because she had gained 0.3 kg over lunch. She had to run one lap of the track for each 0.1 kg of increased weight in fast time followed by 20 minutes of on-the-spot jogging in the sauna fully clothed. By fully clothed she meant the clothes she wore when running. In winter this would include tracksuit and parka.

**6.87** There appears to be no corroborating evidence for Ms Kirkham's claims and the allegation is denied by Mrs Tian. She said that Ms Kirkham was not an advanced gymnast. There was no reason to weigh her twice a day, as might have been the case for an older gymnast preparing for a major competition. Mrs Tian questioned how a 12 year old could jog for 20 minutes in a sauna fully clothed.

**6.88** Ms Kirkham has developed into an intelligent and articulate young woman. She did not impress as dishonest. There are two serious aspects to her claim. First, the period and circumstances in the sauna. Second, that this should occur because she has gained weight by eating her lunch. The first will be dealt with here; the second was considered generally above.<sup>45</sup>

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45 Specifically, there is insufficient evidence to substantiate the allegation.

**6.89** Unlike many of the allegations which the Inquiry has investigated, there is no ready explanation for the differences between the accounts of Ms Kirkham and Mrs Tian. The events relating to the sauna as described by Ms Kirkham seem incredible. Either it was a horrific incident for Ms Kirkham, or there is substantial inaccuracy in the allegation. The Inquiry's experience of a large number of gymnasts much the age of Ms Kirkham was that they did not like the sauna and have limited tolerance to it, preferring to skip between it and the spa. The older gymnasts who were the object of the 1986 incidents had enough after three minutes.

**6.90** There is insufficient evidence to substantiate this allegation and, accordingly, it is rejected.

**6.91** Rebecca Jackson was at the AIS from October 1988 until June 1995. She alleged that in or about early 1992 Mr Lu Ming sent her to the sauna to lose weight. She was required to remain in the sauna for 20 minutes, to be fully clothed including tracksuit and sweatsuit and to do five sets of push-ups with a few minutes rest in between each set. Mr Lu Ming declined to make a submission to the Inquiry. Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes have no knowledge of this incident. In the absence of evidence from Mr Lu Ming, this allegation cannot be further investigated.

**6.92** Rebecca Jackson alleged that twice in or about early 1992, Mrs Tian sent her to the sauna to lose weight. She was required to remain in the sauna for 20 to 30 minutes and to be fully clothed. On the first occasion she was required to jog on the spot alternating between one minute of jogging and one minute of rest. On the second occasion, no instruction as to exercise was given. Rebecca was 13 years old, approaching 14 at the time. She said that Mrs Tian had told her to "Go to the sauna and do jogging."

**6.93** Mrs Tian denied these allegations. She said that she did not have Ms Jackson in her training group until 1993. However, the Inquiry understands from evidence received generally from gymnasts that she might coach younger gymnasts from time to time. Mrs Tian added, "...you cannot put the children 20, 30 minutes in the sauna, impossible."

**6.94** It was put to Ms Jackson that Mrs Tian's instruction could mean two things: go to the sauna and jog in the sauna, or go to the sauna and then have a jog. She rejected that and said "we just know what they mean."

**6.95** On the second occasion, Ms Jackson went to the sauna on her own. On the first, she claimed that three gymnasts accompanied her. One she could not remember, another did not participate in the Inquiry and the third was Ruth Moniz. Ms Moniz denied ever having been sent to the sauna to exercise. She said she had been in the sauna with groups of gymnasts but they had just talked. The comments above about Ms Kirkham's alleged period of time in the sauna are applicable here too. Ms Jackson impressed as honest, although there was some inconsistency in her evidence. The possibility of some misunderstanding cannot be discounted.

**6.96** There is insufficient evidence to substantiate this allegation and, accordingly, it is rejected.

#### **h. Reaction of Gymnasts to Issues of Weight**

**6.97** Many gymnasts told the Inquiry that weight is a "big issue" for them. It is important from the viewpoint of their ability to perform routines. What is happening to their weight is an objective measure of how they see themselves achieving in their sport. Also, these are issues about which they are not necessarily forthcoming.

**6.98** Younger gymnasts are not particularly interested in weight. However, as gymnasts grow older, mature physically and progress toward representing their country, weight does become very important.

**6.99** Gymnasts respond to the pressure of this importance in various ways: some silly, others serious. These responses exist wherever gymnasts are to be found, but they are not necessarily characteristic or common at the AIS. The following responses were identified as having occurred at the AIS at various times over the past five years.

**6.100** Nervousness before weighing and skinfold tests is common. Most gymnasts go to the toilet beforehand, and delay having a drink in order to keep their weight down. Some remove their hairpins. Others jog on the spot hoping to burn off some energy or fat, yet knowing that it will have no effect. One gymnast some years ago vandalised the electronic weighing scales before a Monday morning training session. She had a weekend of bingeing on chocolates and biscuits. This action was an extraordinary occurrence within the



gymnastics program and proved to be linked to personal problems for which the AIS arranged counselling.

**6.101** Nervousness is greater on Monday mornings because there has been a break from training. The absence of exercise may lead to a weight increase. Some gymnasts may eat too much and be faced with shedding weight before the morning. As was indicated above, a number of gymnasts over the past five years have used the sauna to shed weight on a Sunday afternoon. The best information available to the Inquiry is that it has stopped. However, the Inquiry cannot be sure. Some gymnasts have worn heavy clothes in the sauna. This occurred without the knowledge of the coaches, houseparents or medical staff. It must be emphasised most strongly that this affected only a handful of gymnasts and tended to be the same few gymnasts over a period of time.

**6.102** A small number of older former gymnasts claimed that they denied themselves food and water from Sunday evening until after Monday morning training if they had over-indulged on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning.

**6.103** One gymnast suffered from regular bingeing on sweet foods. This was discovered and she received counselling and other support. One former gymnast told the Inquiry that she suffered from bulimia before she came to the AIS and kept it secret. She stayed for only a short period. The Inquiry received a handful of reports of isolated purging of food, quite possibly these were experiments. Two incidents of improper use of laxatives were reported to the Inquiry. One proved to be a misunderstanding within a family as to the use of laxatives. Both had come to the attention of the AIS medical staff and received appropriate treatment.

**6.104** These are undesirable reactions. However, the Inquiry is of the view that they result from the nature of the sport and individual circumstances. Where serious matters have come to the attention of the AIS, they are dealt with appropriately with formal counselling and medical care. The coaches and houseparents discourage nervous reactions prior to skinfold tests and weighing. Education and preventive measures are important, but may be of limited value. For instance, one former gymnast told the Inquiry that she attended an education session with nutritionist, Dr Burke, found it interesting, but did not pay any attention and still went for the biscuits and lollies. Given the nature of the sport, some of these problems may not be capable of easy solution.

### 3. HARSH TRAINING METHODS

#### a. The Nature of Gymnastics Training and the Inquiry's Terms of Reference

**6.105** The nature of gymnastics training is physically and mentally very demanding. The AIS chaplain, Reverend Peter Nelson, described it as punishing, but not punishment. The gymnasts become tired, if not exhausted. They must confront fear. They grumble and grizzle. They cry. They have good days, and bad days.

**6.106** In its written submission, the ASC described the sport in these terms:

*Perhaps the most gruelling and self-disciplined of sports, gymnastics places demands on its participants that few other sports do. A difficult combination of flexibility and strength is required and without total mental control some of the difficult optional routines can be dangerous to do. Discipline and fearlessness are the most important 'talents' of the successful gymnast. It requires 100% concentration and effort in training and competition because the risk of serious injury is always present.*

**6.107** The AIS is an elite sports training institute which is unashamedly striving to produce athletes who can perform with distinction in major international competitions such as Olympic Games and World Championships. It seeks and then coaches gymnasts of rare ability. One of the functions of the AIS is to challenge each gymnast to extend herself to the very limits of her ability.

**6.108** Mention was made in Chapter 2 of the importance of the Inquiry avoiding the temptation to merely substitute its judgment about what should be done in a variety of situations which are the preserve of the expert coaches. However, medical, legal and ethical limits apply.

**6.109** All of the foregoing are some of the circumstances which the Inquiry must take into account in deciding whether any proven conduct or practice is inappropriate. Some practices are widely regarded in the gymnastics community as essential if Australia wishes to be internationally competitive in the sport. These include the long hours of disciplined application to physically

demanding training by young gymnasts. Some, maybe many, in the wider community will find that inappropriate because it is extreme. However, it is not within the terms of the Inquiry's reference to make that judgment. The circumstances within which the Inquiry must make its findings is that the sport exists in its current form and that the AIS is there to produce world class gymnasts. However, that does not give the AIS or others free rein because there are medical, legal and ethical limits.

**b. Some Aspects of Training in the AIS Gymnasium**

The Inquiry was told that gymnasts will often cry in the gymnasium, some more than others. Crying may occur from frustration with their own inability to do what they want to do and from fear and other causes. Mrs Valerie Hayward whose daughter is currently at the AIS said:

*...she has really high expectations of herself and if she can't do something she gets really angry.*

**6.110** The gymnasts may scream in pain when engaged in stretching exercises which explore the limits of their flexibility. One current gymnast told the Inquiry that while stretching did hurt, "it feels nice too".

**6.111** They may become angry or resentful over what they regard as the unreasonable demands of their coaches.

**6.112** These circumstances were not challenged in any substantial way. There were some differences of opinion and perspective, but a general acceptance just the same.

**6.113** Some gymnasts find the environment at the AIS too serious, too hard, not friendly and not sufficiently encouraging or "positive". The Inquiry received some complaints in this respect. The most prominent is considered in Chapter 3. However, these complaints tended to be about personal styles and preferences, and that alone is insufficient to establish that the training practices and environment in the AIS go beyond the limits of appropriate conduct in all the circumstances. A mother of a former gymnast raised a number of complaints about the AIS which were really criticisms of the sport in its elite context and would have applied wherever it was pursued. Furthermore, those

few complaints were well outweighed by those who had good memories of the AIS even though they may have chosen not to continue.

6.114 While gymnasts were obviously greatly challenged by the coaching they received at the AIS, no complaints were received that gymnasts were forced to perform skills for which they had not been prepared adequately. This would strongly suggest that the program fulfils one aspect of the important legal obligation to provide a safe training environment.

6.115 All gymnasts spoke highly of the improvement in their gymnastic skills during their time at the AIS, even those who were inclined to criticise other aspects of the program.

**c. Training Punishments**

*i. Allegations*

6.116 A small number of allegations were made to the Inquiry concerning gymnasts having to perform additional physical exercise or gymnastic skills as "punishment" for inadequate training or competition performance.

*ii. AIS Practice*

6.117 In its written submission to the Inquiry, the ASC made these observations on training practices in the AIS gymnasium:

*To re-create the pressure of competition, where the first and only attempts counts, gymnasts are challenged to succeed. If the first routine is excellent, they need do only one more. If the first routine has a fall, three more are required, a training method which might be mis-interpreted by some as 'punishment'. This system puts the gymnast under pressure in training and helps identify weaknesses on which they need to work. Supplementary training sessions are used to work on particular skills if technique needs to be corrected. Sometimes 20 or more repetitions may be required to work on a skill. Again, this is not unlike the system used in major competing countries.*

*Perfection of skills and physical preparation are essential to reduce the risk of injury. Where a physical weakness is identified, strength exercises are developed to correct the problem, and may need to be repeated 40 or more times. A time-frame is given to complete these exercises in order to improve speed so that the gymnast is better able to perform the difficult manoeuvres safely.*

*iii. AIS Practice in Operation*

**6.118** As a general matter, criticism of AIS training practices as described above was noticeably absent from past and present gymnasts, and from leading coaches.

**6.119** Gymnasts referred to having to do additional routines for inadequate performance, alternative work for inadequate performance and to repeat incomplete routines. One gymnast described the training as just like school: do it again and get it right. The experience which past and present gymnasts outlined to the Inquiry accorded with the approach which is set out in the quotation from the ASC's submission under the immediately preceding heading.

**6.120** The Inquiry's attention was drawn by gymnasts to a number of "punishments" to do with misbehaviour. The misbehaviour might consist of not paying attention, being silly and creating risky situations. In those circumstances they spoke of being reprimanded, made to climb the ropes to the ceiling (which is regarded as easy) and being sent from the gymnasium in more serious cases. There did not appear to be anything patently improper in any of this, nor was it regarded as being so by the gymnasts.

**6.121** Thus, the allegations of punishment practices did not reflect a general position. Those allegations which had been made had to be treated as unrepresentative.

*iv. Individual Incidents*

**6.122** Patricia Kirkham alleged that if she did not train hard or well enough, extra strength exercises would be set. She alleged that on one occasion in 1990, she was required to do 50 standing back somersaults in 4.5 minutes.



She did not complete them in the prescribed time and was required to repeat them, this time in 5 minutes after a short break. At the time, she was 12 years of age, weighed 37 kgs and had 4 kgs of weights attached to her for the purpose of the exercise. This exercise was alleged to have been set by Mr Qu Derui in conjunction with Mrs Tian.

6.123 Mrs Tian had no particular recollection of the incident. She claimed that the exercise was not difficult and that Ms Kirkham ought to have been able to complete it in the prescribed time. Ms Kirkham had mastered the skill and ought to have been able to complete 20 to 25 standing back somersaults in one minute. The skill was basic and the exercise would have been performed for endurance and conditioning.

6.124 Mr Forbes agreed. He added that small, young gymnasts can have very favourable power to weight ratios. Their ability to perform large numbers of relatively simple skills exceeds that of older, more experienced gymnasts who have less favourable power to weight ratios because of body growth.

6.125 The Inquiry sought the views of some gymnasts. Those who were older described it as possible, but hard. Others said it was easy. The standard for back somersaults in one minute seemed to be around 20-25 as Mrs Tian suggested.

6.126 The Inquiry also sought the views of doctors, a physiotherapist and some coaches. A range of views was expressed. To the extent that there was a consensus, it was that if the exercise was to punish, it was wrong from a psychological viewpoint. If it was to teach a skill, it was wrong because there were too many back somersaults and any bad habits would be reinforced. As a strengthening or toughening exercise, it would be appropriate depending on the gymnast's level of preparation, although fatigue would have to be monitored to ensure that there was not exposure to injury.

6.127 No injury was incurred. There is a reason for the exercise. It is achievable, at least on the evidence of other gymnasts. This is a matter of coaching judgment and some coaches may act differently, others would agree. This conduct gives no indication of stepping outside acceptable medical, legal or ethical limits. On that basis, the allegation is rejected.

**6.128** Melinda Cleland alleged that in July/August 1994 when she was nine years of age, she was unable to finish her strength exercises in 12 minutes as required. As a consequence, she was required to do 100 back somersaults. These were divided into five sets of 20 each, each set to be completed in one minute, with 30 seconds of rest between sets. Mrs Tian said that she did not coach Melinda and repeated her comments made in relation to Ms Kirkham's allegation. For the same reasons as set out in the immediately preceding paragraph, this allegation is rejected.

**6.129** Ms Fiona Bird, the head coach of the VIS gymnastics program, alleged that immediately following the Diet Duos competition in Melbourne in 1993, Mrs Tian sent AIS gymnast Ruth Moniz for a one hour run around the outside of the Olympic Park stadium. Ms Bird spoke to Ms Moniz after she had been running and found out that Mrs Tian had instructed Ms Moniz to go running and Ms Bird assumed that this was a punishment for Ms Moniz falling off the uneven bars in the competition. However, she does not know whether or not that is the case. According to Ms Bird, Ms Moniz made no comment to that effect.

**6.130** Mrs Tian said that she sent Ms Moniz for a run after she had failed to qualify for the final, but denied that the failure was the reason for sending her on the run. Mrs Tian explained that a few days previously at the 1993 Nikon International in Sydney, Ms Moniz had performed poorly. She had been greatly disappointed and had contemplated retiring from the sport. She binged on food and put on 1.5 kgs. in a few days. Mrs Tian was busy inside the stadium. She sent Ms Moniz for a 30 minute run around the outside of the stadium.

**6.131** Ms Moniz denied having been sent for a run. The Inquiry does not believe her. However, that is not necessarily consistent with a desire to protect Mrs Tian. Ms Moniz is now a senior gymnast. She is an adult. That denial may represent a simple desire not to speak about what was a difficult time in her career. It is indeed very likely that Mrs Tian was both angry and disappointed with Ms Moniz. Sending her for a run may have reflected a loss of patience to some degree. However, two years later they have a strong relationship that has matured. Mrs Tian has helped see Ms Moniz through difficult times as a teenager. The act of sending Ms Moniz for a run would hardly harm her, although if Ms Bird's allegation as to the period of time is correct, the run was longer than might be normal for a gymnast. The only question here is the propriety of Mrs Tian's intentions. On Mrs Tian's version, the act was innocent. On Ms Bird's assumption, the act was intended to

punish. There is insufficient evidence to accept Ms Bird's version of events. However, even if there was such evidence, such evidence at worst the incident is very minor.

**6.132** Ms Bird made a second allegation in relation to alleged behaviour by Mrs Tian towards Ms Moniz. She claimed that at the 1993 Nikon International in Sydney which preceded the Diet Duos in Melbourne by a few days, Mrs Tian made Ms Moniz jog around a concrete walkway at the top of the Sydney Entertainment Centre for one hour as a punishment for a bad morning training session. It is further alleged that this caused a lot of muscle soreness in Ms Moniz's legs and was dangerous in view of her participation in the beam final that evening (an apparatus from which she happened to fall). Ms Bird claimed that to jog on a concrete surface for an extended period was inappropriate and would cause muscle soreness.

**6.133** Ms Bird told the Inquiry that she did not witness this incident, but heard from Ms Trish Manson who was a masseur at the event that Ms Moniz was very tender in her legs. Ms Bird said that Mr George Tatai, an AGF Board member from Victoria witnessed the event. Ms Bird said she asked Ms Moniz what had happened and she said that she had a bad training session. It is not clear from whom Ms Bird heard that Ms Moniz had to run for the period of one hour. Ms Bird referred to some male gymnasts having known about the incident.

**6.134** Mr Tatai told the Inquiry that he had not witnessed the incident. He just heard that Ms Moniz had been running around the floor of the stadium.

**6.135** Mr Calton told the Inquiry that he had left the Centre just as Ms Moniz was commencing to run and that she was running on the floor of the Centre. He described the floor surface as a mixture of lino, boards and concrete.

**6.136** Mr Steve Chetkovich who is another AGF Board member but from Western Australia told the Inquiry that he had heard that Ms Moniz had been told to run for two hours around the stadium because Mrs Tian

*considered she [Ms Moniz] was too fat and it was a punishment...*

**6.137** Ms Moniz was the first qualifier for the final on the beam that evening. This was a very good performance for her because there was strong international competition present. She had trouble in her morning training

session because she was nervous. She explained to the Inquiry that she became nervous before events and would not train well, and that she would try to save energy for the evening. Then she would try too hard in the competition and not perform well. She has been receiving sports psychology assistance for this problem. Ms Moniz said that she did not do very much training, Mrs Tian was annoyed with her and told her to go for a run. She said that she jogged 10 circuits of the floor which she thought was wooden and covered with carpet. It took her about 15 minutes, her legs were no more sore than after a normal run, and she did not go to the masseur. She did not speak with Ms Bird, but spoke with her gymnasts who asked her what she had been doing. She told the Inquiry, "I just told them I had to run 10 laps around the gym." Ms Moniz said that she fell off the beam that evening during a part of her routine that she performs well in training but has difficulty within competition.

6.138 Mrs Tian confirmed that Ms Moniz had a bad session and that she had told her to go for a run around the outside of the podium in the centre of the floor. She does not recall the time but thinks it was 10 or 15 minutes. Also, she does not remember the floor surface. Ms Moniz had not even warmed up properly and the Inquiry understands from Mrs Tian (although it was not clear) that she wanted Ms Moniz to do some exercise. She confirmed Ms Moniz's evidence regarding falling from the beam in the competition and her problem with nerves.

6.139 Mr Forbes told the Inquiry that the floor was covered with carpet.

6.140 Although the Inquiry did not interview Ms Manson, it is quite clear that this allegation is the product of hearsay and construction. Ms Bird's claims are contradicted by various witnesses. Also, establishing a causal link between the running and the fall from the beam is speculative, especially given Ms Moniz's evidence. This allegation is rejected.

6.141 Just as was mentioned in Chapter 2, circumstances should not have been allowed to develop where the two allegations made by Ms Bird had to go as far as this Inquiry. If they occurred as described, why did she not do anything about them? She could have approached Mrs Tian for an explanation. If she achieved nothing in that respect she could have gone to the AGF or the AIS. Why did Mr Chetkovich and Mr Tatai not raise the second incident officially at AGF level and require an explanation?

**6.142** The Inquiry did receive a few other allegations of inappropriate training practices. They were clearly in the realm of personal disputes or were quite trivial. They do not require discussion.

#### **4. TRAINING OR COMPETING WITH INJURY OR ILLNESS**

##### **a. Nature of the Allegations**

**6.143** The Inquiry received slightly under 20 allegations that gymnasts had been required by their coaches to train or to compete while they were injured or ill. Most of these allegations included a claim that medical advice was ignored by the coaches.

**6.144** These are very serious allegations.

##### **b. Scope of the Investigation**

###### *i. Access to Medical Records*

**6.145** In order to investigate these allegations, the Inquiry required access to the medical files of the gymnasts held at the AIS. These files are governed by medical confidentiality. Permission was sought from the gymnasts or, where appropriate, their parents to examine those files. It was given in 11 cases.

**6.146** It was essential to examine those files to determine the nature of the illness or injury from which the gymnast allegedly suffered and to assess whether the coaches had acted in a way which may have conflicted with any advice or instruction issued by the medical staff.

**6.147** In those instances where permission to examine the medical files was not forthcoming, it became impractical to proceed with the investigation. Since this impediment was placed in the path of investigation by the person making the allegation, the Inquiry must reject those particular allegations. This is not to suggest that those people have necessarily made false allegations because such a refusal is consistent with a desire to preserve privacy.

**6.148** In investigating any particular allegation, the Inquiry did not regard it as its function to judge the accuracy or the particular quality of the work of the AIS doctors. In effect, the direction of the investigation was to determine whether or



not injury and illness were being ignored in preference to training and competition obligations in a manner which was inappropriate in all the circumstances.

*ii. Minor Ailments and Injuries*

**6.149** There were some complaints made to the Inquiry that gymnasts who were suffering from stiff and sore muscles or had colds and other very minor illnesses were made to train. The Inquiry has rejected these complaints on the basis that AIS coaches, coaches outside the AIS and medical personnel agreed that this was not an inappropriate practice. The need to avoid the loss of training time and the fact that the gymnasts might encounter similar situations at a major competition and needed to learn to cope, meant that they had to continue with their training.

**6.150** There are other situations which do not represent inappropriate practice. For instance, a gymnast may fall from an apparatus and knock, scrape or bruise herself. Where no significant harm is done it is the usual practice in the AIS gymnasium (and most other places) to tell the girl to rub the sore spot, stop crying and get back up on the apparatus. This may seem tough, harsh or, even, callous. To some extent matters will depend on how it is done. However, this is part of dealing with the trials of becoming a successful elite gymnast. It is a similar approach to that encapsulated in the old adage that when thrown by a horse, get straight back on.

**6.151** The Inquiry discovered that incidents which amount to no more than this can be viewed in some minds in an exaggerated way and lead to unwarranted criticism. One 11 year old gymnast no longer at the AIS expressed the view that she did not "feel safe around" Mrs Tian because she had seen Mrs Tian tell older gymnasts to get back onto apparatus in circumstances of the kind just identified. Of the dozens of former and current gymnasts interviewed, none expressed a similar view. Yet this girl's reaction appeared to become a factor in the development of an attitude held by her mother that "Ju Ping ... should not be treating young Australians like they come from China." Such views are misinformed, and their discriminatory tones are objectionable in their own right. It was rare for views of that kind to be so overtly aired to the Inquiry.

**c. AIS Practice**

i. *Nature and Explanation*

**6.152** It was mentioned in Chapter 4 that it has become a common practice for gymnasts to continue with their training programs and even compete notwithstanding that they may be injured or ill in some way. This is governed by two important principles. The first is that this is accomplished through a modified training or competition program to allow for the injury or illness. The second is that this occurs under medical supervision.

**6.153** The reasons for this practice, and that it is widely accepted, are set out in the following extract from the written submission of Dr Peter Barnes. Dr Barnes is the medical co-ordinator for the South Australian Sports Institute and his views have the express endorsement of the South Australian Branch of Sports Medicine Australia which is the peak body for sports medicine professionals in that State. He said:

*Injuries in gymnastics are common and there are many factors contributing to these injuries. The high work load is obviously one but other factors include biomechanical, flexibility or strength deficiencies or technique problems.*

*The management of these injuries often requires modification of training and a period of relative rest. Unfortunately because of the nature of gymnastics as a sport, periods of total rest from training will very quickly have the athlete lose condition and fall behind in developing routines. It takes a long time to 'catch up' and they rapidly become non-competitive.*

*In an effort to avoid this scenario but at the same time treat the injury, gymnasts, and athletes in all high level sports, will continue to train in a modified program. This is sometimes poorly understood by the general public and perceived as 'making them train with injury'. Such injury management is carefully planned in consultation with a medical practitioner, the coach, the athlete and parents.*

**6.154** The AIS coaching staff and Dr Fricker told the Inquiry that they adopted and followed practices in accordance with the principles identified above. Indeed, Mrs Tian is widely credited with introducing many new thoughts and

practices in this field into Australian gymnastics. Speaking of Mrs Tian's early years at the AIS, Dr Fricker told the Inquiry that while Australian sports medicine was aware of modified training programs, he had learned a great deal from Mrs Tian.

**6.155** There are a number of dimensions to this approach to injury management. A gymnast who has a shoulder injury can still train for condition and work on skills relevant to her lower body. In the past, this gymnast may have been rested completely. Where total rest is required, it may be possible to shorten that rest period by developing a specialised training program. A number of people drew attention to the case of one gymnast at the AIS in 1985 who had a back injury. Mrs Tian developed a specialised gymnastics training program for her which enabled her to continue with substantial training without risk of aggravation of the back injury. The Inquiry was told that this was the first time in Australian gymnastics that had been done.

**6.156** The Inquiry received evidence from administrative, coaching and medical personnel in various sectors of the Australian gymnastics community which approved of these practices either specifically in relation to the AIS, or in relation to gymnastics programs with which they were involved elsewhere.

*ii. AIS Practice in Operation*

**6.157** The Inquiry was not able to discover any general departure from the practices and principles which the AIS gymnastics program claims to adopt. A substantial number of gymnasts told the Inquiry that they had been rested when they thought appropriate and had been given modified training programs when that seemed warranted. The Inquiry was provided with a number of significant examples of this occurring at various times over the years. Parents said they understood these practices and principles, although it has to be recognised that parents do become unavoidably apprehensive to some degree. However, this would apply anywhere, not just at the AIS.

**6.158** Various comments were received that medical advice was followed. For instance, the senior houseparent at the AIS, Mrs Robyn Allen, said that she had experienced no difficulty in having the AIS coaches accept advice from the AIS medical staff, or any of concerns which she may have about the health of the resident gymnasts. Mr David Zuker of Melbourne, who has not been specifically connected with the AIS, was the physiotherapist to many Australian

gymnastic teams during the 1980s of which Mrs Tian was coach. He said that Mrs Tian "listened to advice" and that "I did not feel I had to intervene".

**6.159** Therefore, it became clear to the Inquiry that the allegations which had been received did not reflect a general position of gymnasts being forced to train or compete while injured or ill. Those allegations which had been made had to be regarded as not representative of a pattern, but as individual incidents.

*iii. Individual Incidents*

**6.160** As mentioned above, the Inquiry investigated only those allegations where it was given permission to obtain the necessary evidence from each gymnast's medical records. This information is very personal and the gymnasts will not be identified by name.

**6.161** On the basis of the available evidence, the Inquiry has rejected each allegation it has investigated. Most of them had a simple explanation associated with misinterpretation or a lack of information about the medical condition or how the condition was being accommodated within the training program. In a couple of instances, there was insufficient evidence to establish that the coaches had behaved as alleged.

**6.162** Each allegation involved considerable information. Rather than set out each in full detail, some examples will be outlined.

**6.163** Gymnast C<sup>46</sup> alleged that she had been required by her coach to do backflips when she had an injured back. She said:

*I wasn't allowed to stop training. I still had to do like backflips and stuff which really hurt my back, but I wasn't allowed to stop doing them.*

**6.164** She did not have a strong recollection of the incident, but seemed clear on the point that "I was not meant to do any back work."

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46 This lettering continues from that which appears in Chapter 4.

**6.165** Gymnast C's medical file was examined with Dr Fricker. He had seen her but had not been the only doctor to do so. She had suffered from a spinal injury which caused her some pain and decreased her range of movement. A bone scan disclosed "increased uptake of the spinous process of L4". Gymnast C claimed that she had the injury before she came to the AIS but the increased training had caused it to flare up. Dr Fricker said that there was nothing in the medical notes which indicated she had been forbidden from doing any back work. The nature of the injury was such that forward bending was undesirable but that he was happy for her to train within the limits of pain and that backward bending was permissible. Dr Fricker said:

*[Kids] are very aware of pain. Their first, I suppose, instinct is to stop if anything hurts at all. The problem with that is if you stop for every injury and every ache and pain you get in gymnastics, you wouldn't train more than, you know, three months a year so we're used to setting a threshold at what we call grade 1 symptoms. We say, 'Look, that's okay. You'll get better. If you can put up with the pain and keep going and it doesn't worry you, that's good. If it gradually gets worse as you go on, put up your hand; stop; and we'll have another look.' But because she made progress in a week we said, 'That's good. Off you go, keep training', and we did not see her again after that. I guess the summary is that we never told her not to train, and we knew that she'd get better eventually.*

**6.166** Dr Fricker explained that it is the normal practice for the coach to receive an instruction sheet from the doctor explaining the diagnosis and what is permitted in training. Performing backflips was, in Dr Fricker's opinion, permissible. Gymnast C was 11 years old and it might be expected that she would be apprehensive and not necessarily well placed to understand whatever she might have been told.

**6.167** Gymnast D was overseas at an international competition. She tore the cartilage in her knee while training. She was taken by the team physiotherapist to a sports medicine doctor at the sports institute of the foreign country. Gymnast D was about 13 years old at the time. She told the Inquiry that Mrs Tian made her compete notwithstanding the injury, although she then said that it was partly her decision and partly Mrs Tian's decision. This is equivocal and the gymnast had quite a reputation for not giving up. The Inquiry regards the



key issue to be whether she should have competed given her injury. Mr Dean Kenneally, the physiotherapist was inexperienced at the time and understandably cautious, but the local sports medicine doctor had no objection to her competing. Mr Kenneally said, "My memory is that he didn't think that there was a heck of a lot wrong, that she should be able to compete." She competed, apparently without aggravating the injury. Gymnast D's knee was strapped and the landing in her routine on the uneven bars was modified to protect the knee. Although Dr Fricker did not see the injured knee until a week later, he told the Inquiry that from his understanding of the injury it was "probably a reasonable decision". He added, "I could understand a decision being made to allow her to compete which I would have been happy with on the day." From this evidence, the Inquiry finds that the gymnast was not made to compete contrary to medical advice.

**6.168** Gymnast E injured her knee in a playground accident. She developed Sinding-Larson-Johansson syndrome which Dr Fricker described as patella tendonitis. This is a common condition in active children. Gymnast E saw an AIS doctor about her knee when it did not recover from the initial injury. Her mother told the Inquiry:

*He sent a certificate in [to the coach] saying that she was to stay off it for six days and not do any training for six days, with her leg. I mean, she could still do the upper arm stuff, upper body strength, but she was not to use her legs...[The note was given to the coach]...And they had her doing a strange exercise with her feet together, to build up her leg muscles and all this. And I said, 'That doesn't look like she's resting her leg', and they just kept on doing these other exercises, supposedly to strengthen the leg up and things like that. I was quite surprised, because I thought a medical certificate from one of their own doctors would have been valid.*

**6.169** Ms Jenny Clack was the coach concerned, but she does not recall the incident. Dr Fricker did not examine this gymnast. He drew the Inquiry's attention to the direction from the examining doctor, Dr Hughes, to Ms Clack. This said:

*I would advise that she be rested from all lower limb training for the next four days while we treat this. She may work on the bars but should be assisted on and off them.*

**6.170** There is a difference in the number of days rest actually prescribed and what the mother recalled to have been the case, but that is irrelevant. There is a patent divergence between the doctor's direction and what was done. Dr Fricker offered a convincing explanation. He said:

*...resting from lower limb training means no jumping and landing, because obviously you want to avoid that impact on the knee when it's sore, but what they do is the strength training because associated with this condition is a tendency to waste and weaken of the thigh muscles...*

**6.171** There is nothing inappropriate in the coaching of the gymnast, but her mother obviously did not have a full understanding of the situation. Whose responsibility that may have been is unclear, but mistreatment of the gymnast is not evident.

**6.172** It is evident from the foregoing that misunderstandings have been occurring and that may be because information is not being conveyed, or being given to young children who do not understand it. This is an area of increasing interest in health care circles. While the Inquiry has not found any inappropriate conduct in relevant respects under the terms of reference, it is suggested that communication mechanisms should be watched carefully.

**6.173** The final incident which the Inquiry will consider in this section is an allegation by Ms Kellie Larter. She claimed that in 1986 or 1987 while resting between 400 metre sprints conducted outdoors, she told AIS coach Mr Mark Calton that she was not feeling well. According to Ms Larter, Mr Calton said that she should continue and do her best. At the conclusion of the next sprint she fainted. When she regained consciousness, Mr Calton accompanied her back to the gym. He did not mention the foregoing to Mrs Tian and Ms Larter was required to complete normal training, which she did. Ms Larter alleged that Mr Calton should not have permitted her to continue training.

**6.174** Mr Calton did not specifically recall Ms Larter fainting, although he recalls some illness associated with running. This was either Ms Larter's third or fourth year at the AIS. Mr Calton said:

*...so any problems, usually saying in terms of the heart or that sort of stuff probably would have manifested itself earlier. If she had a dizzy spell or that then allowed to sit down and then said okay, well how are you feeling? Let's walk back down to the gym and see how it's going. If you're feeling up to it, let's try training. If not, or if things start to get worse then we'll take it from there. That would be my normal process with an athlete.*

**6.175** He mentioned that after strenuous exertion blood can pool in the lower limbs thereby depriving the brain of blood and causing fainting.

**6.176** Dr Barnes more or less agreed with this analysis. He said that post exertion pooling of blood in the periphery of the body to assist cooling down resulting in a fainting episode is "reasonably normal". It is "spectacular" when it occurs, but the gymnast is fine afterwards. Mr Calton would have been entitled to assume that Ms Larter was fully recovered.

**6.177** Accordingly, the Inquiry finds that events occurred as alleged by Ms Larter but that Mr Calton's conduct was not inappropriate in the circumstances.

## **5. PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING DRUGS**

**6.178** Dr Fricker said that no gymnast in the WAG program at the AIS had tested positive to a prohibited performance-enhancing drug. This was confirmed by the Australian Sports Drug Agency in relation to the period during which it had been testing.<sup>47</sup> Also, Dr Fricker had no evidence of abuse of such drugs at the AIS.

**6.179** The AGF expressed a similar view to Dr Fricker. No evidence came to the attention of the Inquiry which suggested anything otherwise.

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47 The Agency was formally established at the beginning of 1991.

## **7: THE RESIDENCE**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

**7.1** A number of WAG scholarship holders do not live with their families in Canberra. These girls are housed within the AIS Residence which provides full-board, live-in accommodation for athletes across the range of AIS sports located in Canberra. A portion of the Residence is set aside specifically for the female gymnasts and they are in the direct care of two full-time houseparents. Gymnasts who are making short-term visits to the AIS for a variety of reasons are also accommodated in this portion of the Residence if space permits.

### **2. OVERVIEW OF ALLEGATIONS**

**7.2** Allegations of inappropriate treatment of resident gymnasts originated principally from an anonymous letter which had been given to Senator Faulkner on 27 March 1995. This letter contained a number of startling and very serious allegations directed mainly to the behaviour and management practices of the senior full-time houseparent, Mrs Robyn Allen. During the course of the Inquiry Mrs Sheryl Whitwell of Sydney came forward as the author of that letter. Her daughter, Karinda, was a scholarship holder from September 1991 until April 1994. During that time Karinda lived in the Residence. A letter from Mrs Heather Cleland of Melbourne was also given to Senator Faulkner on 27 March 1995. This contained some apparently less serious allegations of inappropriate treatment. Mrs Cleland's daughter, Melinda, lived in the Residence from about early May 1994 to 5 August 1994.

**7.3** A number of written and oral submissions received by the Inquiry made other allegations or expressed some concerns about the AIS residential program. However, these did not add much material which was different in nature. The main focus of this aspect of the Inquiry became those allegations contained in Mrs Whitwell's letter, supplemented in particular by submissions from Mrs Ann McTiernan and her daughter Lisa. In any event, all allegations of inappropriate treatment relating to the Residence which were drawn to the Inquiry's attention were investigated.

**7.4** Apart from the submission relating to Melinda Cleland's time in the Residence in mid 1994, no allegation of mistreatment was received in respect

of any gymnast who was resident at the time of receipt of the relevant submission or who had been resident at any time during the preceding year.

**7.5** The matters drawn to the Inquiry's attention can be grouped loosely into five categories:

1. Complaints which are of historical relevance.<sup>48</sup>
2. Allegations that Mrs Allen had neglected her responsibilities of caring for the female gymnasts.
3. Allegations that Mrs Allen had victimised two gymnasts.
4. The AIS had applied inappropriate criteria to the selection of houseparents and this placed the welfare of gymnasts at risk.
5. Suggestions that a residential system was in itself an abuse of the gymnasts.

**7.6** The remainder of this Chapter will describe arrangements in the Residence as they have been found to exist at present and will then consider specific allegations of mistreatment under the five categories identified immediately above. However, it is necessary first of all to mention some reported incidents which were found not to be within the terms of reference.

### **3. INCIDENTS NOT WITHIN THE TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE INQUIRY**

**7.7** In relation to all alleged incidents in the residential program which were drawn to the Inquiry's attention, an initial assessment was made of whether they involved an allegation or indication of mistreatment.

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48 To the extent that they might have had some grounds for justification at the time to which they applied, they are no longer immediately relevant. That is because the substance of those complaints has been overtaken by the on-going improvement which has occurred over the years as the Residence has become more established following its inception in 1986.



7.8 If they did not, the relevant incidents were regarded as being outside the Inquiry's terms of reference and, therefore, not warranting further investigation. A small number of incidents came within this category. In general terms, they related to matters of management and administrative procedure, or derived from the understandable anxiousness which parents experience when separated from their young daughters for a lengthy period, especially for the first time. In each case, the gymnasts and parents involved acknowledged that the incidents, even if they proved to be true as alleged, did not entail any mistreatment. Although it is not necessary to do so, the Inquiry mentions that it is satisfied on the basis of the evidence presented in relation to all such incidents which the Inquiry came to regard as outside the terms of reference, that no particular adverse impact or unfairness occurred. To illustrate this aspect, two examples are recorded below.

*One young girl who arrived at the AIS in mid 1994 was very happy for two weeks, then became homesick. While her parents identified that something was amiss almost immediately, they claimed that the houseparent did not discuss their daughter's homesickness until about two weeks after it had commenced. The parents felt they should have been contacted sooner. However, they acknowledged that at the time the residence was very busy with making arrangements for a travelling team. Also, in relation to homesickness, they had been told in advance that it is not uncommon for the AIS to wait and see if newly arrived gymnasts can work through their homesickness before approaching the parents. There was no suggestion of improper concealment of the girl's unhappiness by the AIS. Indeed, it is open for parents to raise any worries that they may have with the houseparents at any time (although in this case there may have been some frustration of the parents' efforts to do so by virtue of alleged delay in returning a couple of their telephone calls). Evidence presented to the Inquiry from a number of sources established that such contact is encouraged and parents usually take advantage of the opportunity if necessary. In this particular case the gymnast left the program after about six weeks due to a combination of homesickness and the demanding nature of training. The Inquiry does not consider that in these events there is any indication of mistreatment and it was not considered necessary to seek a formal response from the AIS in relation to*

*the parents' claims. Indeed, the parents were not alleging any mistreatment. In passing, it is very likely that even if the girl's homesickness had been discussed with her parents by the houseparent sooner that would not<sup>8</sup> have had any impact on the ultimate course of events.*

7.9 Another example concerned the administration of medicine to a gymnast. Her mother was concerned that this had occurred without the mother being consulted beforehand. However, written parental authority had been given for the AIS to arrange for necessary medical treatment and there was no suggestion that the medicine was anything other than appropriate. Again, no mistreatment was alleged. Such concerns appear to derive from parents' understandable anxiousness in relation to their separation from their children.

#### 4. RESIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENTS

##### a. Numbers in the Residence

7.10 At the commencement of the Inquiry 25 girls were receiving scholarship support in the AIS WAG program. Of these, four lived in the Residence. The rest lived with their families in Canberra. A further three girls from the Queensland Academy of Sport were undertaking an extended period of training at the AIS and living in the Residence, making a total of seven residents.

7.11 The age of these residents ranged from 11 to 14 years.

7.12 The number of girls living in the Residence fluctuates continuously. This is due to the coming and going of girls on three month trial scholarships, senior girls attending AGF national training and selection camps, and short visits by young gymnasts and their coaches for advanced tuition and scholarship try-outs. The numbers can grow quickly to over 20 and fall to about five who constitute a core group of relatively long-term residents.

7.13 Although specific figures were not provided or sought, the impression gained by the Inquiry is that number of scholarship holders who live in the Residence as a proportion of total scholarship holders has tended to fall over

the years.<sup>49</sup> The reason for the falling proportion appears to be that in regard to those girls who progress from three month trial scholarships to longer term scholarships, the AIS has encouraged their families to relocate to Canberra. Among the families of gymnasts now on scholarship, some have come from as far afield as Darwin, Bundaberg and Adelaide and as close as Wollongong. Mrs Tian and other AIS staff are of the view that a girl's prospects of successfully meeting the challenges of an elite WAG career are enhanced by the presence of immediate family support. This is predominantly the case with younger girls. However, it may be noted also that some girls appear to thrive on the more independent lifestyle that the Residence may bring.

#### **b. Role of the Houseparents**

**7.14** Immediate responsibility for the care and supervision of the girls in the Residence currently rests with two full-time houseparents. The arrangement which prevailed for many years was to have a full-time houseparent who was on duty for five days per week and an assistant or relief houseparent who was available on the other days of the week and whenever the full-time houseparent was on leave or ill. Since October 1994, the position of assistant houseparent has been replaced by a second full-time houseparent.

**7.15** The houseparents are also called upon to chaperone AIS teams when on tour, and these teams will include girls who are on scholarship but not living in the Residence.

**7.16** Mrs Robyn Allen is the senior of the two full-time houseparents having occupied her position since 4 June 1990. In addition to being the longest serving houseparent ever in the gymnastics program, she has the benefit of experience gained from being the mother of two AIS scholarship holders in gymnastics, Gabrielle and Monique Allen. Monique lived in the residence from its opening in 1986 until her retirement in 1992. Ms Danica Mladenovich has been employed since 10 October 1994. Ms Mladenovich is one of Australia's top four international WAG judges and holds a very high international ranking in judging. She is a secondary school teacher on unpaid leave and is a Level 3 coach as well. Both are mature women. Mrs Allen is employed on a two-year contract, Ms Mladenovich has a one-year contract.

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49 This has not necessarily affected the total number living in because the number of scholarships has increased overall

**7.17** The position of houseparent is very important and demanding, especially when it is remembered that there can be simultaneous responsibility for a large number of children. Ms Cindy Lincoln who was the assistant houseparent from 20 February 1992 to 19 February 1994 described the position generally in these terms:

*I was responsible for the girls 24-hours a day when I was on duty, responsible for their health, their wellbeing physically and mentally. We fulfilled the role as a parent, but we were not their parent. So I used to get them up in the morning, take them to all their meals, take them to training, make sure a coach was there before I left, and so that they were constantly under supervision, make sure they got to school, take them their lunches, pick them up after training, eat dinners with them, then get them to tutoring at night, and put them to bed at night. When they were sick, I used to take them to the hospital, to the doctor, the medical centre, dental appointments. All those things a parent would do, I did. School excursions, I helped get them to. So, day-to-day running of the kids' lives.*

**7.18** Mrs Allen emphasised however, that the houseparent should not be viewed as replacing the gymnast's parents. She said:

*I think it's very threatening to some of the parents to feel that someone's taking their place, because no-one can take the parents' place, nobody. I consider myself a friend who understands the sport, who can help...[the gymnasts]...if this is what they want to do...*

**7.19** Mrs Allen explained that the houseparent also has a role which the Inquiry regards as protective of the gymnasts in relation to their sport and living environment. This might mean recommending to the coaches that a gymnast be rested if she is overtired or, in Mrs Allen's words, "fighting for the things that the kids need for education and conditions in the residence".

**7.20** The position of houseparent is subject to an extensive job description which is set out in Appendix B.

**c. Physical Accommodation**

**7.21** Currently, all the female gymnasts live in the basement/ground floor portion of one wing of the AIS Residence quadrangle at Bruce in Canberra. Entry is through one door down a few steps from ground level in the quadrangle. The girls live in a series of interconnecting rooms, usually sleeping two per room in bunks. There are adequate toilet and bathroom facilities. There is a common living area and a space set aside for study. The girls' area is well equipped with a computer, television, games and other recreational amenities. There is a fenced, grass backyard reached directly from the common living area.

**7.22** Upstairs spread over three levels are single, furnished rooms with shared toilet and bath facilities which have been occupied by older gymnasts in the past. These rooms have a bed, wardrobe, fridge, wash basin, shelf, desk and lamp. Girls have routinely added some furniture of their own such as a bookcase.

**7.23** Present and past gymnasts expressed general satisfaction with the physical accommodation arrangements. Their beds are comfortable, the building is warm in winter and it is quiet for their sleep (although one young current resident mentioned that sometimes the swimmers upstairs play their music a bit loudly). With the upstairs rooms, there is the opportunity for giving maturing gymnasts a greater degree of privacy. The girls have decorated their rooms with their own possessions and posters. Mrs Robyn Moore, a registered nurse and trained child care worker who attends the AIS frequently in her capacity as a level 2 international WAG judge, described the physical arrangements as not plush but as having everything the girls need.

**7.24** Access to the Residence is by security key late at night and there is a security door to the gymnasts' quarters. A regular security patrol through the night checks the door and windows frequently.

**7.25** Mrs Allen has separate living quarters in the form of a self-contained flat immediately adjacent to the gymnasts' quarters. Her door is several steps from their's. Ms Mladenovich's flat is about 25 metres away. Mrs Allen said that from her flat she can hear what is going on in the gymnasts' quarters. The quarters are linked by telephone to both houseparents' flats. In the past Mrs Allen has had her living area linked by a direct door to the gymnasts' area, but



this is presently not the case because the need for extra sleeping area for gymnasts has meant that Mrs Allen has had to move to a separate flat.

**7.26** The AIS is constructing a purpose-built young athletes' residence to house not only gymnasts but swimmers and tennis players as well. This building will offer a number of improvements in terms of more modern facilities, single rooms and accommodation of houseparents within the same walls as the gymnasts. This is expected to become available at the beginning of 1996. Also, at present there is no area in the gymnasts' quarters where visiting parents can sit and talk with gymnasts in privacy. As a practical matter this limitation is overcome by the parents taking their daughters out, but a space should become available with the new building.

**7.27** One mother whose daughter is no longer living in the Residence suggested that it was better to have the houseparents' living areas linked by direct door to the gymnasts' area to avoid the girls having to go outside into the quadrangle to the houseparents' doors. As an example of the difficulties which might arise, it was suggested by that mother that a girl could be ill at night and no-one would be there to assist. A direct door had been present in the past and only the need for extra beds has meant otherwise more recently. The commissioning of the new building will overcome this concern. In any event, the close proximity of the houseparents' flats, the availability of telephones which can be used by the girls to summon assistance (they are encouraged to do so), and the general supervisory presence of the houseparents (which will be discussed below) suggest that there is no particular deficiency in present arrangements over which there might be serious concern.

**7.28** Apart from the comment in the immediately preceding paragraph, parents and gymnasts had no complaint or concerns about the physical accommodation.

**d. Description of the Daily Routine**

**7.29** The following description is based on the evidence of Mrs Allen, Ms Lincoln and Ms Mladenovich except where indicated. That evidence covers the period since 1990 to the present.

**7.30 Monday to Friday** Mrs Allen said that there is no such thing as a typical day in the Residence. Variation can be caused by many factors such as the

number of girls normally resident, the presence of visiting girls for training camps or clinics, the age and level of gymnastic skill of the girls, the approach of major events or trips away, sickness and school holidays. When Ms Mladenovich was interviewed in July, she told the Inquiry that the situation which then applied was that the girls living in the Residence were attached to one of three training groups. The routine for each group was different.

**7.31** On a weekday, training will commence at 7.00 am or 7.30 am depending on the group. So girls will be woken from 6.15 am onwards. They will shower (some may do so the night before), dress and be taken to the AIS dining hall which is on the opposite side of the quadrangle. The on-duty houseparent will usually eat breakfast with the girls. After breakfast she will escort the girls to the gymnasium, which is about a five minute walk away, and deliver them into the care of the coaches. This process will have to be repeated for the other groups and may be occurring simultaneously for each group but at different stages.

**7.32** Training for those girls who live in the Residence usually lasts until 11.00 am when they go to school. During that time, the houseparents will be engaged on tasks such as washing the girls' clothes, arranging medical appointments and taking the girls' lunches from the dining hall to the gym. Dental, specialist medical and x-ray appointments occur off-campus and the houseparents are responsible for taking the girls to and from them.

**7.33** The houseparents wash the girls' clothes because the girls' heavy schedule does not give them the time. Also, for the younger girls clothes washing is an unnecessary new experience when they are adjusting to the demanding training program. As some girls mature, they prefer to do their own washing and the houseparents instruct them on how to do so. There are washing machines and driers in the quarters.

**7.34** The girls are responsible for keeping their own areas neat and tidy. Cleaning of toilets and baths and vacuuming is done daily (except on Sundays) by professional cleaning staff.

**7.35** Return from school occurs at about 3.15 pm. Girls in the least gymnastically advanced group (usually, but not always, the youngest girls of primary school age) go immediately to study hall at the AIS. This is done together with comparably graded girls who are training at the AIS but live with

their families in Canberra. Study hall lasts for about one hour and is a structured period in which the girls can do their homework and receive assistance from the AIS tutors.

**7.36** For the more gymnastically advanced girls, training commences immediately upon return from school. For all girls, training will usually finish in the 6.30 pm to 7.00 pm range; it may be later if an important competition is approaching. They will be escorted back to the dining hall by either a houseparent or one of the male gymnasts, or come in a group. A houseparent eats dinner with them. For those who did not attend study hall in the afternoon (essentially the older primary school and high school girls), study hall is held from 7.30 pm to 8.30/9.30 pm. For the older girls (14 years) study hall may last up to two hours. For those who attended study hall in the afternoon and for the others when they finish evening study hall, there is then the opportunity to relax in the Residence. The girls telephone their families, read, watch television, play computer games, pursue hobbies such as sewing and knitting and play cards and board games. Occasionally there are activities such as bubblegum blowing competitions.

**7.37** Some children wish to go to bed as soon as possible. Others may linger to watch the conclusion of a television program. Mrs Allen said, "Everyone should be in bed and settled down by 10.00 pm and probably asleep." Many of the girls spoke of going to bed at 9.00 pm or 9.30 pm, even earlier.

**7.38** As mentioned above, at present the houseparents' flats are not within the same walls as the girls' quarters. Before leaving, the houseparents check that everyone is in bed, the lights are out and the quarters are secure. Mrs Allen, whose flat is immediately adjacent, said that she goes back through the girls' quarters an hour or two later to check that all is in order. From her flat she is able to hear any activity of the girls. She said:

*Sometimes you put them to bed and you can hear them giggling and laughing and they're up and out, got the television on again, and sometimes you let it go and sometimes you'll go back and turn it off and pull the plug out. It just depends on what's going on, but usually they're in heavy training sessions, they're all really keen to get into bed. And when you have new groups in, they're always chatty, and they're all excited, and they'll all talk to each*

*other, and you'll usually hear someone go 'Pipe down' from the other end, and it's just part of living in a group.*

**7.39** In response to a question about whether the houseparents patrol through the quarters after bedtime, Ms Mladenovich said:

*Not always. Sometimes if you anticipate that there's going to be an active night, you'll go for a bit of a wander later, but most times as the year gets into full swing and they're in school and in training, and they really don't need much incentive to go to sleep because they know they've got work to do in the morning, and they'll suffer if they don't. So if we anticipate that it's going to be an active night, then we'll wander through, but usually they're pretty right.*

**7.40** Given the number of girls that can be in residence and their youth, it is a common occurrence for the houseparents to care for a girl who is having a disturbed time later in the night. A wide variety of reasons for disturbance were mentioned to the Inquiry. These included illness, homesickness, just not being able to get to sleep, over-excitement and bed-wetting. One group of girls were telling each other ghost stories before bed-time. Mrs Allen suggested to them that they should desist from doing so, but they wanted to continue and did so. The predictable effect occurred and one could not sleep.

**7.41** When the girls need assistance in these circumstances or there is an emergency of some kind, there are four telephones in their quarters which they can use to call through direct to either houseparent's flat. The houseparents' telephone numbers are written on the handles of the girls' telephones and the girls are told which of the two houseparents are on duty for the night. It is usually the houseparent who puts them to bed. Previously, when Mrs Allen had a door opening directly into the girls' quarters, they would knock on that door. Once alerted to the need for assistance, the houseparent comes in. The houseparents mentioned to the Inquiry a variety of what seemed to be resourceful and appropriate strategies for dealing with the kinds of disturbances encountered. Often the distressed girl is taken into the houseparent's flat and cared for there. Mrs Allen now has a pull-out bed in her flat where the girl can sleep under direct supervision. Previously Mrs Allen gave up her own bed and slept on the floor or a couch. Ms Mladenovich has a spare bed in her flat available for a girl's use.

**7.42** A child who is known to be ill may be moved to the on-duty houseparent's flat at bedtime so she can be more closely monitored during the night.

**7.43 Wednesdays** There is no training on Wednesday mornings. The girls attend school at the normal time.

**7.44** For those in the least advanced groups, Wednesday afternoon is a rest period. These primary school age children are excused from school sport and do not train in the gym. It has been organised that they do not receive homework on this day as well. Mrs Allen described this as a play day. Other commitments permitting, the houseparents endeavour to organise some activity for these girls. That might be an early movie, shopping or, in the warmer months, a visit to the park or to the lake to feed the ducks. Otherwise, the girls are free to relax in the Residence quarters using its recreational facilities

**7.45** More advanced girls will have to train in the afternoon, but are excused from school sport. The resulting free time is used for study, off-campus medical and dental appointments or earlier training.

**7.46 Friday Evening at the Belconnen Mall** The Friday evening ritual is to visit the nearby Belconnen Mall immediately after dinner. The girls attend as a group in company with a houseparent. This trip provides the opportunity for the girls to purchase personal requisites such as soap, toothpaste, lollies and ice creams. Girls on short visits for clinics buy presents for family members. Older girls may have interests in clothes, magazines and music tapes. Some girls have kept goldfish and they will buy the necessary supplies in that regard. They may go to a movie or generally "hang out". The evidence of many gymnasts led the Inquiry to conclude that these visits are responsibly supervised. Girls can form their own groups (a minimum of two in a group) and younger ones go in the company of the houseparent, although not always. The houseparents escort any girls who are new to the Residence. If parents do not wish for their child to go off without a houseparent, those wishes are complied with. Instructions are given as to when and where to meet up.

**7.47** The evidence of Sandi McKelvie of Sydney who was at the AIS in February and March this year was more or less typical:



*...we had lots of kids there, like, seniors, juniors, and then all us little ones...[the houseparent would] say 'Who do you want to go with?' and we'd all just jump in a little group...sometimes we'd have three and four - whatever group we wanted. We could have two in the group. And we had to be back by a special time...*

**7.48** According to Mr Peter Hassan, a gymnastics coach and administrator from Sydney, one story that had done the rounds of the gymnastics community in some States suggested an absence of appropriate supervision. Its substance was that one girl had telephoned her parents in another State on a Friday night to say that she had been left at the Mall and did not know what to do about meeting up with the others or getting home. This was entirely hearsay. He could not identify the gymnast or the date when this was alleged to have occurred. Even as alleged, the circumstances are consistent with the girl having become separated from others or being confused about instructions from the houseparents. That this girl would have been deliberately left to her own devices is inconsistent with all other evidence received about supervision of these visits to the Mall. In relation to this story, there is no credible evidence to indicate any inappropriate conduct on the part of the AIS staff.

**7.49** Older high school age gymnasts may leave for the Mall at 7.30 pm on a scheduled AIS bus with athletes from other sports. However, the gymnasts have their own bus for the purpose of this visit and it carries the houseparent and at least the younger gymnasts.

**7.50** Lisa Read said that when there was a group of older girls of 17-18 years at the AIS, they would go on their own (she had a car) - perhaps at different times to the other girls if that could be fitted in with the older girls' more flexible educational timetable.

**7.51 Saturdays** On Saturdays, training does not usually commence until 8.00 am, although it varies according to the training group. Some girls will have two training sessions: morning and afternoon. Others will have a morning session only. There are a range of activities which may involve the girls once their training is finished. Parents, relatives and family friends visit and take girls out, sometimes until evening meal time on Sunday. This is more likely to occur for girls who come from Sydney or other proximate population centres. Strong friendships develop with other AIS gymnasts whose families live in Canberra and the families often have them over to visit for the afternoon on or a

sleepover basis, or go on day trips. Girls are not taken out by anyone other than their immediate family without parental approval.

**7.52** Sometimes on Saturday afternoons the girls prefer to laze around, like they might do at home. Some do their school homework. Except as indicated above, they tend not go out on Saturday night, although older, mature girls have done so in the past. The men's professional basketball team, the Canberra Cannons, play at the AIS campus and the girls may watch the game on a Saturday night.

**7.53** Mrs Allen said that no family has an activity organised every weekend. Expense is a consideration and sometimes the girls just prefer to relax within their quarters. As an alternative to going out various activities have been organised for or involved them in the Residence. Examples mentioned to the Inquiry included an arts and crafts exhibition, silk screen printing, a disco night, clean-up days and games.

**7.54** **Sundays** Training is not conducted on Sunday. The AIS is able to make arrangements for girls who wish to be involved in religious observance.

**7.55** Houseparents emphasised the importance of ensuring that girls go out on Sunday in order to place them in a different environment, just as might occur for other children. The parents of a current resident gymnast said that they were under the impression from their daughter that there was a rule to the effect that the girls had to go out at least one day over the weekend.

**7.56** If there are any gymnasts who are not being taken out on Sunday by family or friends, the on-duty houseparent will take them herself. Present and former gymnasts and the houseparents mentioned a wide variety of activities such as trips to the markets, the Mint, the zoo, the Cotter Dam, the Canberra show, the circus if in town and the movies. They may go for a picnic or a walk in the park. One parent of a gymnast resident in 1991 who had connections in the horse racing industry organised with Mrs Tian to bring the girls and a number of the coaches to the Canberra Sunday races.

**7.57** If there is only one houseparent on duty and she has a number of girls to supervise, there are understandable difficulties in not being able to please all the girls because of their different interests and levels of maturity, but perhaps no more so than for a family with a number of children of different ages. The

Inquiry was told that if there is only one girl left in the Residence, she will regard it as a valued happening because she will have *her* choice of the activity whether it be the movies or something else.

**7.58** On Sundays or at other free times, the girls may play in the fenced backyard to their quarters as other children may do at home.

**7.59** Occasionally and with Mrs Allen's approval, a girl may invite a local Canberra school friend to come and stay with her on Saturday night. Mrs Allen told the Inquiry that the girls take some pride in showing off where they live at the AIS.

**7.60** When there were older girls living in the Residence, such as in 1991 and 1992, these 16-19 year olds would go out on their own, often as a group. That might be to the movies on a Saturday night. By prior arrangement with the houseparents, they occasionally went away for the weekend from Saturday afternoon onwards to such places as the south coast of New South Wales.

**7.61** A number of the Canberra based families of present gymnasts said that there was a fairly strong and developing sense of camaraderie among them. Families of past and present gymnasts have gone to considerable trouble to organise social gatherings. A social network appears to be emerging and providing improved opportunities for resident gymnasts to be involved in the family activities of their gymnast friends at the weekends. The AIS is encouraging this development and the Inquiry regards it as appropriate for it to do so.

#### **e. Communication With Families**

**7.62** The principal form of communication between the resident girls and their families is the telephone. Before she was appointed to the position of houseparent, Mrs Allen lived in Sydney and her daughter, Monique, was resident in the AIS. Mrs Allen had first-hand experience of the difficulties that parents can experience in communicating with their daughters. Upon her appointment she agitated successfully for two measures in particular.

**7.63** The need for the first measure arose because all the telephones available to athletes for outgoing calls were outside. Although they were under cover, it could mean that a girl had to stand in the cold, perhaps for a lengthy

period, while on the telephone to her family. Mrs Allen arranged for four telephones to be installed inside the girls' quarters. These are equipped for internal and external calls.

**7.64** Second, a procedure was approved whereby the girls were permitted to call their families and say that they were at the telephone and wanted to talk. The families then call back. This avoids some problems associated with engaged lines, the girls being delayed elsewhere at an activity and families having to leave messages.

**7.65** Parents who wish to speak to a houseparent can do so by telephoning her in her flat, in the girls' quarters or on a mobile telephone which is usually in the custody of the on-duty houseparent. Each houseparent has an answering machine in her own flat. The houseparents explained that due to the priority usually accorded to caring for the children, messages left on the answering machines may not be returned until later in the evening after the children have been settled into bed.

**7.66** Parents are encouraged to keep in touch with the houseparents in relation to questions, any perceived difficulties and for update reports. In that regard, it is common practice for parents to speak to a houseparent in the evenings immediately after the regular telephone conversations that occur with their daughters.

**7.67** In 1985 and 1986 the gymnastics program administrator, Mrs Frances Crampton, used to prepare periodic written reports for parents which included a section on the girls' circumstances in the Residence. One parent of a former gymnast, Mrs Larter from Launceston, expressed her disappointment over the discontinuance of these reports when Mrs Crampton departed. Mr Forbes, who has been fulfilling the principal administrative role since Mrs Crampton left, does not believe that written reports are now necessary. Increasing frequency of visits by parents and the ease of telephone communication (especially its progressively cheaper cost) have made written reports superfluous.

**7.68** Aside from some specific allegations in relation to communicating with Mrs Allen which are set out and considered below, gymnasts and parents who made submissions on the topic were happy with the communication arrangements pertaining to the Residence.

**7.69** As a general matter, the Inquiry is satisfied that the AIS provides sufficient mechanisms for children to keep in touch with their families and for parents to keep abreast of their daughters' progress in the Residence.

**f. Some Aspects of Supervision**

**7.70** The appointment of a second full-time houseparent in October 1994 meant that in theory there would be three days when both were on duty and four days when only one was on duty (those four days being shared equally between the two houseparents). When on duty, the houseparent has potentially a 24 hour commitment. Ms Mladenovich said that Wednesday, Thursday and Friday are the days when both are on duty. These days are busier for reasons including that medical appointments tend to occur later in the week, there is no school on Wednesday afternoon and the younger ones have to be supervised in their rest period at that time, and Friday involves changing the linen. These arrangements must be flexible because the program can be placed under pressure by visiting national squads and clinics. The two houseparents say they have been able to work co-operatively to deal with these pressures.

**7.71** In the event of the illness or absence of these houseparents, the AIS has relief houseparents available who are experienced in looking after the female gymnasts. They are one of athlete supervisors/tutors, Ms Lee Muddle, and one of the houseparents from another section of the Residence, Ms Ann Staunton.

**7.72** It is not the practice for one of the houseparents to be inside the girls' quarters for the whole time that any of the girls are present. The on-duty houseparent may be working in her own flat nearby or, say, taking other girls to a meal in the dining hall. The girls are informed of the houseparent's whereabouts in that event. If the on-duty houseparent has to be away for an extended period, the practice is to inform a houseparent from another section of the Residence who will provide temporary supervision. If an outing is planned, girls may stay behind provided a minimum of two wish to do so and supervision is available from one of the houseparents in another section of the Residence. Athlete supervisors/tutors can act as back-up if needed. Mr John Bell who is one of the girls' tutors said that on occasions he acted as back-up to a temporary relieving houseparent if the on-duty houseparent was called away.



**g. Social Activities**

7.73 In addition, to the social and recreational activities referred to above, the houseparents ensure that the girls' birthdays are celebrated. A small party is held, a cake provided and presents given. The girls' give the houseparents a mother's day present. Also, from time to time various pranks and tricks occur, including April Fools' Day activities.

**h. Governance**

7.74 Meetings are held between the houseparents and the girls to discuss matters of common interest. These meetings occur in the lounge in the girls' quarters. The houseparents and present and former gymnasts drew the Inquiry's attention to a wide variety of issues which are subject to discussion. They include controlling talking at night, room allocation changes, arrangements for forthcoming gymnastics related trips or social outings, and problems associated with not disposing of chewing gum in the correct manner.

7.75 Mrs Allen said that there is little occasion for disciplinary measures:

*The kids in general are exceptionally good kids...there's occasional little things that you deal with, but...they're disciplined kids, they're busy kids.*

7.76 If something occurs which does require firm action, Mrs Allen said that "grounding" the offender by deprivation of the weekly trip to the Belconnen Mall was sufficient.

7.77 Occasionally, there are personality clashes between the girls. These seem to be dealt with appropriately by the houseparents through counselling or even changing room allocations if two girls who share are just not getting on with each other.

7.78 There can also be personality clashes between houseparent and gymnast, even with parents as well. It is to be entirely expected that there will be occasional disputes if only because a houseparent has enforced a rule to a girl's displeasure. The important consideration is that such disputes do not escalate and that appropriate mechanisms are in place to resolve them should escalation occur. A number of people who made submissions observed that

the appointment of a second houseparent in October 1994 was a desirable measure in that it reduced the chance of serious difficulty arising because the girl had another person to turn to in case of a clash. Mrs Allen welcomed the appointment of a second full-time houseparent. She said that it gave the girls someone different to talk to. She added:

*...it's helped in that with the girls there's a different [houseparent] personality...some little girls come in and they become very attached to you instantly, and some always a little bit distant to you because you're a different person than they've ever known before and it's expecting a lot. Little kids come in and they don't know you and it takes time to get to know you and now there's two different people and some people sort of attach themselves to different people for different reasons.*

**7.79** However, most of the allegations of mistreatment in relation to the Residence appear to derive from clashes between Mrs Allen and two girls, Lisa McTiernan and Karinda Whitwell. These allegations are examined below.

**i. Meals**

**7.80** Most meals are taken in the AIS dining hall. Packed lunches are provided by the dining hall on schooldays. There is a wide variety of foods in the dining hall to meet the diverse nutritional needs of the athletes who train at the AIS, whether they be basketballers, soccer players, track and field athletes, swimmers or gymnasts. As might be expected, the emphasis is on a healthy diet. The meals are presented in a self-serve, smorgasbord style. The menus are overseen by an AIS committee which includes the AIS nutritionist, Dr Louise Burke.

**7.81** For young girls away from home for perhaps the first time, this smorgasbord presents considerable challenges and difficulties. At home, children will eat what their parents select and provide. At the AIS, as one young, former resident said, "It's just like Sizzler!...but they change the foods," and that is for every meal. They may select unwisely - whether too little, too much or an inappropriate balance of food groups. For the younger girls who are still developing dietary habits, there may be little that they are willing to eat. The wide variety of cultural backgrounds from which the girls come creates

difficulties because sometimes they may have to accept foods to which they are not accustomed.

**7.82** These circumstances necessitate close supervision by the houseparents. The houseparents eat meals with the girls to ensure that their diet and the manner in which food is consumed are appropriate. The diet is based on a number of principles and rules established by Dr Burke in conjunction with the houseparents. Numerous former and present gymnasts mentioned that they had been the object of or had observed houseparent intervention to ensure that girls ate enough, did not have too much, or had more of one food and less of another. One rule often recounted by the gymnasts was the necessity to have vegetables of at least three different colours with the evening meal. Subject to her commitments at the AIS, ABOUT every six weeks Dr Burke eats a meal with the girls, observes, answers questions and makes any comments which may be warranted. It appears that Dr Burke's work with the resident gymnasts commenced in about late 1990 (the year she was appointed Head of the Sports Nutrition Program at the AIS). She provided some advice to the houseparents on the girls' diet and her role has increased over time.

**7.83** Others matters to do with the diet of the gymnasts have been discussed in Chapters 4 and 6.

**j. Study Hall and Tutoring**

**7.84** Recognising that athletes face very heavy demands on their time from training and competition schedules, the AIS provides the services of tutors to assist athletes with their school and tertiary education. This has occurred since the inception of the Residence. Tutors live in the Residence and are available generally in the evenings and on weekends to answer questions about material being studied, assist with assignments and teach learning skills. The Inquiry interviewed one current and two former tutors who have worked with the female gymnasts. Only one of the three was formally qualified as a teacher. Of the remainder, one had considerable experience in health education and the other a long period of service as an AIS tutor. In the circumstances, the Inquiry did not regard absence of formal qualification as involving any mistreatment or serious neglect of the gymnasts' education, especially in view of the relative simplicity of some of the curricula which the girls are studying and the presence on campus of houseparents and other tutors who are highly qualified as

teachers and able to assist if needed. The principal of Canberra High School, Ms Helen Burfitt, in answer to a question from the Inquiry agreed that the least formally qualified of the tutors could be described as equivalent to "an interested and moderately well educated parent".

**7.85** Up until about 1990, it was the practice of tutors to call on gymnasts in their rooms. The Inquiry was told that if a gymnast wanted to avoid seeing a tutor, it was not difficult to do so. In 1990, "study hall" was introduced, largely at the instigation of Mrs Allen. This is a regular, formal period designated for homework and study and is held in one of the Residence's rooms on all week nights other than Friday. The female and male gymnasts must attend and are overseen in their work by the tutors. The study groups may include athletes of comparable age from other sports such as tennis or swimming. At the time of interviewing Mr Bell, the arrangement which applied was that he was tutoring the older gymnasts in a common area in their quarters. Mr Bell is an older man and he was careful to point out that a protocol had been established with Mrs Allen to ensure propriety.

**7.86** A special study hall is held for the least advanced gymnasts immediately upon arrival from primary school and before afternoon training commences. This occurs on each weekday other than Wednesday and involves all the gymnasts of that level whether or not they live in the Residence. This means that once training is over, they are free of any particular school or gymnastics commitment. This study hall is supervised by AIS tutors, Lee Muddle and Kirsten O'Connor.

**7.87** Many parents of current and recent gymnasts expressed their satisfaction with these measures adopted by the AIS and said they thought their daughters' educational interests were assisted by them. In relation to the tutoring, Mr Peter Read, father of 1992 Olympian, Lisa Read, said:

*[The gymnasts] were exceptionally well catered for.*

**7.88** Current and former gymnasts who made submissions expressed no personal criticism of the tutors or of study hall. A number made specific comments that they had found the tutors to be "good", "marvellous" or "very helpful". Lisa McTiernan said:

*They were strict, but they were good. They just wanted the best out of us.*

7.89 The reference to strictness is probably to Ms Christine Canning who said that she had been quite firm with Lisa because she regarded her as not being sufficiently diligent with her studies and not performing to her potential. According to Ms Canning, at the time Lisa had complained to her mother and Mrs McTiernan had raised the issue. No complaint was made to the Inquiry in this respect and Ms Canning said that in the end she believed that she had won over Lisa. Lisa's statement seems to support that belief.

7.90 Supplementary tutoring is provided at the schools. This aspect is discussed in Chapter 8 on Schooling together with educational arrangements and performance.

## 5. PROOF AND IMPORTANCE OF THE DESCRIPTION OF THE RESIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENTS

7.91 The foregoing description of the residential arrangements at present and in recent years has, of course, been prepared by the Inquiry. As stated above, it is derived primarily from the evidence of the two current houseparents and one former assistant houseparent. What must be decided is whether that and other evidence presented to the Inquiry is sufficient proof of the description as prepared. This issue will be considered below shortly.

7.92 In preparing the description, a deliberate decision was taken to provide considerable detail. An understanding of that detail is essential to making balanced and informed judgments about the serious allegations of mistreatment which have been made. It provides necessary background, demonstrates the complex nature of the task of caring for the children living in the Residence and gives substantial insights into the nature of their day-to-day lives.

7.93 In deciding whether there is sufficient proof of the description as prepared, three classes of evidence were assessed. The first class is that given by the houseparents. While each of the three women had personalities different from the others, all of them impressed as certain and confident in their evidence. There was nothing in the way of awkwardness, evasiveness or obviously self-serving comment. As might be expected, their evidence differed in minor details and in perspective. Indeed, had it been otherwise, suspicion of



collusion might have been aroused. There is no particular reason to suspect that any of the women would mislead the Inquiry. Ms Lincoln is no longer in the employment of the AIS. No allegations of inappropriate conduct were made against her or Ms Mladenovich. Ms Mladenovich has a career in teaching in South Australia to which she can and may return. She is not apparently beholden to the AIS. Although Mrs Allen was obviously shaken by the allegations which were made against her personally, she appeared proud of her work and what she regarded as her achievements in the residential program. She was quite open and willing to discuss the matters covered in the description set out above. Finally, most of those matters can be checked easily with other sources and any attempt to misrepresent the position would have been foolish.

7.94 Second, a considerable volume of evidence supported or was similar to the evidence presented by the houseparents. In some cases, corroboration was only for small parts of the description and for limited periods of time. In other cases, there was very substantial corroboration. While there were differences in detail and, sometimes, minor inconsistencies, the overall picture which emerged strongly supported the evidence of the houseparents. This corroborative evidence was received from a variety of people including AIS staff, visitors to and observers of the program, and substantial numbers of current and past gymnasts and their families. Small portions of this evidence have been referred to at various points in the description. The volume and generality of this corroborative evidence makes it impractical to set it out in detail in this Report.

7.95 Third, some allegations of inappropriate conduct and their supporting evidence ran counter to parts of the description of the residential arrangements. This is particularly the case in relation to some matters to do with supervision. This presented three possibilities; namely that the allegations were:

1. incorrect;

correct, but represented specific departures from the broader experience such that the description was still correct in a general way; or

3. correct, and the description was incorrect in the relevant part.

7.96 At this point, no comment is made in relation to whether the allegations are correct or incorrect. That is done below for each specific allegation. However, the Inquiry is satisfied in the light of the strength of the evidence from the houseparents and from corroborating sources, that even if the basic facts of any such allegation are true, that will represent only a specific or isolated departure from the broader experience reflected in the description set out above. Of course, if any allegation is found to be unproven, the weight of the evidence supporting the description is increased correspondingly.

7.97 Accordingly, the Inquiry accepts that the general description of the residential arrangements as set out above is sufficiently proved for the purposes of the Inquiry.

## 6. SUPPORT FOR THE RESIDENTIAL PROGRAM

7.98 Before proceeding to consider the allegations of inappropriate conduct under the five classes identified above, it must be recognised that very considerable support for the residential program exists.

7.99 The Inquiry received a joint written submission from the seven gymnasts who lived in the Residence at the commencement of the Inquiry. It was a brief, indignant letter. Most of it was addressed to issues related to training. However, this short but meaningful statement was all that was said about the Residence:

*Our house parents look after us and they are like parents away from home.*

7.100 Three of these seven girls were interviewed. They were Nicole Kantek, Kate Lam and Amelia Fujikake. These interviews established clearly that they were satisfied with the Residence and the houseparents. It seems that the stimulus to write the letter came from one of their coaches who suggested it as a way to express their strong feelings over media reports of alleged happenings at the AIS. Rebecca Wilson from Queensland was identified as the primary author but the Inquiry was told that all of the seven had a hand in its writing. Other girls from the gymnasium also looked at it. Ms Mladenovich said the girls showed it to her before it was sent, but that was more for information than anything else. Mrs Allen did not see the letter. Rebecca's mother and father

were interviewed in Brisbane and shown the letter. They had heard of it from Rebecca, but had not seen it before. They were of the opinion that it exhibited strong signs of Rebecca's work. The letter is obviously from young people and it is clear that it is the girls' own work and represents their views. There is no evidence at all to suggest that they were pressured into writing it.

**7.101** The parents of three girls (Mr Fujikake, Mr and Mrs Kantek and Mr and Mrs Wilson) were interviewed in person. The mother of another girl (Mrs Lam) was interviewed on the telephone and made a detailed written submission, and a letter was received from the father of one of the other three (Mr Croak). The views of a parent of a sixth girl (Mrs Skinner) were reported in the *Courier Mail* on 18 April 1995.

**7.102** Mr Croak from Coffs Harbour whose daughter Alexandra is the youngest girl in the Residence said the following in a letter to Senator Faulkner which was copied to the Inquiry:

*...as a parent of a daughter who lives in the residence and is part of the Gymnastics program I am totally satisfied with how my daughter is treated.*

**7.103** The views of the other parents just identified were to similar effect.

**7.104** With the exception of suggestions that a residential system is in itself a form of mistreatment of the gymnasts (these suggestions will be considered below), no allegation of mistreatment of the gymnasts **currently** living in the Residence was received by the Inquiry.

**7.105** Furthermore, no evidence was brought to the Inquiry's attention which would in any way suggest the existence of mistreatment of the girls currently in the Residence.

**7.106** A large majority of people who provided the Inquiry with evidence relevant to the conduct of the residential program since its inception had not observed or experienced any mistreatment of gymnasts. This was especially so since Mrs Allen had become a houseparent. These included former resident gymnasts, their families, various AIS administrative and coaching staff not directly involved in the management of the Residence, the chaplain to the AIS (The Reverend Peter Nelson), and administrators, coaches and judges of

gymnastics who have had contact with the residential program from time to time. Those former resident gymnasts included girls who had both long and short stays and represented the full period of time during which the residential program has operated. The following is a selection of views taken from the evidence of those former gymnasts and their families.

**7.107** Kellie Larter lived in the Residence from its opening at the beginning of 1986 until July 1988. She made no allegation of mistreatment. Similarly, no allegation of mistreatment was made by Leanne Noack (nee Rycroft) who was resident from the beginning of 1986 until late 1988 (although her father did have a negative comment which is considered below). Both women were interviewed at length by the Inquiry and were leading gymnasts of their era; Leanne represented Australia at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul and Kellie was the third ranked gymnast nationally and the standby reserve for Seoul. At that time they were 19 and 18 years of age respectively.

**7.108** Lisa Read lived in the Residence from the beginning of 1988 to the end of 1992, with a nine month absence in 1989. At the time Mrs Allen was appointed in 1990, Lisa was 16 years old and living in her own room upstairs from where the gymnasts now live. She gave the following answers in response to questions from the Inquirer:

- Q. *Did you enjoy living in the residences or was it not very pleasant for you?*
- A. *Overall I think it was pretty good, yes.*
- Q. *Did you think you were well looked after or poorly looked after or was it just okay?*
- A. *I think we were very well looked after.*
- Q. *Did you ever have any complaints about the houseparents?*
- A. *Robyn was a good houseparent. She was always there and she was always looking after us, but - I mean, I wouldn't say I loved her or anything. I mean - but - I mean - yeah.*
- Q. *Do you have any specific complaints?*

- A. *No. I mean, sometimes we didn't get on, but that's just - you don't get on with everyone.*

**7.109** These answers are instructive. They demonstrate that according to the experience of this gymnast a girl can be "very well looked after" notwithstanding that she does not have a loving relationship with the houseparent. In the circumstances, it is not necessarily surprising that a loving relationship did not develop given that Lisa was quite mature when Mrs Allen took up her position as houseparent. Mrs Allen would have had less to do with Lisa than was the case with younger gymnasts living downstairs in the dormitory area. Also, Mrs Allen was the mother of a gymnast with whom Lisa was competing for a place on national teams, namely, Monique Allen - although nothing was brought to Inquiry's attention to suggest that there was any unfriendliness between the two gymnasts.

**7.110** Lisa McTiernan lived in the Residence from October 1988 until October 1993 except for an absence during the second half of 1992. Apart from some serious allegations which she has made against Mrs Allen (to be considered below), she said that the Residence was fine.

**7.111** Tanya Moses lived in the Residence during the second half of 1991. At the time she was 11 years of age. She said that living in the Residence was "good", her room was comfortable and the houseparents were "nice". Her parents, Kevin and Jenny Moses of Sydney, said they were satisfied with the residential arrangements.

**7.112** Mr Antonius Gysen of Perth said that his daughter, Brooke, received excellent care in the Residence. He said that Mrs Allen was "always very easy to approach and understood Brooke". Brooke lived in the Residence from April to October 1993 and turned 16 years old during that time. She had been a member of the Australian teams at the World Championships in Indianapolis, USA in 1991 and the Olympic Games in Barcelona in 1992. Prior to Barcelona, she had trained at the Western Australian Institute of Sport, but had come out of retirement in April 1993 to train at the AIS.

**7.113** When she was 11 years of age, Candice Orpin lived in the Residence. That was during February 1994 until her family moved to Canberra from Bundaberg, Queensland. Referring to her time in the Residence, she said, "the houseparents were really kind to us." Mrs Orpin said that Candice had told her



that she liked being in the Residence, although she had some difficulties with homesickness.

7.114 Sandi McKelvie was 10 years of age when she lived in the Residence in February and March 1995. She described the houseparents as being "really nice". When her mother Mrs Vicki McKelvie of Sydney was asked whether she had been happy with the residential arrangements she said:

*Yeah, I thought it was fantastic. I really liked Robyn Allen, and I really liked Danica as well, and Lee, she's not there now, but she was really nice... I thought they were all lovely.*

7.115 Mr Lewis Valletta whose 12 year old daughter Lisa lived in the Residence for seven weeks at the commencement of 1995 said that he was always impressed by the care Lisa received from Mrs Allen and that he felt Mrs Allen did everything in her power to assist Lisa. He added that Lisa was always well supervised when in Mrs Allen's care.

**Solicitation of expression of satisfaction.** Mrs Cleland whose daughter Melinda lived in the Residence from about early May 1994 to 5 August 1994 wrote a letter dated 2 July 1994 to the then Director of the AIS, Mr Robert de Castella praising the gymnastics program and the residential arrangements in particular. She said that "the units are full of warmth and laughter", that attention to medical care was very prompt "which goes to show that they are being looked after" and that "my daughter has settled in very well and has no complaints and I am sure that Robin and houseparents do a wonderful job and care for the children as if they were their own".

7.116 With effect from 5 August 1994, Melinda's scholarship was ceased because she was not coping with training and was homesick. On 8 August 1994 Mrs Cleland wrote another letter to Mr de Castella which was critical of some aspects of the gymnastics program and the residential arrangements. In her letter of 8 August 1995, Mrs Cleland was at pains to point out that her criticisms were not motivated by "sour grapes".

7.117 Upon reading both letters and considering Mrs Cleland's oral and written submissions, the two letters can be seen as relating to different phases of Melinda's time at the AIS. They are contrasting rather than necessarily contradictory. The substance of her complaints can be examined on the merits

without resort to any possible concerns over sour grapes. However, Mrs Cleland claimed in her oral submission that Mrs Allen had "hassled" her to write a letter commending the AIS. In her letter of 2 July 1994 she opened by commenting that she was "writing in response to a rumour that is circulating about the care given to gymnastics residents". She told the Inquiry that one weekend when she was visiting the AIS Mrs Allen had asked her a "few times" to write a letter. It appears that Mrs Cleland's purpose in mentioning to the Inquiry Mrs Allen's alleged conduct was to explain that she would not have written the commendatory letter to Mr de Castella had she not been pressed to do so. She said that her daughter had been at the AIS only a few weeks and she did not have "the judgment" to write the letter. However, Mrs Cleland said nothing to the Inquiry to suggest that what she had written in the letter was untrue or did not represent her assessment of the position at the time of the letter.

7.118 On that basis it is possible to see the letter of praise and the subsequent letter of complaint as each standing alone and relating to different phases of Melinda's time at the AIS. Curiously, Mrs Cleland's late mention of this alleged incident has served to raise possible concerns about Mrs Cleland's credibility and motives. She did not mention the alleged conduct of Mrs Allen in her letter to Mr de Castella of 8 August 1994, in her letter to Senator Faulkner or in her written submission to the Inquiry. This gives it the appearance of an afterthought. Mrs Allen denies that she actively sought a letter of support from Mrs Cleland. She says that there was discussion among parents of allegations raised by Mrs Whitwell and that Mrs Cleland offered to write a letter. Mrs Allen's recollection is that Mrs Cleland "offered to write the note...she expressed that she was more than happy with everything". Mrs Cleland also said that other parents were being asked to write letters. The only one she was able to identify was "Amelia's mother". According to the records supplied to the Inquiry by the ASC, the only girl in the program with the given name of Amelia at that time was Amelia Fujikake. Mrs Fujikake denies having been asked to write a letter or any knowledge of others being asked to do so.

7.119 In the Inquiry's view, the relevance of the foregoing is that Mrs Cleland was initially very happy with the Residence. Afterwards she had some complaints which are dealt with on their merits elsewhere. While some doubt might be raised as to Mrs Cleland's credibility and motives in regard to her separate allegations, the Inquiry has preferred to place no particular significance on this and has dealt with them on their individual merits.

## 7. ALLEGATIONS OF MISTREATMENT IN THE RESIDENCE

### a. Historical Matters

7.120 The first group of allegations of mistreatment have no current relevance. If they had some grounds for justification at the time to which they apply, the substance of those allegations has been overtaken by the on-going improvement which has occurred over the years as the Residence has become more established following its inception in 1986.

7.121 **Pre-1986 Accommodation** Prior to 1986, gymnasts lived either in Halls of Residence at the Australian National University or were billeted with local families who were paid a fee by the AIS for this service. Evidence presented to the Inquiry relevant to this period was from just a few sources. Therefore, it is not necessarily a representative reflection of the residential arrangements overall prior to 1986.

7.122 Cathy Langtry (nee Blake) held a gymnastics scholarship during 1984 and 1985. She commenced at the AIS when she was 14 years old. She lived with the same family for those years. Five other gymnasts were billeted with that family although some girls moved out at the end of 1984 and others took their places. In this house, three bedrooms accommodated the girls two to a room. Mrs Frances Crampton (nee Thompson) who was in an administrative position in the AIS gymnastics program in 1984 said this house was a very successful arrangement. Of the gymnasts who Cathy recalled as having lived in this house, Monique Allen, Debbie Clarkson (nee Graham) and Kellie Larter made submissions to the Inquiry. These four gymnasts offered nothing that hinted of mistreatment. Cathy said that the arrangements were satisfactory to her, the girls "were lucky" and were made to feel welcome. She expressed the predictable sentiment that she was not as well cared for as she would have been by her own family. She added:

*[T]he only thing I would criticise would be the food as in I don't think it was as healthy as it should have been.*

7.123 In response to a follow-up question she said that the girls had enough to eat and mentioned that they had access to the household refrigerator. There is

nothing in the evidence to suggest that the girls were improperly fed according to family standards of the time.

**7.124** According to Cathy Lantry, Leanne Noack (nee Rycroft) was billeted with another family. In her evidence, Leanne made no criticism of her accommodation arrangements.

**7.125** A stronger complaint came from Debbie Graham. She arrived in Canberra from Sydney in September 1983 at the age of 12 years. She found life away from home very different to what she had experienced with her family and claimed that her time with her first host family was a "disaster" and that she was "really unhappy". She was there until the end of 1983 when she moved to the house shared by Cathy Lantry and five other gymnasts as described above. Debbie did not allege that she had been mistreated by her host family during the final quarter of 1983. However, she claimed that her unhappiness was known to the AIS and she was not allowed to move to another family's home which her father had found for her through the family's local church. When asked for the reason for this refusal, she said:

*As far as I know, because I was 12, the implications were that the family that the Institute had chosen would be offended so I was told I had to remain there for the remaining eight or nine weeks.*

**7.126** This seems an unusual explanation and may well be a child's misunderstanding of a more complicated reason.

**7.127** At that time (just as now) a gymnast could withdraw from the gymnastics program and return home should the residential arrangements prove not to her liking. However, this "take it or leave it" approach must be tempered by a number of considerations. For instance, a gymnast should not have to tolerate mistreatment. Also, she should not have to live in circumstances which make her truly unhappy if something reasonable can be done to avoid it. In these respects, no claim was made that she was being mistreated by her host family. In determining whether the AIS behaved reasonably it would be necessary to weigh the availability and suitability of alternative accommodation suggested by Debbie's family against a number of possible factors. These may include:

- \* the circumstance that other arrangements likely to be satisfactory to both gymnast and AIS would become available in two months;

- \* if she were to move to the alternative home suggested by her family, there may be no guarantee that Debbie would recover from her unhappiness should a substantial reason for her condition be homesickness rather than discomfort with her present host family;
- \* any contractual arrangements with the host family which had to be honoured; and
- \* the obligation on the AIS (with attendant commitment of resources) to independently assess whether the accommodation suggested by Debbie's own family was suitable for her, and to the AIS (e.g., distances to school and gym).

**7.128** These events are alleged to have occurred almost 12 years ago and this presents difficulty in establishing the circumstances. For the reasons set out below, the Inquiry has decided not to investigate this complaint further or to require the AIS to answer whether it behaved inappropriately in not relocating Debbie as her family requested.

- \* Debbie does not claim to have been harmed by staying with her allotted host family in 1983 other than to have suffered temporary unhappiness.
- \* Very different arrangements apply today for residential living at the AIS.
- \* Debbie's evidence is consistent with a number of possible justifications for AIS management denying the request.
- \* Preliminary investigations indicate that substantial time and effort would be required to investigate further with no guarantee of discovering relevant evidence.

**7.129 Opening of AIS Residence in 1986** The Residence was available to accommodate scholarship holders for 1986. Ms Anne Briggs (now the Reverend Anne Turner) was appointed the houseparent in charge of junior



female athletes (under 18 years of age) including the gymnasts. She was assisted by Ms Judith Gillen who also worked as a tutor.

**7.130** No complaints were received about the management of the Residence during 1986, although Ms Gillen was critical of the concept of a residential system (see below). Gymnasts and their families from this era expressed their appreciation of Ms Briggs.

**7.131 1987, 1988 and 1989** New houseparents were appointed from the beginning of 1987. They were Ray and Bronwyn Stanton who lived with their two young children in a flat in the Residence.

**7.132** It was alleged that not enough was done by the houseparents to support the young gymnasts who were living away from home for the first time; especially in view of the circumstance that they were endeavouring to cope with the demands of increased training. These allegations coincide with the arrival for the first time at the AIS of significant numbers of younger gymnasts and come from three sources:

- \* Mrs Glen Bevans of Melbourne whose daughter Hollie lived in the Residence from October to December 1987 and again from October 1988 to April 1990 - Hollie was 11 years of age when she arrived at the AIS in October 1987;
- \* Megan Scriven of Newcastle who lived in the Residence from September 1987 to July 1988 - she was 12 years old when she arrived at the AIS; and
- \* Mrs Barbara Watts of Melbourne whose daughter Katie lived in the Residence from September 1986 to June 1988 - Katie was 14 years of age when she arrived at the AIS.

**7.133** Specifically, all three alleged that the gymnasts in the Residence had to do their own laundry, that they were not taken on outings by the Stantons and that not enough was done to ensure the girls kept up with their schooling. Debbie Graham was another that considered it inappropriate that gymnasts had to wash their own clothes.

**7.134** Providing support for gymnasts in these three areas which are the subject of the specific allegations is in the Inquiry's opinion a proper matter for the AIS to undertake. Judged by its own current standards and conduct, that support is something which the AIS regards as desirable, if not necessary. Reference was made above to the circumstances of the past four to five years under which the houseparents wash the girls' clothes (unless the girls wish to do so themselves) and take them on outings regularly, and to the introduction of study hall. However, it does not necessarily follow that a failure on the part of the AIS to provide that support at all or to a particular standard constitutes mistreatment of the gymnasts.

**7.135** There are two questions which arise. Did events occur as claimed in these allegations? If so, do those events constitute mistreatment of the gymnasts?

**7.136** In the circumstances, Mr and Mrs Stanton and the AIS were not called on to respond to these allegations.

**7.137** Without it being necessary to make a specific finding as to whether the girls had to do their own washing, the Inquiry does not consider that expecting girls of that age to do so is going so far as to constitute mistreatment. At present or in recent times in the Residence there have been a number of girls of similar age who prefer to do their own washing notwithstanding the availability of support. Children of that age are capable of washing clothes. In many families, they are expected to at least assist in that regard. While it may be a new or hard task for girls who are involved in demanding gymnastics training (especially for the youngest girl), and for that reason very desirable for the AIS to offer support, it is not mistreatment to fail to provide it to girls of that age. Some people may regard it as part of the process of growing up and becoming independent.

**7.138** In relation to the allegation that the Stantons did not take the girls for outings, it was clear from other evidence that the gymnasts did leave the confines of the AIS quite regularly and frequently. Apart from their schooling, visits to the Belconnen Mall and trips to competitions, the gymnasts were taken out by their own or other girls' parents who visited on weekends. Indeed, Mrs Watts said that she visited monthly from Melbourne and would take out those girls whose parents were not visiting. However, the impression which Mrs Watts conveyed was that if she had not acted, the girls would not have been

taken out. Even if it is true that the Stantons failed to act as alleged, it does not follow that the girls were mistreated. There was no evidence of any harm having been caused. There appears to have been a substantial range of opportunities to go out. Assuming that matters could reach a stage where gymnasts are so tightly confined to the AIS campus that it causes them substantial unhappiness and affects their social development, that was certainly not the case on the basis of the evidence presented.

**7.139** The third allegation was that not enough was done to ensure the girls kept up with their schooling. Ms Scriven said her performance at school declined such that she became distressed. While the AIS tutors would call on her two or three times a week, she said that it was easy to avoid them. Also, she would go to school but not attend classes. She acknowledged that while other girls kept up with their school work and succeeded, she did not. Towards the end of her stay, the AIS became aware of her behaviour by virtue of her declining school performance and she was spoken to about it, but by then she was leaving the program because of a health problem. On the basis of her own evidence, mistreatment cannot be established for the following reasons. The AIS had in place an educational program to assist its scholarship holders. Ms Scriven's difficulties arose in large measure from her own efforts to avoid it. The AIS did detect the difficulty but, on Ms Scriven's evidence, somewhat slowly. In 1987 and early 1988, the tutoring system was still new and, perhaps, cases such as Ms Scriven's drew attention to the need for the introduction of study hall. The fact that the need for improvement is discovered and valuable changes are introduced does not of itself prove mistreatment in the past - it proves that there are better ways of going about things. Ms Scriven is now studying successfully at university and does not appear to have been harmed by her short period of below normal (for her) scholastic performance.

**7.140** Mrs Watts' allegation was more general. She believes that the houseparents did not provide the support the girls needed in relation to caring for themselves including doing their homework and completing their assignments. However, no specific evidence of this was provided. In large measure support of gymnasts in relation to their schooling was the responsibility of the tutors. However, the Inquiry has concluded that it is to be expected that the houseparents should provide parental guidance and keep a watchful eye on progress with schooling. Even assuming that they had not been as diligent in this respect as might be expected, that does not necessarily amount to mistreatment especially when the tutoring system is taken into

account. Also, given the general nature of this claim the Inquiry is unable to find that the gymnasts were mistreated in this respect.

**7.141** It seems that the Stantons did not act as houseparents from late 1987, although the Inquiry cannot be certain of that date. The records provided by the AIS to the Inquiry of the names and dates of service of houseparents were confused and, according to the evidence of gymnasts, their families and some houseparents, contained gaps and were inaccurate in significant respects. For instance, the AIS did not report that Ms Anne Briggs had been the first houseparent and Judith Gillen her assistant. Mrs Bevens' allegation that not enough was done to ensure the girls kept up with their schooling was directed to the houseparents that succeeded the Stantons and, like Mrs Watts' allegation, was general in nature. Although Mrs Bevens did not name them, this was taken to be a reference to Tracey Luckje and her assistant Bridgette Walsh<sup>50</sup> and their successors Sue Johnson and Claire Baker<sup>51</sup> who Mrs Bevens put as being in their early twenties. Apparently because of their age she considered them to be "obviously totally inappropriate" in terms of assisting the gymnasts in dealing with the difficulties of life at the AIS including coping with homework. Later she added that they had no experience with looking after children. On its own, such an allegation lacks proof: relative youth or not even having raised a family does not prove inappropriateness in this regard. Notwithstanding a lengthy stay at the AIS, Hollie Bevens has gone onto university and appears not to have suffered any educational disadvantage. As is explained elsewhere, Mrs Bevens was prone to exaggerate. Accordingly, this allegation is rejected.

**7.142** Megan Scriven was critical of the Stantons for not having eaten meals with the girls. Hollie Bevens made a similar claim. In itself this cannot be taken as mistreatment, and it is believed that Ms Scriven made this comment as a constructive criticism rather than an allegation. Hollie was more accusatory. It

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50 According to the AIS records which were supplied to the Inquiry, Ms Luckje was employed from 1 December 1987 to 30 December 1988 (13 months) and Ms Walsh was employed from 4 April 1988 to 5 December 1988 (eight months).

51 According to AIS records, Sue Johnson was employed as a full-time houseparent from 6 December 1988 until 1 May 1990 (17 months) and Claire Baker was employed as an assistant houseparent from 19 December 1988 until 31 December 1991 (3 years).

is noted that the practice of the houseparents for some years has been to eat meals with the gymnasts.

**7.143** It was clear to the Inquiry that Mrs Bevans, Ms Scriven and Mrs Watts believed that the performance of the houseparents in general and in the specific respects discussed was not good enough. Ms Scriven and Mrs Watts were very impressive witnesses and genuinely constructive in their criticism. It may well be that the criticisms are justified (although it must be borne clearly in mind that neither the Stantons nor the AIS were asked to respond to these criticisms.) Certainly, the Inquiry has found that the practice of the AIS for some years incorporates procedures which would answer those criticisms and may well be a response to the concerns which were voiced. However, for the reasons set out above the Inquiry has not found that anything in the nature of mistreatment occurred.

**7.144** As indicated above, Mrs Bevans was generally critical of the houseparents who were employed during 1988 and 1989. She said:

*With changes with houseparents, she [Hollie] would fit in fairly well. From a parental point of view, for the rest of the time she was up there [after the Stantons had left], the houseparents were young, I'd say early 20s, obviously totally inappropriate inasmuch as the severity of coaching incidents in the gym, accompanied with living away from home, trying to deal with looking after yourself, doing your own laundry, homework, school.*

Later, she added:

*...the one I remember best is the last houseparent she [Hollie] had, her name was Sue, and I do remember the girls before, nice girls but unmarried, young, no experience with looking after children.*

**7.145** However, Mrs Bevans qualified the foregoing with this statement:

*The one good thing, particularly Sue, that she would try to do of a weekend is to sort of get them out of the place.*



**7.146** Notwithstanding these alleged difficulties, Mrs Bevans said that her daughter managed quite well. This may have been because Mrs Bevans was very attentive to her daughter's needs. She said that at her own expense she stayed at the AIS for one week in three from late 1988 until Hollie left in April 1990. This placed Mrs Bevans in a good position to observe closely. However, Mrs Bevans' generally expressed criticisms are against the weight of evidence.

**7.147** Mrs Watts who visited for a weekend once a month and at Christmas and Easter had a different impression of Ms Luckje. Given the different periods during which Katie and Hollie were at the AIS, the opportunity for their respective mothers to observe Ms Luckje was not all that different (two to three weeks compared with four to five weeks respectively). Mrs Watts said of Ms Luckje:

*... she was good because she was able to relate to them better when they had problems. If they had problems in training and they'd come back and some things didn't go right she was able to sit and talk to them quite well because she was younger and could relate to them better...*

**7.148** Mrs Watts added that Ms Luckje took the girls out on Sundays if they wanted to go somewhere. She described Ms Luckje's performance in this respect as "fine".

**7.149** Ms Scriven said that in retrospect she did not realise that the job done by the Stantons was inadequate until Ms Luckje arrived. The clear implication is that Ms Luckje's performance was much better if not quite satisfactory in Ms Scriven's view.

**7.150** There have been various other expressions of satisfaction with the houseparents from 1988 until Mrs Allen's arrival in 1990 and no relevant criticism of the management of the Residence during that time. The Inquiry does not accept that the houseparents of this era were in Mrs Bevans's words "obviously totally inappropriate" and accordingly the Inquiry does not accept that any mistreatment was caused by such alleged inappropriateness.

**7.151** Mr David Rycroft of Adelaide expressed concern over a loosening of discipline in the Residence in 1987 and 1988. His daughter, Leanne Noack (nee Rycroft), was at the AIS from January 1985 until late 1988. She lived in

the Residence from its opening in 1986 until she left the AIS. Ms Noack was one of Australia's two competitors in WAG at the Seoul Olympics in 1988. This concern related to alleged sexual activities of older female gymnasts. He said:

*... my wife stayed at one period and to her horror, there were guys coming into the girls rooms, stopping overnight and all sorts of things. Just the sort of thing that - the last thing that you'd want to see happen.*

**7.152** Mr Rycroft's comments could be treated as being directed to the general issue of supervision rather than the more narrow issue of sexual activity. The incident which is recounted by him might therefore be regarded as indicating that proper care was not being taken for the girls' welfare. However, his evidence is more related to issues of Residence governance, management style and policy. It does not constitute proof of the mistreatment of gymnasts. In any event, the AIS has a relevant rule and there is evidence of its enforcement.

**7.153** Mr Forbes told the Inquiry that it has been a rule of the gymnastics program that males are not allowed in the females' quarters and that the female gymnasts are not allowed to visit the males' quarters. There is, of course, social contact between males and females at school, in the gymnasium and in the common areas of the Residence such as the dining hall. This rule may be regarded in some sectors of the community as too restrictive when applied to girls of over 16 years of age. Mr Forbes said that bearing in mind that whatever approach was adopted would meet with criticism from some quarter, he preferred to err on the side of conservatism rather than liberality.

**7.154** Mr Forbes also told the Inquiry that towards the end of 1987 it came to his attention that a 16 year old gymnast had been sleeping in the room of a male track and field athlete. That was considered a serious breach of discipline and, therefore, of her scholarship agreement. Mr Forbes recommended to the Director of the AIS that her scholarship not be renewed for 1988 and that recommendation was accepted and acted on.

**7.155** It is possible that Mr Rycroft has drawn attention to a failure to enforce the rule as effectively as he or the AIS might wish. However, for the reasons stated, the Inquiry does not regard any such possibility as involving mistreatment of the girls.

7.156 A small number of other alleged incidents were drawn to the Inquiry's attention. These are not set out here because insufficient facts were supplied to the Inquiry for it to obtain anything other than a vague idea of what was alleged to have occurred. In other cases, the allegations were patently trivial and, regrettably, were open to the accusation that they had been made in an attempt to cause trouble.

**b. Alleged Neglect of Responsibilities by Mrs Allen**

*i. Alleged Absence from Duty*

7.157 A number of allegations concerned what might be collectively described as an absence from duty on Mrs Allen's part. The clear implication of these allegations, if substantiated, was that she was neglecting her task of caring for the girls in the Residence, and that placed them at risk in some form or other. Some matters drawn to the attention of the Inquiry were not intended as allegations of mistreatment and in isolation could not constitute mistreatment. However, they have been referred to here because if true and taken with others, they could establish a pattern of neglect.

7.158 Each specific allegation will be set out and considered.

7.159 In her written submission Mrs Whitwell, whose daughter Karinda lived in the Residence from September 1991 to April 1994, alleged that Mrs Allen "was never there when on duty".

7.160 Taken literally, this allegation is so broad as to be virtually unsustainable. Bearing in mind that according to the weight of evidence, Mrs Allen has fulfilled the position of houseparent satisfactorily for over five years, Mrs Whitwell's allegation is preposterous. Ms Lincoln who was Mrs Allen's assistant for two years gave this response when informed of the allegation:

*I just don't know how people can make that accusation unless they lived there.*

7.161 Mrs Whitwell presented much evidence which was in direct conflict with her allegation because she referred to incidents where Mrs Allen could only be described as 'present when on duty'. Apart from some specific matters which

are dealt with separately below, Mrs Whitwell presented no evidence to substantiate her allegation.

**7.162** The Inquiry finds this allegation by Mrs Whitwell to be untrue.

**7.163** Mr Kwan whose daughter Tracey lived in the Residence from October 1990 to February 1992 said there had been times when his family arrived on a Saturday afternoon to visit Tracey and they had been unable to find Mrs Allen even though she was on duty. Mrs Robyn Trentini from Wagga whose daughter Renee lived in the Residence from January 1992 to December 1993 said that on Saturdays it was only rarely that Mrs Allen was in the girls' quarters and she was "extremely hard" to find on the AIS campus. Mrs Trentini considered that Mrs Allen had other responsibilities which were improperly taking her away from being with the girls in their quarters and should have had a mobile telephone. Mrs Whitwell said that one of the issues discussed at the meeting of parents and AIS staff on 5 July 1994 was the absence of a houseparent on a Saturday afternoon when parents came to collect their daughters. According to Mrs Whitwell, Mrs Allen had also failed to honour appointments for them to meet. According to Mrs Whitwell, Mrs Allen denied that allegation at the meeting. No details were provided to the Inquiry by Mrs Whitwell of any dishonoured appointments. Mr Ross Broadbent and Mrs Julia Broadbent from Newcastle whose daughter Alison lived in the Residence during July and August 1994 said that when they visited on a Saturday afternoon they rarely encountered Mrs Allen because she would be having a day off. They would have to speak to another houseparent who was not the main care-giver and might not be as familiar with their daughter's circumstances.

**7.164** Mrs Allen acknowledged to the Inquiry that at times she could be difficult to contact. Certainly after the meeting with parents on 5 July 1994, AIS management realised that Mrs Allen was severely overcommitted. The response was to issue her with a mobile telephone and upgrade the assistant houseparent role to a full-time position. Apart from the growing size of the program, this over-commitment arose from Mrs Allen's commendable determination to support the girls in their gymnastic careers to a degree and in ways not hitherto undertaken at the AIS, but she stretched herself too thinly. There has been no credible evidence brought to the Inquiry's attention to suggest that Mrs Allen was anything other than conscientious in her work. Also, a number of parents have indicated that they did not have any significant problems of the kind under discussion. In any event, the appointment of the

second full-time houseparent and the introduction of the mobile telephone seem to have resolved matters and there have been no complaints relating to the past year. Further, when informed of these changes, Mr Kwan considered that they would have prevented the difficulty he had experienced.

**7.165** For those parents who wished to speak in person to Mrs Allen on a Saturday or at other times, especially when they may have travelled a long way and have limited time with their daughters, any delay in finding Mrs Allen would be likely to produce understandable and considerable annoyance. However, these matters do not amount to or reflect an absence of basic supervision of the girls. As set out above, even though a houseparent may not have been within the walls of the girls' quarters, measures were in hand to supervise the girls. Although it will depend very much on the circumstances and these are always changing, given the age of the girls (three were 14 years of age at the time of commencement of the Inquiry), their numbers and their familiarity with each other and the surroundings, it could not be said that it is neglectful to leave them on their own for limited periods, especially when alternate supervision is nearby. Obviously, different circumstances can require a more visible presence and the foregoing is but one circumstance. However, no evidence was presented to the Inquiry that established that matters at any time had reached a stage where there was a significant or systematic absence of basic supervision. There have been no reports of adverse incidents in the Residence occurring which were contributed to by inadequate supervision. Also, a message board was provided for those parents who wished to leave a message, such as to say that they had called and taken out their daughter for the afternoon.

**7.166** The Inquiry finds that there has been no mistreatment of gymnasts in this respect. However, that is not intended to be dismissive of the annoyance of parents or to suggest that at times the level of visible presence ought not to have been greater, if only for reasons of public relations.

**7.167** The Inquiry finds that there is insufficient evidence to establish Mrs Whitwell's accusation of Mrs Allen not honouring appointments. This allegation is rejected.

**7.168** Mr Gui Planes of Sydney, the leader of a New South Wales parents' group who met with Senator Faulkner on 27 March 1995, told the Inquiry that



*the kids were left alone all weekend, that whenever this lady [Mrs Allen] needed to go out she was going out and the kids were left alone.*

**7.169** Mr Planes had no personal knowledge of such incidents and did not identify his source, but the likely source was Mrs Whitwell.

**7.170** In her written submission, Mrs Whitwell alleged as follows:

*Children left alone in flat (not just on Sundays but at lots of other times).*

**7.171** No particulars of this allegation were provided to the Inquiry.

**7.172** When informed of this allegation, Ms Lincoln said:

*Left alone in the flat. Well, to take that literally, I would say yes, because I didn't live in the flat with the children. I did not sit down with them all the time while they watched television, but that doesn't mean that we weren't next door or on site.*

**7.173** She went on to suggest that children need some personal space and added:

*...you can leave them to watch some television, it doesn't mean that I don't go down every half an hour and check that they're all still watching television.*

**7.174** Other AIS staff, such as Mr Bell, informed the Inquiry that supervision was in place even though a houseparent was not always inside the quarters of the gymnasts.

**7.175** The Inquiry rejects these allegations due to insufficient evidence and for the reasons set out in relation to the immediately preceding set of allegations.

Mrs McTiernan, Mrs Broadbent and Mrs Whitwell alleged that Mrs Allen did not return telephone calls when they left messages on her answering machine.

**7.176** Mrs Broadbent said that "[t]here were several calls we made I never had returned calls for". This was in July 1994 when Mrs Allen was heavily

committed preparing a team departing for the Commonwealth Games. Mr and Mrs Broadbent did not allege any mistreatment of their daughter and regarded this an administrative matter.

7.177 Mrs Whitwell claimed in her written submission that Mrs Allen "didn't return phone calls unless it suited her". Mrs Whitwell identified at least four occasions where she had left messages which Mrs Allen had not returned. All of these occurred in a short space of time leading up to an incident in which Mrs Allen allegedly forced Karinda to call her mother a liar (see below). This incident was alleged to have occurred somewhere between September 1991 and December 1992. Although Mrs Whitwell did not identify other specific occasions where Mrs Allen allegedly did not return telephone calls, it was clear that she had some in mind.

7.178 The following is a series of questions and answers between the Inquirer and Mrs McTiernan:

A. *...Well, I never saw her [Mrs Allen], I never saw the woman. You couldn't talk to the woman, she wouldn't answer phone calls. I don't know what she was doing but then there was no one else to talk to either. So if you wanted to go down and say: oh, okay, can I take her home on such and such a day or whatever, there wasn't anyone to ask.*

Q. *When you said she would not answer phone calls, what...*

A. *She never got back, had contact with you, I'll get back to you.*

Q. *You would leave a message?*

A. *Of course.*

Q. *On the machine or...*

A. *Yes - no, she never got back.*

Q. *Do you think a mobile phone now would help make that better?*

A. *If she wanted to talk to you. If she wanted to talk to you, that's fine.*

**7.179** That Mrs McTiernan is distrustful of Mrs Allen is apparent. Also, there is an undercurrent of dislike. These unfortunate circumstances derive from a conflict between Mrs McTiernan's daughter Lisa and Mrs Allen which will be considered below.

**7.180** Mrs Allen denied any difficulty in relation to Mrs McTiernan or Mrs Whitwell. She said:

*Mrs McTiernan contacted me and spoke to me whenever she thought necessary. Mrs Whitwell, there were very limited conversations. Most of Mrs Whitwell's approaches went straight to Warick or Ju Ping.*

**7.181** The following is a question and answer between the Inquirer and Mrs Allen:

Q. *Would it just have been possible that the kids are having difficult times and mothers are concerned about that and ringing up a fair bit and perhaps not really advancing matters very far, that there would be a temptation maybe to let them wait for a little while before you returned the next call if you felt you had given them a fair go?*

A. *No. The procedure would be to deal with the matter as quickly as possible; not to delay it.*

**7.182** The following is a series of questions and answers between the Inquirer and Ms Lincoln:

Q. *[Did you hear of] any comments that Robyn did not return phone calls unless it suited her?*

A. *Any comments from parents of that? Yeah, I've probably heard parents complain of that.*

Q. *Do you think they were justified complaints?*

A. *I don't know who she phoned and who she didn't phone. I'll say that the parents who I could think of that would be saying those sorts of things that used to do a lot of complaining - some parents you could just never satisfy... [Ms Lincoln did not identify those parents].*

- Q. *So you may not return their calls?*
- A. *Well I wouldn't say you never - I always returned calls, but Robyn sometimes used to say that there were things that had greater priority. She would deal with things because she cared a lot about the children. If the child was in danger or it was concerning the children, it would be dealt with, but there were some times we had so many things to do that you just - I don't know. [Emphasis added.]*
- Q. *You couldn't do everything?*
- A. *Things might be left till the next day, because if you're not getting in there until sort of - well nine, ten o'clock, but depending on what - if a child's sick or something, sometimes you're not in your flat until 10.30, 11.00 o'clock at night, and do you want to ring a parent back then? If it's urgent, of course you would, but if it's concerning, say, an appointment with a schoolteacher or something, you'd leave it for the next day, or - but I don't know who she rang and what her messages were.*

7.183 Ms Mladenovich said that she had never heard of any complaints about telephone calls not being returned. A number of parents of current and former resident gymnasts said they were quite satisfied with communication arrangements and that telephone calls were returned in good time. For example, Mrs Moses said:

*...if you rang she always had an answering machine on if she wasn't actually there, and then she would ring you back.*

7.184 Apart from delays which may have been occasioned by the over-commitment which has been identified earlier and expanded on by Ms Lincoln, the problems are confined to two families. Mrs McTiernan's claim appears to be too broadly stated. The Inquiry is of the view that Mrs McTiernan and Mrs Whitwell believe that Mrs Allen neglected her responsibilities in returning calls, and that Mrs Allen believes enough was done given her other responsibilities. Where the balance lies in relation to these families is impossible to say without much more specific evidence. In any event this is an administrative matter which the Inquiry does not need to resolve. There is no evidence of a systematic problem indicative of neglect of the gymnasts' welfare.

**7.185** The Inquiry is satisfied that no mistreatment of gymnasts has occurred in relation to these allegations.

ii. *Alleged Neglect of Supervision at Night*

**7.186** Three allegations were received concerning inadequate supervision of the girls at night.

**7.187** In her written submission, Mrs Whitwell alleged as follows:

*Children were not allowed to 'disturb' Robyn Allen at night - even when she was on duty. One particular night, a girl was sick and vomited on the floor and bed - Robyn refused to get out of bed to help so the girls cleaned up the mess. There were other such occasions.*

**7.188** In her written submission, Mrs Trentini alleged as follows:

*... on one occasion one of the girls was sick and had vomited. When the other girls phoned through to Robyn they were told to leave a bucket near her bed and that was that.*

**7.189** The Inquiry regarded these as particularly serious allegations.

**7.190** A different impression was gained from Mrs Trentini when she made her oral submission. She said:

*Well, I think what happened was - like, someone was sick and Robyn probably attended to her and saw what she thought was all right and then I think she got sick later on through the night and was vomiting and that is when she just said, "Well, leave the bucket there beside her bed". I do not think she was inattentive, but she did not come in. If that was me - again, I always base everything on what I do, I would have been there.*

**7.191** Further information emerged from the following line of questioning:

*Inquirer: Can you remember who it [the sick girl] was?*



*Mrs Trentini: I do not know.*

*Renee: I do not know.*

*Inquirer: You do not know?*

*Mrs Trentini: Can you remember who it was?*

*Renee: No.*

*Inquirer: Do you remember when it occurred?*

*Renee: No*

*Inquirer: No other details about the incident?*

*Mrs Trentini: No, I cannot remember. I remember Renee telling me and I just cannot remember who it was...*

*Renee: Are you sure it was me or was it Karinda's mother or something? I am pretty sure that it was not me who told you.*

**7.192** The Inquiry has concluded that neither Mrs Trentini nor Renee have any direct knowledge of this alleged incident.

**7.193** Mrs Whitwell said that she could not remember the name of the girl who had been sick or any other significant details of the incident or of the other incidents she alleged occurred. Her daughter Karinda was her source of information and, as discussed above, she was not willing to speak to the Inquiry.

**7.194** More than 10 gymnasts who had lived in the Residence at some time while Karinda Whitwell lived there were interviewed. None of them claimed any knowledge of this incident. Both Mrs Allen and Ms Lincoln denied any knowledge of it too.

**7.195** A number of people who work with Mrs Allen at the AIS described the actions alleged by Mrs Whitwell as being quite out of character for Mrs Allen. Also, the allegations run counter to the standard night-time practice for dealing

with sick children or other emergencies in the Residence. This practice is described above under the heading *Description of the Daily Routine* and has been confirmed as such in interviews with over 15 gymnasts who lived in the residence during the past four years.

**7.196** Aside from Mrs Whitwell's bare accusation there is not the slightest evidence to suggest the happening of the specific incident concerning vomiting or the other occasions to which Mrs Whitwell refers.

**7.197** Mrs Whitwell's more general allegation that "children were not allowed to 'disturb' Robyn Allen at night - even when she was on duty" also runs counter to the established night-time procedure for dealing with sick children or other emergencies. The following is series of questions and answers between the Inquirer and Sonia Brown of Newcastle who lived in the Residence in May and June 1992 and is now 14 years of age:

Q. *Were you ever told that you weren't allowed to disturb her [Mrs Allen] at night?*

A. *No.*

Q. *She never said anything like that?*

A. *No.*

Q. *Did she ever say anything to you like, if you've got any problems at night let me know?*

A. *I think - she - I don't remember her saying that but - but that's what I thought, like, I wouldn't have been nervous waking her up at night.*

**7.198** The substance of Sonia's evidence is typical of that received by the Inquiry from gymnasts. Ms Lincoln denied the allegation. She said:

*I cannot believe that they were told not to disturb Robyn. That is just a lie. They were told not to disturb Robyn when she wasn't on duty because I was the one they should be disturbing because I was on duty. But - and even then they all knew that if they couldn't get one of us they could ring the other one if there was an emergency, and there was another set of houseparents that if, for some unforeseen reason, they couldn't get anyone, which never was the case - but that is just - I can't*

*say it was I lie because I wasn't there, but to me that is a - that's complete rubbish.*

**7.199** Accordingly, the Inquiry rejects all of these allegations made by Mrs Whitwell.

**7.200** Second, Mrs Cleland was critical of the night-time supervision arrangements because a houseparent did not sleep within the walls of the girls' quarters. Mrs Cleland drew on three incidents to support her allegation.

a. Her daughter Melinda said that in July or early August 1994 it snowed at the Residence and the girls went outside into their backyard, pushed a table against the fence, got on the table and looked over the fence at the snow. Melinda stayed in bed, but according to her, the girls remained outside for 15 minutes wearing only their nighties. They did not throw snowballs because there was not enough snow. Mrs Cleland said that Melinda told her that nobody knew the girls had gone outside.

The Inquiry is satisfied that this incident occurred, but not as described. While the Bureau of Meteorology has informed the Inquiry that there was no recorded snow in Canberra during 1994, it is possible that there was a small local fall at the AIS at Bruce which is some distance from the meteorological recording station at Canberra Airport. Kate Lam who was resident at the time and 12 years of age says that snow fell during the middle of last year and that the girls went outside. She says that a houseparent (not Robyn Allen) came out and told them not to be so noisy and to put on warm clothes. It can be assumed that young girls wearing only nighties would not voluntarily withstand zero temperatures for more than a minute or two. Hence, the houseparent's intervention appears to have been rather prompt. The Inquiry is of the view that the estimation of elapsed time by Melinda Cleland who was nine years old and probably a bit drowsy cannot be relied on. This is not in any way to suggest that Melinda has not been honest; it must be recognised that less reliance can be placed on evidence of one so young.

That the houseparent should encourage the girls to view the snow on this occasion is quite proper. Many of them come from warm parts of Australia where snow is unknown and it is a thrill for them to see it.

The Inquiry does not consider that this incident evidences any absence of supervision.

b. Melinda Cleland said that in about July 1994, another girl in the Residence, Ceris van Boxtel, was very ill and had vomited. She said that some of the girls went to Mrs Allen's door to tell her of Ceris' condition. According to Melinda, they could not raise Mrs Allen for "about 10 to 20, 10 to 15 minutes". Once raised, Mrs Allen came in and cared for Ceris.

Mrs Cleland's concern was the period of time elapsed before Mrs Allen could be raised. However, there is insufficient evidence to say that it took so long. Apart from any difficulty that Melinda may have had in estimating time, the suggested range of time does not seem credible. Melinda said that the leader of the girls on this occasion was Nicole Kantek. She is 14 years of age, responsible and the longest serving resident. Nicole was not available for interview on this particular point because of overseas travelling arrangements. However, if she was experiencing difficulty in raising Mrs Allen, the most probable thing that Nicole would have done would have been to seek out another houseparent. Even before that, she would have telephoned. Melinda was inconsistent about whether the telephone was used. She said once that it was not used and then that it was. Mrs Allen has no particular recollection of the incident, but she said that sometimes the girls will say, "We've been here for ages." when the time may be short. It is understandable that for girls presented with the sudden and moderately frightening illness of one their friends, any response from the houseparents will seem to take a long time.

There is quite insufficient evidence for the Inquiry to decide that this incident involved any absence of appropriate care and supervision.

c. On some occasions, Melinda was disturbed at night by girls who talked or got up after having been put to bed. This kind of event was analysed under the heading *Description of the Daily Routine* above and the practices of the houseparents to deal with this type of occurrence were discussed. The incidents mentioned by Mrs Cleland fall squarely within the earlier discussion and need no further consideration.

The Inquiry does not consider that these incidents involve any absence of adequate supervision such that mistreatment has occurred.

7.201 Mr Jackson said that he believed that a direct door from the houseparent's flat to the girls' quarters was desirable; the position should be like what it was in the past. The Inquiry formed the impression that Mrs Allen and AIS management would agree with both Mrs Cleland and Mr Jackson on this point. The new building should resolve this issue. However, the relevant issue for this Inquiry is whether there is any mistreatment inherent in current arrangements. The conclusion has been that there is not. To the extent that there is a difference between what exists and what is desired, it is quite small.

7.202 Third, during her oral submission, Mrs McTiernan referred to a couple of occasions during 1992 on week nights when Mrs Allen had been on duty. She alleged that after the girls' bedtime Mrs Allen had checked to see that the girls' quarters were secure and had then left the immediate vicinity. Mrs McTiernan further alleged that Mrs Allen didn't tell anyone where she was going.

7.203 Mrs McTiernan said she had no idea for what reason Mrs Allen departed or for how long she was gone. She did not identify her source, but it was presumably her daughter Lisa. Lisa had already been interviewed separately and attempts to secure a further interview with her proved fruitless. Lisa had not made any reference to these alleged happenings. Mrs McTiernan would have no way of knowing whether Mrs Allen had made arrangements for another houseparent to keep an eye on the girls' quarters.

7.204 Mrs Allen said that she does have occasion to leave the immediate vicinity of the girls' quarters later in the evening. However, she does not have a car in Canberra and would not be leaving the campus midweek. She said that she might have occasion to speak to Mr Forbes who works late in his office in the gym, to see other houseparents or catch up with someone in the Residence. Mrs Allen says that she informs other houseparents:

*Well, I just tell them what I was doing and where I was going, and come back. The procedure when I come back is to unlock, go and have a look and see how they [the girls] are, and try to get to bed at a reasonable hour.*



**7.205** It is clear from Ms Lincoln's earlier evidence that if an emergency arises, the girls know that they have a number of other houseparents to call on should the on-duty houseparent not be immediately available.

**7.206** Mrs Allen appears to have justifiable reasons to depart the immediate vicinity of the girls' quarters and says she makes appropriate alternative arrangements for supervision. In the absence of further evidence which would establish neglect of Mrs Allen's responsibilities, the Inquiry rejects Mrs McTiernan's allegation.

**7.207** As a general observation on the topic of supervision, a number of people who made submissions had formal qualifications or experience in childcare apart from their interest in gymnastics. They had some exposure to the Residence and were of the opinion that the supervision of the gymnasts was quite satisfactory. To emphasise that Mrs Allen takes supervision seriously, Ms Lincoln mentioned that occasionally she would get into trouble if Mrs Allen thought that the supervision had not been what it ought to be.

*iii. Alleged Personal Unsuitability of Mrs Allen*

**7.208** A small number of allegations were made which may be regarded as going to the suitability of Mrs Allen to fulfil the role of houseparent.

**7.209** The most serious of these concerned Mrs Allen's alleged drinking habits. In her written submission to the Inquiry which mirrored her anonymous letter which had been circulated to the media, Mrs Whitwell said:

*Robyn Allen drinking - children used to guess how many bottles there would be in the bin from the night before.*

**7.210** In her oral submission, Mrs Whitwell expanded on her allegation as follows:

*Robyn Allen drank a lot and they [the girls] would take guesses of how many bottles that she would've drunk, like, on the Friday or the Saturday night depending on whenever on the weekend. They'd - they guess how many bottles and they - 'cause when you*

*got down there - like, when I used to go down and pick Karinda up I'd say: look, where's Robyn? It could be nine, ten o'clock or we might've gone out and come back and there might be two or three children still in the residence and I'd say: well, what have you been doing, and they'd say: nothing, just sitting watching TV, and I'd say: well, where's Robyn? She hasn't come out of bed yet she's probably still drunk.*

7.211 Mrs Whitwell went on to say that sometimes there might be five bottles: assorted wine and Scotch bottles, but not five Scotch bottles. These incidents of drinking were alleged to have occurred when Mrs Allen was on duty. Mrs Whitwell said that Mrs McTiernan had told her that "Robyn had rung her up a few times drunk".

7.212 The source for much of the material contained in Mrs Whitwell's allegations is her daughter. According to her mother, Karinda has refused to speak to the Inquiry.

7.213 In her written submission, Mrs McTiernan made no reference to Robyn Allen drinking. In making her oral submission, the following series of questions and answers occurred:

A. *...Robyn used to like her drinks. I know because she used to ring me up at 11 o'clock at night and tell me about it.*

Q. *What would she say?*

A. *I'm having a scotch, do you want one? I'd say sure, pour me one.*

Q. *That would just be social chit-chat though, would it not?*

A. *Yes, but she did, she was a drinker. She did, she used to drink a lot. I mean that was well known. Lisa used to sit - watch that and laugh and say she used to carry her bottles out in the morning but other girls used to say the same thing. I said, yes, sure, but - yes, she did. I'm not saying that she was drunk, I don't know whether she was drunk, I can't say that but she did, she used to have a lot to drink... Lisa used to say the stupid old bag's carrying out her bottles to the... She used to drink wines and scotches and gins...*

- Q. *Okay, so that could be perhaps consistent with having a couple of visitors in the flat?*
- A. *Exactly, exactly, but the girls you know. But then she's on duty. She was on duty when these things - she shouldn't have been drinking anyway from that point of view.*

**7.214** In her written and oral submissions, Lisa McTiernan did not make any reference to any of the events the object of these allegations.

**7.215** As chance would have it, the order of interview was Lisa McTiernan first, Mrs McTiernan and then Mrs Whitwell. For both Lisa and Mrs McTiernan, the occasion to go over past events proved very emotive and when approaches were made to seek further interviews to discuss matters which had emerged later, no response was received. However, the available evidence is sufficient to deal with the allegations.

**7.216** Notwithstanding what is arguably hinted at by Mrs Whitwell's written allegation, neither Mrs McTiernan nor Mrs Whitwell in their oral submissions said that they had ever witnessed Mrs Allen intoxicated or hungover. Mrs Whitwell's statement that Mrs McTiernan had told her that Mrs Allen had telephoned late at night when drunk is inconsistent with Mrs McTiernan's oral evidence to the Inquiry.

**7.217** At their widest the allegations are that Mrs Allen drank a lot, drank when on duty at night and, in Mrs Whitwell's case, Mrs Allen was not out and about and doing things with the girls because she was hungover.

**7.218** Mrs Allen does not claim to be a teetotaller. She does not drink beer or wine. Occasionally she has a scotch. Present and former work colleagues and parents sprang to her defence. They denied ever having seen her drunk, hungover or incapacitated in any way in terms of performing her functions as a houseparent. For example, Ms Lincoln who was the assistant houseparent over the two years to which the allegations principally apply said the following when informed of Mrs Whitwell's written allegation (Ms Lincoln was interviewed before Mrs Whitwell):

*Well, that's absolutely appalling, and I never ever heard the children do that...I never heard the children do anything like that, playing a game or anything - never known Robyn to be drunk*

*when on duty. I don't even think I've ever - I've known her to have drinks, but she was never on duty. I was on duty.*

**7.219** Ms Lincoln went on to say that she had never seen Mrs Allen drunk at any time. Ms Christine Canning who was a tutor at the AIS for all of Mrs Allen's time there until recently said she had an occasional drink with Mrs Allen in her flat, but had never seen her drunk. Mr Bell found the allegation "surprising".

**7.220** Mrs Allen denied the allegations. She said:

*I have never been drunk. I don't drink on duty. I have friends in occasionally when I have time off and they may come for dinner or something.*

**7.221** No past or present gymnast who was interviewed mentioned any problem associated with Mrs Allen being drunk, hungover or drinking while on duty. Mrs Whitwell identified Lisa McTiernan, Nicole Kantek and Kate Lam as having participated in the game of bottle counting. Kate Lam emphatically denied having done so. Nicole Kantek was not able to be interviewed on this point due to overseas travel. However, Mrs Kantek had no knowledge of it and felt certain that Nicole would have mentioned any problem because she "tells you everything" that happens in the Residence.

**7.222** The Inquiry does not discount the possibility that on one or more occasions some of the girls (most probably Lisa McTiernan and Karinda Whitwell) have seen Mrs Allen take out a few empty bottles from her flat following a visit from friends (Mrs Allen she had nothing to hide in that respect) and this has been the occasion for making the kind of comments which Mrs McTiernan attributes to her daughter. Such comments are childish and nasty. Mrs McTiernan herself is clearly and appropriately wary of them. The reasons why such comments might be made are complex and will be considered below. However, it is worth noting at this stage that, according to Ms Lincoln, Lisa McTiernan and Karinda Whitwell were "as thick as thieves". It was obvious to the Inquiry that Lisa bore Mrs Allen a strong resentment. The Inquiry suspects that Karinda was of a similar disposition.

**7.223** There is nothing in the evidence presented to the Inquiry to suggest that Mrs Allen has any drinking problem and is therefore unsuitable for her role as a houseparent.

**7.224** The allegations that Mrs Allen had been drinking while on duty or was neglectful of her duties because she was hungover are little more than bare general assertions. They are inconsistent with strong evidence from other witnesses. Accordingly, the Inquiry rejects these allegations.

**7.225** A small number of critical comments were made concerning Mrs Allen's personality and fitness for the role of houseparent. These were decisively outweighed by the plaudits. Due to her lengthy period as the senior houseparent at the AIS and her prominence in gymnastics circles by virtue of her daughter Monique, Mrs Allen is one of those people - at least within gymnastics - about whom many feel entitled and qualified to have an opinion. Also, nearly everyone has a view of the ideal houseparent and inevitably some of Mrs Allen's characteristics will fit that mould and others will not.

**7.226** Of the small number of critical comments, some were obviously unthinking, most were trivial and those that were not trivial were patently motivated by ill will and did not come within the terms of reference of the Inquiry. Some arose simply because there had been a clash of personalities, however minor. It is not appropriate to report them in detail.

**7.227** Mrs Allen was interviewed over a very long day in trying circumstances for her. There have been various supplementary discussions. At all times she acquitted herself well. From these contacts and the reports of those who had been in contact with her at the AIS, no impression was gained that anything in her personality or behaviour makes her unfit to continue to assume the very responsible position of houseparent.

*iv. Alleged Neglect to Arrange for Medical Care*

**7.228** Three allegations of this type were made.

**7.229** First, Mrs Whitwell alleged that Mrs Allen had refrained from organising grief counselling for her daughter Karinda. Mrs Whitwell made a long and detailed submission on this allegation. Its substance is as follows. Karinda's father died in early December 1992. Mrs Whitwell was concerned that Karinda may need assistance in dealing with her father's death, especially because she was living away from home. Within days of the death, she spoke to a number of staff in the gymnastics program including Mrs Allen and Mr Forbes and was



assured that counselling could be organised if needed. It was arranged that no steps in that respect would be taken until Karinda indicated her willingness to be counselled. Mrs Whitwell was satisfied with these arrangements. While it is not entirely clear, some months into 1993 Mrs Whitwell spoke to Mrs Allen, confirmed arrangements and suggested that it would be soon that Karinda would need counselling. It is claimed that Karinda asked Mrs Allen around the middle of the year to organise the counselling. Allegedly, nothing was done. Karinda made two more requests with no result. Mrs Whitwell spoke to Mr Forbes on two occasions in the second half of 1993 and he said that he would follow it up. Mrs Whitwell claims that he did not do so. Karinda's emotional upset reached a head shortly after the anniversary of her father's death and Mrs Whitwell told her daughter to ask Mrs Allen again. Karinda said she did, but in a conversation between Mrs Whitwell and Mrs Allen at the AIS in mid-December 1993, Mrs Allen denied that Karinda had asked her. Mrs Whitwell told Karinda to ask again that day and saw her go up to Mrs Allen and speak with her in the gym. Mrs Whitwell telephoned Mrs Allen a couple of days later to discover what arrangements had been made and Mrs Allen denied that Karinda had made the request. Mrs Whitwell approached Mr Forbes again and he said he would see what could be organised. About the beginning of March 1994, Mrs Whitwell saw Mr Forbes at the AIS and an appointment was made for Karinda to see Ms Vicki de Prazer, an AIS psychologist who was working with the gymnasts. According to her mother, Karinda was very happy with Ms de Prazer and felt she was being helped. Mrs Whitwell said her daughter described Ms de Prazer as "fantastic". Shortly afterwards and very abruptly Karinda left the AIS. She has refused to discuss matters with her mother other than to say she was not prepared to stay and wanted to go home.

**7.230** Mrs Allen's version of events is different and not as detailed, especially in relation to dates. It is easiest to quote Mrs Allen:

*Karinda was always unhappy and wanted to leave and Mrs Whitwell rang me and thought that the reason that she was wanting to leave was because that she was grieving over the death in the family and asked me if I could organise something. And I said I would see what I could do.... I approached Dr McDonald and spoke to him about the situation.... he was not quite sure whether the counsellors that we had at the Institute were appropriate for grief counselling and...it was really something that Karinda had to request, not her mother... [W]e came to the arrangement that Karinda would come and ask and I spoke to Karinda and I said,*

*"Your mum's rung me about this and if you want it you can see Warren McDonald or you can come and see myself and we'll organise it for you", and we left it there. And Karinda never came and asked about it.*

**7.231** Mrs Allen went on to say that Mrs Whitwell rang a second time. In response Mrs Allen saw Dr McDonald who found out about some outside counsellors but Mrs Whitwell was concerned about the cost. Mrs Whitwell spoke to Dr McDonald direct and it was arranged that Karinda would see Ms de Prazer from the AIS. Mrs Allen added:

And I actually approached Karinda in the gym and said, "Your mum's spoken to me again. Would you like me to organise something?" and I think, actually, Karinda's mum was in the observation centre watching, and Karinda said, "Yes", and I spoke to Vicki.

**7.232** Mr Forbes' evidence was brief and generally supported Mrs Allen version of events. He made no reference to the earlier requests as alleged by Mrs Whitwell. He made the following comments in relation to his role.

Just prior to going to the World Championships in April [1994], this whole issue of grief counselling had come up and Mrs Whitwell had contacted me, I contacted Warren McDonald ... and I said, "Well, can we do - you know, this is - we're at crisis point. Can we contact Vicki?" So Vicki was engaged in the counselling of Karinda.

**7.233** There is agreement among all three witnesses as to some key facts. The AIS would help in relation to grief counselling in connection with her father's death, but nothing would be done until Karinda took the initiative. Karinda understood that she had to ask Mrs Allen before anything would happen. Grief counselling was provided in March or early April 1994 by an AIS psychologist, Ms de Prazer.

**7.234** Any concern over possible mistreatment of Karinda derives from the alleged delay of about eight months from the time when she is said to have asked for grief counselling until when it was provided. It might be expected that once Karinda had indicated that she wished to discuss her grief, she would be given the opportunity within days. Prima facie, a delay of eight months is serious neglect of her welfare.

7.235 However, such a delay is incredible. There is nothing to even suggest that it was intentional. To organise the counselling, it should have involved a few hours work extending over, say, a week at the very most: perhaps arrangements had to be cleared with Mrs Whitwell, messages left and an appointment made at a convenient time to all concerned. Mr Forbes' reference to "crisis point" suggests a realisation on his part that action had to be rapid. Thus, a delay of eight months seems inexplicable. Also, if events were unfolding as Mrs Whitwell suggests, it might be expected that she would simply make her own arrangements. On her own evidence, she was in Canberra frequently enough for that to occur.

7.236 On the other hand, there is some evidence of delay. Mrs Allen said:

*... and Mrs Whitwell rang me the second time and I went back and spoke to Warren McDonald again and he went and got a name of an outside counsellor appreciating some time had sort of got past - I do not know, weeks or something.*

7.237 Then she went on to discuss Mrs Whitwell's concern over cost which has been mentioned above. That may have caused some delay too. However, delays of this nature do not explain the alleged period of eight months.

7.238 Mr Forbes' involvement might suggest that he had to act because Mrs Allen was inactive. However, it was clear to the Inquiry that Mrs Whitwell's method was to approach numerous people at the AIS almost simultaneously.

7.239 Notwithstanding that Mrs Whitwell was confident in presenting her evidence and had an impressive recollection of the detail of events, the claim remains puzzling.

7.240 The key issue is whether Karinda asked Mrs Allen to organise counselling as early as July or August 1993 and at subsequent times as Mrs Whitwell says she did, or whether Karinda did not make her request until much later when she was on the floor in the gymnasium and her mother was watching from the observation gallery as Mrs Allen says she did.

7.241 At no stage was Mrs Whitwell actually in a position to hear Karinda ask Mrs Allen to make an appointment to see the counsellor. Mrs Whitwell's evidence of what Karinda is alleged to have said is hearsay. Although Mrs

Allen is an impressive witness and appeared honest, if there was a long delay of the order of eight months in organising counselling, it is conceivable although quite unlikely that she would be motivated to conceal it by alleging that Karinda had not asked for assistance until much later. However, the existence of such a motive is contingent on a delay of that order having occurred. As discussed above, that delay is incredible.

**7.242** More importantly, Karinda has not presented any evidence to the Inquiry. According to her mother she refuses to do so. The Inquiry has proceeded on the basis that the rules of evidence which apply in a court of law do not govern the Inquiry in all their respects. This has permitted receipt of hearsay evidence, especially in regard to establishing lines of investigation. However, the weight which can be attached to hearsay evidence in making any decisions must be appropriately discounted. Mrs Whitwell was informed of this and presumably Karinda has become aware of it as well. Nevertheless, her mother says she remains unwilling to present her own evidence.

**7.243** There is a further difficulty with the evidence. Dr McDonald and Ms de Prazer may be able to shed light on matters because they will have records of important dates and could comment on their impressions of Karinda and her condition. Such matters are governed by medical confidentiality. The Inquiry sought permission to access those records. Mrs Whitwell promised that permission on a number of occasions and claims to have completed and sent to the AIS Director of Medicine (Dr Fricker) two consent forms which were supplied by the Inquiry. He claims not to have received either. Arrangements were then made for the consent to be provided to the Inquiry's office direct. The detail of events is tortuous and does not bear elaboration, but in the end no consent form has been received by the Inquiry and whatever evidence is held by the medical people has been unavailable to the Inquiry.

**7.244** Nevertheless, there is some weak evidence to suggest an inappropriate delay. Mrs Allen said that Karinda told her that she wanted to see the counsellor when she was on the floor of the gymnasium on a day when Karinda's mother was in the observation gallery. Mrs Whitwell refers to a very similar occasion, but said that two days later Mrs Allen denied having been told by Karinda that she wanted to see the counsellor. If the two women are speaking of the same occasion and Mrs Whitwell is correct in placing the time of this event as in mid-December 1993, a period of up to slightly in excess of three months elapsed before Karinda received counselling. That there was

some delay is possibly supported by Mrs Allen's evidence, although she speaks of "weeks or something". However, this is potentially ambiguous because she could have been referring to the time between when Dr McDonald was first asked to offer guidance and when Karinda<sup>s</sup> said she was ready for assistance, rather than the time from Karinda's request to when the counselling was provided. In any event by this time, a delay of few weeks may have had no discernible adverse effect on Karinda, although that is a matter for speculation. Again, without evidence from Karinda and access to the medical files pursuit of this avenue of investigation is pointless.

**7.245** There is insufficient evidence to prove the allegation and it must be rejected.

**7.246** It should be said that while this allegation is rejected for the stated reasons, it has come to the attention of the Inquiry that there was a possible motive for Karinda to be untruthful to her mother about telling Mrs Allen that she was ready to see a counsellor. That motive might also explain some of Karinda's allegations in relation to other matters. The existence of the motive rests on circumstantial evidence and is to some degree speculative. The Inquiry has endeavoured to decide as many allegations as possible without any reference to that possible motive. If accepted it would be an additional reason for rejecting this allegation about counselling. The possible motive will be discussed below.

**7.247** Second, Mrs McTiernan alleged that Mrs Allen was responsible for holding up an operation on her daughter's arm by six weeks because she had neglected to book the hospital. The basis of this allegation was that upon becoming aware of a delay she claimed to have been told by Mr Forbes that Mrs Allen was, in Mrs McTiernan's words, "supposed to have organised the hospital".

**7.248** Mrs Allen denied any neglect. She said that she had no responsibility for or involvement with organising hospital bookings: that was the province of the sports medicine people at the AIS. She has an incidental role as an escort and "taxi driver" where necessary. That responsibility for hospital bookings was not within her role was confirmed by other AIS staff.



**7.249** Mrs Allen was unaware of any delay in Lisa McTiernan undergoing surgery.

**7.250** Whether there was any unjustifiable delay caused by an AIS employee other than Mrs Allen which amounted to mistreatment of Lisa cannot be determined on the available evidence. The relevant evidence is in Lisa McTiernan's AIS medical records and a request to her to authorise access to those records has gone unanswered.

**7.251** This allegation is rejected on the available evidence.

**7.252** Third, Mrs McTiernan alleged that her daughter was required to be in receipt of calcium and iron tablets and that these had been dispensed in her name by the AIS pharmacy. However, Mrs Allen had not given these to Lisa.

**7.253** Mrs Allen said that it was normal practice for her to have safe custody of such supplements (including vitamin C tablets) for the girls in the Residence. The procedures for safe custody, dispensing and return to the pharmacy of surplus quantities were discussed. These procedures appeared to be satisfactory.

**7.254** Mrs Allen denied that any supplements had been withheld. Lisa McTiernan made no reference to these matters in her written or oral submission and, as indicated above, did not respond to attempts to organise a follow-up interview after her mother had raised the issue. There may be relevant evidence in Lisa McTiernan's AIS medical records and a request to her to authorise access to those records has gone unanswered.

**7.255** The allegation is extraordinary. No reason was advanced for the alleged behaviour.

**7.256** The Inquiry rejects this allegation.

*v. Lack of Discipline, Particularly in Relation to Alleged Theft*

**7.257** A small number of incidents were drawn to the attention of the Inquiry where it was alleged that items of relatively small value had been stolen from gymnasts in the Residence by other gymnasts. In another case, a camera was

alleged to have been stolen from a houseparent. There was no suggestion that the houseparents or other AIS staff were responsible for the thefts.

**7.258** In those circumstances, it is not immediately apparent how the alleged thefts fall within the terms of reference. However, it was suggested that they were indicative of a general absence of control in the Residence or were linked to allegations concerning secret meetings (discussed below). Accordingly, the allegations will be dealt with from those perspectives.

**7.259** A further allegation concerned the role of a houseparent in the lending of money by one gymnast to others. A suggestion arose that pressure had been exerted to bring about the loan.

**7.260** Finally, some girls were accused of shoplifting. This led to allegations concerning secrecy and victimisation which will be considered in following sections. However, the details of the shoplifting and how it was handled will be considered in this section.

**7.261 1. Theft** Monique Allen who lived in the Residence from when it was opened in 1986 until late 1992 said that theft was an intermittent problem. It would be surprising to the Inquiry if the typical and largely unavoidable problems of theft which are encountered in residential Australia were not to some degree replicated in the Residence. The houseparents and a number of girls said that thefts were more likely to occur when visiting groups came through. The items which might go missing would be very small sums of money, clothes and lollies. A number of cases of such alleged theft were drawn to the Inquiry's attention, but it was not always clear whether these were thefts or instances where the item had been lost or mislaid. In that part of the gymnasts' quarters where the accommodation is in the form of interconnecting rooms (dormitory style), there is greater scope for theft than where the girls have their own lockable rooms.

**7.262** A number of precautionary measures are in place: valuable items such as cash and ATM cards can be given to the houseparents for safekeeping; recently a lock-up room has been created; girls are discouraged by the houseparents from bringing in lots of valuable items and are told to take special care of wallets and other valuables; and the existence of the safekeeping facilities is mentioned to the parents. Various gymnasts and the houseparents drew the Inquiry's attention to those precautionary measures.

**7.263** Some of the girls have small lockable cashboxes. External physical security arrangements were claimed to be satisfactory. The houseparents appear to keep a watchful eye on happenings. The girls are educated in appropriate standards of behaviour, if there is a particular problem (such as when a large group of new girls may come in) it may be discussed at a meeting of the girls, and on one occasion police public relations officers from Belconnen assisted in that regard.

**7.264** Notwithstanding some specific occurrences being drawn to the Inquiry's attention, no impression was gained that theft inside the gymnasts' quarters was rife or that it was allowed to occur without proper investigation or precautionary measures. A significant number of the gymnasts who had lived in the Residence said that they had not had any personal experience of being the victims of theft. Mrs Allen said that sometimes one girl might eat a lolly or pick up 20 up cents belonging to another girl. This is the kind of incident that can occur between brothers and sisters in some households. Ms Lincoln said that if she had caught such a girl she would have made her return or replace the item and given her a "lecture" on the issue. However, she never had occasion to do so. Sometimes children (and adults) can spend money and then forget that they have done so. Ms Mladenovich commented that sometimes a girl will think that she has had a possession stolen when she has merely misplaced it or hidden it so well she cannot find it. Mrs Allen added that the girl may not wish to take responsibility for having lost it herself. Also, it may be convenient to say that money has been stolen or lent to others and not returned when the girl has in fact spent more than she should have.

**7.265** Four significant instances of alleged theft occurring over the past five years were drawn to the Inquiry's attention. They involved the unauthorised use of an ATM card (the gymnast had written her PIN on a piece of paper which was with the card in her wallet, but neither card nor wallet were taken permanently), the loss of a large and valued doll, the theft of a camera from a houseparent and the forcing open of a locked cashbox (it is unclear whether anything was stolen from the box). There was no evidence to suggest who had been responsible for the use of the ATM card or the opening of the cashbox. A girl was suspected of having stolen the doll but upon investigation by the houseparents, that suspicion proved inconclusive. The Inquiry interviewed all relevant persons in relation to the doll's loss and concluded that the houseparents took matters as far as was appropriate. The alleged theft of the camera was resolved and it was recovered by the owner. This incident was

raised with the family of the gymnast concerned. It formed part of a wider, complex personal problem, but the Inquiry is satisfied that appropriate counselling has occurred from both AIS and external sources in relation to her overall situation.

**7.266** Mrs Whitwell in her written submission alleged:

*A lot of stealing went on in the flat. Those responsible were not punished.*

**7.267** To support her allegation Mrs Whitwell did not offer any evidence which has not already been referred to above. The Inquiry considers her first sentence to be an exaggeration. To the extent that the second sentence implies that the identity of offenders was known but nothing was done to bring them to account, the Inquiry rejects that allegation.

**7.268 2. Loan** One instance was drawn to the Inquiry's attention where a girl had lent money to other gymnasts and had not been repaid before she left the AIS. In the process, doubt was cast on the appropriateness of the houseparent's role in the lending of the money. Melinda Cleland said that one evening when the girls were going shopping, some of the girls wanted to borrow some money. According to Melinda, Mrs Allen did not have any money to lend and said to the girls, "Melinda will give it to you." Melinda said she gave one girl \$25 and another \$10. At the time of the interview, she was a little confused as to the amounts and did not remember the names of the girls. The Inquiry places this incident as occurring in late July 1994.

**7.269** Mrs Allen does not recall having asked Melinda to lend the girls money. When asked whether she had any recollection of the events described by Melinda, Mrs Allen said:

*No, and I would not do that. I would not do that at all. I often lend the girls money out of my own wallet, and sometimes the girls offer to lend each other money... the kids often jump up - some kids would not lend anybody anything - and they will say, 'Oh, I'll lend you some money.'*

**7.270** Mrs Allen later added:

*I discourage it [the lending of money]. I do not think it is a very good practice. I think that - I do not like it at all. I often say to them, if you need to borrow money, borrow it off me... Because there are people that do leave with no intention of paying somebody back.*

**7.271** When girls lend each other money, a whiteboard in the girls' quarters is used to record who owes what to whom.

**7.272** Mrs Allen's practice is not open to criticism in connection with any possible mistreatment of gymnasts, and nothing was brought to the Inquiry's attention which would suggest that it is not followed as a general matter.

**7.273** However, there is the incident raised by Melinda. It would be quite inappropriate for a houseparent to exert pressure on a young girl to lend other girls sums of money, especially what were in the circumstances such large sums. There is a conflict of evidence between Mrs Allen and Melinda in relation to the specific incident. There are no other identifiable witnesses. Melinda impressed the Inquiry favourably as a young person and there is no specific reason to believe that she would be dishonest. However, she had neither a full nor a clear recollection of the incident. Also, in relation to other evidence, the Inquiry was satisfied that her recollection could not be relied upon as always accurate. Comparing the girls of her age which the Inquiry interviewed, Melinda was among the less mature. On the other hand, Mrs Allen denies any recollection of the incident and says that she would not act in the way alleged. There are a number of possible explanations as to how the money came to be lent including that Melinda may have been asked by the girls direct and without Mrs Allen's knowledge, an adult other than Mrs Allen may have been involved, and Melinda may have volunteered to lend the money when she knew the others were in need.

**7.274** The Inquiry has decided that there is insufficient evidence to substantiate this allegation. Accordingly, it is rejected.

**7.275 3. Shoplifting** About February or March of 1992, a person working in a newsagency in the Belconnen Mall mentioned to Mrs Allen that her little group of girls was picking up things and not paying for them. Mrs Allen did not



witness this but she had her suspicions<sup>52</sup> and had no reason to believe that she was not being told the truth. It was apparent that the newsagency did not wish to take matters further and that Mrs Allen's intervention would be regarded by them as a sufficient response to the problem.\* Mrs Allen and the AIS gymnasts are a regular and well-known group at the Mall on Friday nights. It might be expected that they attract interest and a certain amount of affection.

7.276 Also, Mrs Allen said that she was approached by one of the younger gymnasts and told that other girls were engaged in shoplifting. According to Mrs Allen, this little girl was feeling pressure to join in. Mrs Allen refused to identify that gymnast to the Inquiry.

7.277 Mrs Allen called a meeting of all the girls who were involved. She told them that she knew what was going on. She explained to them that one of three things could be done: "promise me that this will never happen again, and you're just grounded"; she could tell their parents; or she could take the matter to the Director of the AIS for formal action. "Grounding" is not being allowed to go to the Mall and is regarded by the girls as a significant deprivation of privilege. According to Mrs Allen, all admitted to the shoplifting and it was decided by them unanimously that the first option would apply and they were grounded for one or two weeks - Mrs Allen cannot recall precisely.

7.278 Arising out of this incident, one girl has alleged to the Inquiry that she was falsely accused. The mother of another girl has alleged that her daughter was falsely accused. They are Lisa McTiernan and Mrs Whitwell respectively.

7.279 Mrs Whitwell's complaint will be dealt with first. Mrs Whitwell said:

*... Robyn said to her [Karinda] at this meeting, go into your room and put in a bag what you stole so we can give it back, or something to that effect. She went away and said to Cindy [Ms Lincoln], because Cindy was there at the time, I didn't take anything, what am I supposed to do? And Cindy said just put something in a bag and give it to Robyn, that will make her happy... She took a bag back to Robyn, gave it to her and Robyn*

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52 According to Ms Lincoln, those suspicions arose from comments of people Mrs Allen knew at the Mall or other people connected with the AIS who shop at the Mall.

*said, "I could have gone to de Castella [the Director of the AIS] and had you kicked out of the AIS for stealing. Karinda - before she actually went and got this stuff she said that she hadn't done it... I then confronted Robyn about it and she said that she had stolen something, I asked her what, she didn't know. I said, okay if she stole something then call the police because I don't believe in stealing. Oh, no, no, no, no, we don't want to do that, we don't want to do that. I [Mrs Allen] have cautioned her now and it's all over and I said, "Well, you know, you're accusing my daughter of something that's illegal and if you're not willing to call the police then, you know, don't say stuff like this" and it was all dropped, it was never brought up after that.*

**7.280** There is a puzzling aspect to this account. If Karinda had given the bag of allegedly stolen items to Mrs Allen as Mrs Whitwell says, why would Mrs Allen not know what had been stolen? Another point is that Mrs Whitwell was aware only that alleged stealing was involved, not that it involved shoplifting.

**7.281** Immediately after Mrs Whitwell recounted to the Inquiry her version of the conversation with Mrs Allen, she was asked if she had told Karinda what she had told Mrs Allen. Mrs Whitwell said she had, and she was then asked what had been her daughter's reaction.

*She was really upset, she didn't want me to go to - go to Robyn and say anything at all, because she said she would get paid back for it [from Mrs Allen].*

**7.282** Mrs Allen said that two mothers telephoned her in connection with the incident. Their daughters had mentioned it and they wished to discuss it with her. Neither was Mrs Whitwell, and Mrs Allen specifically denied speaking to her about the incident.

**7.283** To support her accusation of shoplifting Mrs Allen had as evidence the information from the newsagent and the young gymnast (who was not identified to the Inquiry) as well as her own suspicions. All of that was allegedly confirmed by the confessions of the girls at the meeting. According to Mrs Allen, Karinda later handed over some stolen items. She said she received:

*A plastic ruler and little bits and pieces of no consequence and I said, 'Is that all?' and she [Karinda] said, 'I ate the rest' so I assumed it was lollies.*

7.284 When this incident occurred, Ms Lincoln had not been at the AIS all that long. She does not recall attending the meeting, although she does not completely discount the possibility that she was there. Mrs Allen thinks she was there. Ms Lincoln knows that a meeting occurred about shoplifting. If she did not attend, Ms Lincoln knows that Mrs Allen spoke to her about what had happened shortly afterwards. According to Ms Lincoln, Mrs Allen confronted the girls with the accusation of shoplifting and presented them with the option of taking the incident to their parents or imposing the punishment of grounding. While not sure, Ms Lincoln thinks a further option of taking matters to the Director of the AIS was mentioned.

7.285 Ms Lincoln said the following occurred on a Friday night shortly after the meeting. Karinda had been given a bag by Mrs Allen and told that she had to place in it the items that she had taken. Ms Lincoln was coming on duty and Mrs Allen was off for the weekend. Mrs Allen emphasised to Ms Lincoln that Karinda had to put the items in the bag. In Ms Lincoln's opinion, Mrs Allen was pressing Karinda hard to produce the stolen goods. Mrs Allen went away for a while and Ms Lincoln sat down to talk things through with Karinda. Karinda was very, very upset. She denied the shoplifting strongly. When Mrs Allen returned, Ms Lincoln indicated that she thought Karinda may not have stolen anything. Mrs Allen said she had proof and that Ms Lincoln should not be fooled. Karinda had to produce what she had taken. Mrs Allen left. Again Ms Lincoln sat down with Karinda and talked through the issues. In the course of a relatively long and non-confrontational counselling session Karinda told Ms Lincoln that she had taken lollies. She was frightened because Mrs Allen was pressing hard for her to produce the items and she was not able to do so because she had eaten them all. She did not know what to do. Ms Lincoln then suggested that Karinda put some items in the bag to satisfy Mrs Allen, and that was done. They consisted of a plastic ruler and some other things. These were items that Karinda had not stolen, but Ms Lincoln suspects that Karinda had taken some other small items which were not edible. Ms Lincoln never told Mrs Allen of this turn of events.

7.286 Ms Lincoln's evidence corroborates both Mrs Allen's and Mrs Whitwell's evidence in many significant respects. However, whereas Karinda told Ms

Lincoln that she had taken some lollies she told her mother everything other than that, and denied the theft and she appears not to have mentioned that the nature of the theft was shoplifting. Ms Lincoln told the Inquiry that Karinda was one of her favourites, but a sad girl. Ms Lincoln considers that it was one of her triumphs that she managed to get Karinda to smile as time went on. Ms Lincoln was adamant that Karinda had told her that she had stolen lollies and Ms Lincoln was confident that Karinda was telling her the truth. She said that this episode was the beginning of quite a good relationship between the two of them. That Ms Lincoln had a good rapport with Karinda was in various ways supported by Mrs Whitwell's evidence.

**7.287** There is little doubt that Mrs Allen sought to deal with the incident in a secretive fashion. According to Ms Lincoln, Mrs Allen would have preferred not to get the parents or the AIS Director involved. Mrs Allen told the Inquiry that she was trying to protect the girls. She thought that it was a "trivial incident that was over and done with." However, she did inform Mr Forbes, but not Mrs Tian.

**7.288** The Inquiry must decide whether Karinda was mistreated in relation to the accusation of shoplifting. This issue has been examined from two aspects.

**7.289** First, did Mrs Allen follow a procedure which was fair in the circumstances? This was not a court of law or a disciplinary tribunal. It was akin to a case of family discipline where informality and parental authority are the order of the day. Mrs Allen had cause to act, the girls knew what it was about and they had the opportunity to participate in the process of deciding what to do. They were given the option of dealing with it there and then in a summary fashion or of taking it to higher authority. According to Mrs Allen, they jointly decided to deal with matters immediately by way of a promise of good behaviour and deprivation of privileges as punishment. That the girls so decided is inconsistent with the initial denial by Karinda to Ms Lincoln and with the continuing denial by Lisa McTieman (see below). However, some would have agreed and there was probably some degree of acquiescence by the rest. A possible criticism was that Mrs Allen merely said that she knew what was going on in relation to shoplifting and did not spell things out. Such an absence of particulars of the accusation would be fatal in a court or tribunal. Yet in a quasi-family situation involving young children and where houseparent authority needs to be considerable, the Inquiry does not believe that the approach taken



was fatally flawed. Parents do not have to hold court-like hearings with their young children.

**7.290** Second, is there sufficient evidence of Karinda being involved in shoplifting? Mrs Allen had the reports from the newsagent and the young gymnast. These are hearsay as far as the Inquiry is concerned, but there is no substantial reason to suspect that those reports were not made or are not true. Also, there is the confessional evidence.

**7.291** On the other hand, Mrs Whitwell has said that Karinda denied to her that she was involved in stealing. Karinda has refused to speak to the Inquiry.

**7.292** Ms Lincoln's evidence is very important. In presenting her evidence she always impressed as honest. While forthright, she had a balanced perspective on events. She was careful to identify the limits of her recollection. Of all the witnesses who had close knowledge of events in the Residence, she was most the independent. Ms Lincoln's evidence is to be preferred.

**7.293** Also, recalling Mrs Whitwell's challenge to Mrs Allen to call in the police,<sup>53</sup> there could be another reason as to why Karinda may have been very upset over this apart from anticipated payback; namely, she had been engaged in shoplifting. Also, if she knew that her mother held very firm views on such matters, there would be added motive to deny any responsibility.

**7.294** A further piece of evidence which might implicate Karinda in shoplifting was drawn to the Inquiry's attention. Kate Lam who had just arrived in the Residence at that time, told the Inquiry that before matters came to a head with the meeting, she had walked around a Coles Supermarket at Belconnen with Karinda. Karinda took a chocolate called something like a "Wobbly" from the shelf, walked around the supermarket, ate the Wobbly and did not pay for it. Kate said she told her mother about this just after it happened and Mrs Lam confirmed that to be the case. Kate denied telling anyone else about this happening. While the Inquiry makes no suggestion as to the truthfulness of this evidence, it chooses not to rely on it because it is surrounded by circumstances

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53 A telephone conversation to this effect is denied by Mrs Allen. It is not necessary to make a decision on whether or not a conversation occurred in these terms, but for the purposes of the present discussion it will be assumed that did occur.



which are controversial. Kate and Karinda had a stormy friendship. Mrs Whitwell accused Kate of having stolen a small item from Karinda. On the other hand, Ms Lincoln said that Kate tended to be a scapegoat for thieving accusations when things went missing in the Residence. Also, Karinda has not had the opportunity to respond to this claim. Matters can be resolved without any reliance on this evidence.

**7.295** In these circumstances, the Inquiry rejects the allegation that Karinda Whitwell was mistreated in relation to the issue of shoplifting.

**7.296** Lisa McTiernan told the Inquiry that she was accused of shoplifting in 1992 by Mrs Allen and banned from the Mall for three weeks. There is no doubt that she was referring to the same incident which involved Karinda Whitwell. There was no opportunity to question Lisa on the details of the meeting of the girls and Mrs Allen as recounted by Mrs Allen because these emerged later and Lisa was not available for further interview. Lisa said that she denied any involvement at the time and has maintained that denial.

**7.297** The Inquiry suspects that any possible acquiescence by Lisa in the grounding was because she felt she had no choice. Above, it was decided that the procedures adopted by Mrs Allen did not involve mistreatment of the girls and, in particular, were not fatally flawed because Mrs Allen did not elaborate on the particulars of the shoplifting. As the oldest girl, Lisa was probably more willing and able to test Mrs Allen's authority. Obviously, she would not wish to reveal the identity of her young informant for reasons of confidentiality and concern about possible intimidation. However, in the face of Lisa's continuing denial, there is something to be said for the desirability of Mrs Allen confronting Lisa with better evidence. Yet, that criticism is insufficient to fatally flaw the whole process in all the circumstances.

**7.298** The Inquiry does not have as powerful evidence before it of Lisa's involvement in shoplifting as is the case with Karinda Whitwell. Ms Lincoln could not provide any relevant evidence. However, Mrs Allen obviously had accurate information about shoplifting, and after having interviewed Lisa generally and taken Mrs Allen's evidence into account, the Inquiry is not prepared to say that Mrs Allen acted without justification in disciplining Lisa.

7.299 A final observation can be made in relation to Mrs Allen's attempt to keep this incident secret.<sup>54</sup> Mrs Whitwell was angered when she learned that her daughter was being punished secretly over a serious matter which her daughter denied. The Inquiry believes that viewed from her position she had some justification for her anger. While the scale of theft was small and notwithstanding what Mrs Allen may think about it being a trivial incident, the imputation was serious. The number of girls involved made it serious. On the other hand, the unwillingness of the newsagency to pursue the matter and the fact that young girls acting together can do silly things which are out of character individually, are matters which would suggest a low-key approach. What is best to do is a difficult question.

7.300 By acting in secret as she did, Mrs Allen left herself open to the suggestion that she had endeavoured to protect herself and the AIS from embarrassment. Such an incident could be expected to attract unpleasant attention in gymnastics circles and in the media and to raise questions as to whether or not she was supervising the children in a proper fashion. When this was put to her during her interview, Mrs Allen hotly denied the suggestion. By way of corroboration, Ms Lincoln said that Mrs Allen had expressed at the time her overwhelming concern to protect the girls. The Inquiry accepts that the girls' protection was her predominant concern.

7.301 With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to say that had Mrs Allen reported her suspicions to parents immediately and suggested to them that they endorse the manner in which she proposed to deal with the issue, some of the allegations which have been made about secret meetings, a possible cover-up of potentially damaging news and victimisation may have been avoided. Independently, the view may be taken that Mrs Allen ought to have reported the matter to parents immediately because this was something about which they needed to know. On the other hand, in order for the Residence to function it is essential that Mrs Allen should have the trust and confidence of the girls and that might be less likely if every misdemeanour is to be relayed to parents. Also, other organisations which have custodial responsibilities, such as schools, do not report every case of misbehaviour. What should have been done in this case is open to legitimate debate. There are arguments either way and it is not the function of this Inquiry to resolve that question because ultimately no issue of mistreatment arises.

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54 The issue of secrecy will be examined further under the next heading.

vi. *Alleged Secrecy*

**7.302** An allegation was made to the Inquiry that secret meetings of the gymnasts in the Residence were organised by Mrs Allen. Also, there was a small number of allegations that Mrs Allen had issued instructions that gymnasts were not to inform family and friends about happenings at the AIS. Some of these allegations expressly or impliedly identified an ulterior motive; namely, that untoward events were occurring at the AIS and that Mrs Allen or others did not want that to become known. These are very serious allegations.

**7.303** The Inquiry has rejected these allegations. It may be noted at this stage, that to the extent that most of them can be linked to actual events, the allegations represent a considerable misrepresentation of those events. One allegation was pressed to the point where, in the Inquiry's view, it could be described as approaching the realm of fantasy.

**7.304** Mrs Whitwell made the sole allegation of secret meetings. She made this allegation in her written submission in connection with identifying other matters which are dealt with elsewhere in this report. She said:

*Children had secret meetings in the flat - these were run by Robyn Allen - at these meetings the children were told:*

- \* That what happens at the AIS was not to be told to their parents.
- \* If a child told the parents anything, then that child suffered from the payback system.

**7.305** In her oral submission, Mrs Whitwell repeated the allegation in similar terms:

*... the girls in the residence had what were called secret meetings which Robyn organised and they were told at these meetings that anything that happened at the AIS, whether in the residence or in the gym, were not to be told to their parents. They were not allowed to tell their parents what was going on. And any time they said anything that happened at the AIS or about anyone at the AIS, then the girls got that payback.*

**7.306** Mrs Whitwell did not know how often these alleged meetings occurred. All she could say was that "they had a lot of them". She said later:

*... meetings were only held to tell\* the girls that they weren't allowed to tell their parents anything that happens at the AIS, and to remind them again that they weren't allowed to tell their parents anything - that meeting just for that purpose.*

**7.307** There is no particular suggestion in this that secret meetings were held for a purpose such as to discipline or humiliate girls or to force them through initiation rites. Yet, taking Mrs Whitwell's reasoning to its ultimate conclusion, all other meetings would also have to be secret because they would be about something which happened at the AIS. However, the inquiry rejects the premise for the allegation of secret meetings, namely, that children "weren't allowed to tell their parents anything" (see below).

**7.308** When Mrs Whitwell said, "the girls in the residence had what were called secret meetings", she implies that others referred to them as such. She also said that these secret meetings were discussed among parents. These conversations would have probably occurred in the observation gallery at the AIS gym. Two of the parents which Mrs Whitwell identified as having been involved in these discussions, Mrs Kantek and Mrs Trentini, denied ever having discussed "secret meetings" in the Residence. It may be that they discussed matters about which the girls had meetings with Mrs Allen, but the parents did not consider them to be secret. Mrs Whitwell also said that she raised the issue of secret meetings with Ms Lincoln and Mr Forbes. Both denied this.

**7.309** The houseparents, other AIS staff, many gymnasts and other parents who were interviewed did not regard any meetings as secret. Reference to meetings as secret appears to be something unique to Mrs Whitwell.

**7.310** Various people speculated on what may have been regarded by Mrs Whitwell as secret. Two meetings were suggested as possibly falling into that category. One was the meeting concerning shoplifting (see above). The other concerned a decision by the girls to change the way in which families had access through their rooms into the rooms of other girls. The girls had a meeting about it and decided that they preferred parents to see gymnasts in the common area rather than walk back and forth through the rooms of the girls which were at the front of the dormitory area. Mrs Kantek said that parents did

not find out until the girls had made their decision. In that limited respect it was a secret meeting. However, none of this secrecy was regarded as untoward by those who mentioned it.

**7.311** Mrs Whitwell drew the Inquiry's attention to a couple of secret meetings about theft. She said:

*... there were a couple of girls there that used to take things from other girls. That was brought up at a couple of meetings, and that - that particular child would be stood up in front of the other ones and she would be called a thief.*

**7.312** Mrs Whitwell is reliant on her daughter as the source of this information. As indicated previously, Karinda has not made herself available to speak to the Inquiry.

**7.313** The Inquiry does not consider it necessary to make a finding in relation to whether these two meetings occurred. As alleged they do not raise any particular concerns. The meetings as described involve making an example of a girl who has done wrong. The houseparents freely indicated that this was very occasionally necessary. The procedure of making an example of someone is accepted in homes, schools, clubs, courts and other situations throughout the country. It must be handled properly, but no real evidence of that not being the case was brought to Inquiry's attention. Indeed, if Mrs Allen did ask the girls not to discuss the reasons for those particular meetings outside their group, that can reflect a commendable desire to ensure that the incident did not become the object of gossip which could produce unwarranted distress to the girls concerned.

**7.314** To the extent the four identified meetings might be shrouded in some "secrecy", the Inquiry finds nothing untoward in the circumstances. The position in relation to the meeting at which shoplifting was discussed has been commented on in greater detail under the immediately preceding heading.

**7.315** A relevant observation is that dozens and dozens of meetings or brief gatherings are held in the Residence to discuss matters of common interest and to make announcements. No secrecy is attached to these activities.



**7.316** The Inquiry finds that "secret" meetings are not as a general matter held in the Residence. To the extent that some meetings are held which might concern private issues, they did not involve any mistreatment of the gymnasts.

**7.317** Allegations were received from three sources that Mrs Allen had issued instructions that gymnasts were not to inform family and friends about happenings at the AIS.

Mrs McTiernan said in her written submission:

*They were told in the Residence on many occasions, 'What happens here is to be left here'. Robyn also said the same to me. The girls were reprimanded by Robyn if she found they had spoken to their parents about 'the unspoken' whatever that may have been. I mentioned this to Ju Ping and she said that would be incorrect, the girls must tell and speak to parents about whatever they wish to discuss.*

**7.318** In her oral submission, Mrs McTiernan elaborated as follows:

*I was told it was like a family, this is how Robyn explained it to me. 'It's a family here and what goes on here has nothing to do with out there'. I said, 'But they have a right to talk to their parents' and she said, 'No, because their parents aren't here. What goes on here stays here, because parents will make an issue of things and it's taken out of context.'*

**7.319** Mrs McTiernan, however, acknowledged that there were some matters which the houseparents would be warranted to ask the girls not to discuss. Specifically mentioned in that regard were problems a girl may be having with her family, or a dispute between two girls which did not involve Mrs McTiernan's daughter. She agreed with the proposition that because the girls are much closer than normal neighbourhood or school friends, they will learn very private and sensitive information about the other girls and that justifies requests not to discuss matters with families.

**7.320** While it was not entirely clear, what Mrs McTiernan appeared to have in mind were situations where a girl was dissatisfied with a houseparent or had a personal complaint about something at the AIS. No substantial evidence was

provided to support this particular allegation. However, the nature of the problem as it applied to her daughter Lisa will emerge from matters to be discussed below. Lisa did not specifically raise any such restriction on communication as a complaint.

**7.321** Mrs Whitwell's allegations have been set out above in connection with secret meetings. To repeat a portion of what was said there:

*...anything that happened at the AIS, whether in the residence or in the gym, were not to be told to their parents. They were not allowed to tell their parents what was going on.*

**7.322** In her oral submission, Mrs Whitwell tried to have the Inquiry believe that girls were not allowed to say things such as, "I went to training today", "I had a sore foot" or "The coach praised me for doing something new". She recounted an incident where her daughter went on a trip to China. Mrs Whitwell was grateful to Mrs Allen for having provided helpful advice and assistance in acquiring clothes and baggage to outfit Karinda. Upon her return, Karinda told her mother that all had gone well. Mrs Whitwell then telephoned Mrs Allen to thank her. Mrs Whitwell said:

*Then Robyn went in and told Karinda that she shouldn't tell me what's been going on at the AIS.*

**7.323** Mr Jackson said that he had heard that, "Robyn had instructed the kids that they were not allowed to talk about anything that happened in the residence." Mr Jackson acknowledged that this was a very broad statement. In the course of discussion he agreed that it would be legitimate to ask the girls not to discuss with their families and friends the personal and family difficulties which one of the other girls may be experiencing. The following series of questions and answers then occurred.

*Mr Jackson. ... the way the - it came to me, and I read what I was told, that things go on in the residence is things like if the kids do not have tea one night, they miss out on tea one night, or they are not allowed to ring their mum or dad or something like that. 'I'm telling you you're not allowed to ring mum and dad.' 'Why can't I?' 'Because I'm telling you you're not allowed to.' Things like that,*

*you know, and the kid or the gymnast is not allowed to say, 'Well, Robyn said I'm not allowed to ring you'...*

*Inquirer. Who would have told you that?*

*Mr Jackson. I have got a sneaking suspicion it was possibly Ann McTieman or Sheryl Whitwell.*

*Inquirer. Okay, but you have no personal knowledge of that, is that correct?*

*Mr Jackson. No personal knowledge, no.*

*Inquirer. Do you, Mrs Jackson?*

*Mrs Jackson. No.*

*Inquirer. Do you have any knowledge of those sorts of things, Rebecca?*

*Rebecca. No.*

**7.324** Mrs Allen denied these allegations. So did Ms Lincoln and Ms Mladenovich. Ms Lincoln said:

*[W]e would never hold back information from the parents. They could come and go at any time they wanted to. That was their child. They could turn up one day, out of the blue, that was fine. There was never - you would never not tell a parent ...*

**7.325** Suggestions that girls were not to pass on information is obviously inconsistent with Ms Lincoln's views.

**7.326** Mrs Allen does educate the girls in interpersonal skills relevant to respecting each other's privacy. She said there had been occasions where the gossip had reached a girl's parents before the facts. She said she deals with the issue in this way:

*I take the opportunity to have a meeting and talk to the kids and I would explain to them that if somebody gets into trouble, that's their business, that's their concern. If they want to tell their parents about it, it's up to them; if they don't want to tell their parents, well, that's up to them, too. But it is really not anybody*

*else's concern to tell their parents. I use an example, how would you like it if someone told your mum and you hadn't told your mum, and I think that's just a living skill and being considerate of other people.*

**7.327** Ms Mladenovich agreed with this approach, but said that she had never had the occasion to implement it.

**7.328** Mrs Allen said that she might suggest to a child who is anxious about something that she should try not to worry her mother so much. She says she does this in an endeavour to soothe the child's concerns and out of consideration for the parent who may be distant and unable to do anything immediately. She said she would tell a girl not to harp on something, especially if her parent was not able to respond immediately. Also, the girls are asked to make certain of things before they mention them to their parents. For instance, if a girl has a sore foot and it is to be x-rayed because a fracture is suspected, the girl should tell her parents just that, but Mrs Allen would counsel against her saying the foot is broken until the girl actually knows.

**7.329** However, Mrs Allen denied ever telling the girls not to tell their families about things that happened to them. Even in regard to the shoplifting incident, the arrangement was that Mrs Allen would not tell families, not that the girls could not tell their own families.

**7.330** Mrs Allen added that at orientation for new girls, she will tell their families that if a minor matter arises, such as a girl develops a cold, she will not telephone specifically for that. The houseparents have limited time available to them. However, the girls are in regular telephone contact with their families and usually mention such things. The parents can then speak to the houseparents if they wish.

**7.331** As the girls mature their capacity to deal with problems themselves without their parents' assistance will gradually increase. It is appropriate that the houseparents' assist them in that maturing process.

**7.332** These methods seem unobjectionable. Apart from the sources of complaint identified above, the Inquiry found general absence of dissatisfaction among parents and gymnasts. A number of them confirmed that comments of this nature had been made to them by Mrs Allen.

**7.333** However, there is some evidence from sources which the Inquiry regards as reliable which might suggest that Mrs Allen goes a little further than she told the Inquiry. Mrs Kantek said that Mrs Allen had told her daughter Nicole not to bother Mrs Kantek with every tiny thing that it is wrong, especially if it has been resolved. Mrs Kantek was appreciative of the motives behind such an approach and not at all critical, but said she told Mrs Allen that she does prefer to know. Ms Lincoln said that Mrs Allen would sometimes say to girls, "You don't have to tell mum and dad everything", that some things "can be solved in-house" or "you don't have to tell mum and dad that because they will think it happens all the time". Ms Lincoln expressed the opinion that such statements were not proof of the allegations but could be misconstrued in a manner that might support them. The Inquiry agrees. While no evidence was put to the Inquiry establishing that there was a significant departure in Mrs Allen practice from the unobjectionable methods referred to in the preceding paragraphs, such statements as recounted by Ms Lincoln would very likely fuel suspicion.

**7.334** Mrs Whitwell's allegations are incredible and against the weight of evidence. Insofar as it suggests some AIS policy of not speaking about what goes on in the gym, it is illogical because the gymnasium has a public observation gallery. Also, most of the gymnasts do not live in the Residence and there is no suggestion that they are under any restriction as to what they say.

**7.335** Some specific allegations made by Mrs Whitwell and Mrs McTiernan about not communicating events at the AIS are closely linked to allegations of payback and victimisation. They are best dealt with below, but it may be noted now that the Inquiry believes that significant misunderstandings and poor communication are at the root of most of these allegations.

**7.336** Mr Jackson has no actual knowledge of the matters alleged and is reliant on what Mrs McTiernan and Mrs Whitwell have told him.

**7.337** The fact of the matter is that whatever happens, or is believed to have happened, is reported widely and quickly on the bush telegraph. The AIS gymnastics program including the Residence is a very open activity in that respect. This is the greatest protection that gymnasts and the public interest could have against any form of mistreatment of the girls.



**7.338** Accordingly, subject to the discussion below concerning alleged payback and victimisation, the allegations concerning not reporting matters at the AIS are rejected.

**7.339** However, the matter cannot be left there. The issue of communication is of great importance to parents. The moment houseparents suggest to the girls that there are some things that should not be told to parents, they invite controversy. The Inquiry has found that the methods of the houseparents as explained are unobjectionable. Nevertheless, they need to be consistently and clearly explained to new gymnasts and their families. They need the support of those families. At times the methods will have to be modified to suit the reasonable requests of individual families. The methods cannot anticipate every contingency. They have to be flexible. Just how the methods are applied on any one occasion must of necessity be left to the wisdom of the houseparents. Mrs Allen has unique and long experience as the mother of elite gymnasts and as a houseparent. Her judgment on such matters has to be and is respected.

**7.340** Yet it is clear to the Inquiry that much anguish (including that occasioned by the need to have an inquiry) could have been avoided if the methods were recorded in writing in a simple fashion and had the imprimatur of parents. This would facilitate informing new gymnasts, parents and houseparents. Mrs Allen will not always be at the AIS. Her wisdom and experience needs to be captured for the future.

**7.341** This is not to suggest that Mrs Allen and other houseparents have not explained these methods in the past to gymnasts and families. However, for the new gymnast and family, much is strange and easily forgotten or misunderstood. Something in writing for future reference will be valuable.

**7.342** Since no mistreatment has been found to have occurred, the Inquiry is not authorised to make any recommendation. However, it does offer the following suggestion as a way of avoiding possible future difficulty. The suggestion is that the methods be stated simply in writing, perhaps adapting the wording in this report, together with some brief examples of the methods in operation. Parents should be afforded the opportunity of commenting on these methods at one of the meetings with gymnastics staff which are held regularly. (Mrs Allen should not have to bear the burden of responsibility for the methods

alone.) The statement should be included in the information booklet given to new families and be reviewed from time to time in consultation with parents.

**c. Miscellaneous Incidents of Neglect or Mistreatment**

**i. Trip from Melbourne**

**7.343** After investigation the Inquiry has concluded that the following incident does not involve any mistreatment of a gymnast, but it does concern an occasion when there was an absence of communication between Mrs Allen and a gymnast's family which caused that family considerable distress. The occasion is significant to the Inquiry because it produced a deep resentment of Mrs Allen which the Inquiry believes has contributed to other complaints being made against her.

**7.344** Evidence of the incident was presented in great detail. The following is a summary of the key facts as found by the Inquiry. In 1991, Mrs Allen, the gymnast Rebecca Jackson (who was about 13 years old) and two of the coaches, Lu Ming and Shao Yi, returned to Canberra from the National Championships in Melbourne. They travelled via the Hume Highway in an AIS minibus which had been brought down to Melbourne by Lu Ming. The others had flown to Melbourne. Rebecca lived with her family in Canberra. Shao Yi and Mrs Allen in particular were not familiar with the road. They left Melbourne about 11.00 am after a hectic time for Mrs Allen in seeing off team members to other locations and finalising the team's administrative arrangements at the hotel. Their planned departure time was delayed by a period which is not entirely clear to the Inquiry, but probably by at least an hour. They stopped at a roadhouse not far north of Albury for refreshment. Mrs Allen inadvertently left behind a briefcase containing some money, documents and other valuables. Its loss was not discovered until they reached Yass. They turned around, went back to the roadhouse, recovered the briefcase intact and returned to Yass. At Yass Rebecca telephoned her father in Canberra to tell him of her whereabouts. By this time the hour was about midnight and Rebecca was about six to seven hours overdue. Her family was panic-stricken and had been contacting the AIS, police and other emergency services. Panic turned to relief and then anger. Rebecca slept for much of the journey and the significance of events was lost on her until her father became angry.

**7.345** An earlier telephone call would have avoided any distress caused to the Jacksons. While Mrs Allen said she tried to telephone from Yass when the briefcase was discovered to be missing (there was no answer or it was engaged - she cannot recall), there were other opportunities to do so. She says she was tired, not familiar with the travelling times, anxious about the briefcase and then anxious to get home, and knew that Rebecca was safe. However, it should have been a high priority to let the Jacksons know. Considerable friction occurred between Mr Jackson and Mrs Allen at the time and that has been ongoing. According to Mr Jackson, matters were compounded by the failure of Mrs Allen to offer an immediate and full explanation of the reason of the delay. He alleges an attempt by Mrs Allen to conceal her oversight in leaving the briefcase behind. Mr Jackson has not received the apology that he considers his family deserves. There is no doubt that an apology was warranted. Mrs Allen told the Inquiry that she is "very sorry that incident happened" and tried to apologise to Mr Jackson on one occasion but the surrounding circumstances precluded that from occurring.

**7.346** The incident has taken on a life of its own. The Jacksons drew to the Inquiry's attention a number of other matters in relation to Mrs Allen. Although Mr Jackson denied it, the Inquiry wonders whether those matters might not have been raised if an apology had been received and the incident resolved amicably at the time (which Mr Jackson believes could have happened). The Jacksons impressed as honest and decent people who hold the gymnastics program and Mrs Tian in particular in good regard. In fairness to them, although the family continues to be very angry about the incident, Mr Jackson said that he had his say at the meeting with AIS staff and parents in July 1994. They did not approach the Inquiry with the aim of pressing matters. Rather, they made their submission at the Inquiry's invitation because it was learned that Rebecca may have witnessed alleged incidents that the Inquiry was investigating, and because other people had said the Jacksons had complaints about Mrs Allen.

**7.347** This incident is not a matter in relation to which the Inquiry can make any recommendation under the terms of reference.

*li Evening meal*

**7.348** Rebecca Jackson alleged that during the 1992 National Championships held in Melbourne she did not receive a proper evening meal on one occasion.

She was the only girl from the AIS competing in the junior age group. She competed at different times to the AIS girls in the senior group. She did not return to the team hotel from the competition venue until about 7.30 pm. The other girls had eaten. Rebecca showered and changed. By 9.00 pm she had not been given anything to eat. She approached Mrs Allen who was responsible for looking after the girls in the team and she is alleged to have said that she would organise something. Mrs Allen became caught up with other matters and Rebecca had to ask on a couple more occasions. Some time after 9.00 pm, Rebecca received six long green beans to eat. This may have occurred via room service, but Rebecca does not recall. It is not clear whether Rebecca complained at the time or just ate the beans and said nothing until a later time. From the Inquiry's observations of Rebecca and the reports of others who knew her well, the latter is the more likely happening.

**7.349** There is no allegation or supporting evidence that it had been intended that Rebecca should have six green beans only. Rebecca claims that those AIS staff who remember the incident regard it with some humour, the clear implication being that they see it as an unintentional and extraordinary happening. Mrs Allen says she does not recall the incident.

**7.350** The Inquiry accepts Rebecca's version of events. Indisputably a meal of that nature is inadequate and the Inquiry regards it as mistreatment of Rebecca not to feed her adequately. However, is the AIS responsible for that? Given the findings above, it must be inferred that Mrs Allen ordered a proper meal for Rebecca. It might then be said that immediate responsibility lay with the hotel. However, the AIS must be regarded as having a special relationship with the gymnasts in its care which would include ensuring that they are properly fed on occasions such as this.<sup>55</sup> Also, there appears to have been insufficient done to ensure that Rebecca was fed promptly on return from competition and responsibility must rest with Mrs Allen in this regard.

**7.351** Apart from the immediate deprivation of an adequate meal, Rebecca has not been otherwise harmed. The incident was isolated. Rebecca said that in her career at the AIS of approaching seven years, nothing similar ever occurred. The incident might be explained in part because of the circumstance that she was the only girl in her group, but that cannot be an excuse.

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<sup>55</sup> This places responsibility on the AIS in a corporate sense, not on Mrs Allen personally.



**7.352** Although there has been some mistreatment, taking into account the circumstances set out in the immediately preceding paragraph, the Inquiry recommends that no action be taken.

***iii Wet Uniform***

**7.353** Mrs Whitwell alleged that in 1992 Mrs Allen sent her daughter Karinda to primary school in a wet uniform on one occasion. Particulars of the allegation are as follows. Mrs Whitwell suggested that it was Karinda's summer uniform. Karinda decided to wash it. While the uniform had been through the spin dry cycle of the washing machine, it was not completely dry. Karinda forgot to put the uniform in the drying cabinet while she attended morning training so it was still damp when she came to get dressed to go to school. She put on her AIS tracksuit but Mrs Whitwell alleged that Mrs Allen made her wear her uniform even though it was still wet. No reason was advanced as to why Mrs Allen would take this action.

**7.354** No evidence was received from Karinda.

**7.355** Mrs Allen angrily denied this allegation. She had no knowledge of the incident. She found it inconceivable that she might do such a thing because of the time she spends endeavouring to ensure that the girls in the residence are in good health. Sending a girl to school in a wet uniform would be counter-productive to her work.

**7.356** This gained support from the evidence of other witnesses in relation to the general way in which Mrs Allen went about her work, and not in specific reference to this allegation. They commented that Mrs Allen was always concerned to see the girls were protected from the cold. For instance, Ms Canning said:

*...she's a stickler for keeping them warm.*

**7.357** The Inquiry has nothing before it other than the hearsay evidence given by Mrs Whitwell. The key witness does not wish to speak to the Inquiry. The claim seems extraordinary. Mrs Allen denies the allegation. The strong evidence of Mrs Allen's standard practices in relation to dressing the girls runs counter to the nature of the allegation.



7.358 Accordingly, the Inquiry rejects the allegation.

**iv Room Changes**

7.359 Mrs Whitwell alleged that:

*on more than one occasion Karinda, plus another couple of girls would go to training and come back and their gear would be taken out of their room and dumped in the middle - in the middle of a floor of another room. They would come back after night training like, you know, seven, seven-thirty and they have - would have been moved to another room.*

7.360 Mrs Whitwell did not identify the other girls or provide further details. Karinda did not present evidence to the Inquiry.

7.361 It would very likely be offensive to even a young girl to return home to find that the houseparent had packed up her belongings and moved them to another room without knowledge or prior warning.

7.362 Mrs Allen said that when a change of rooms becomes necessary, sometimes she and the other houseparents assist the process by packing up the girls' belongings and moving them to the new room. The girls can be unduly slow with this task and it is too much to expect them to (a) pack up, (b) shift and (c) pack away their belongings in one evening when they are tired after training and school. So the houseparents may attend to (a) and (b) if circumstances so warrant. The girls are given advance notice of change of rooms.

7.363 There is no need to emphasise that room changes should be accomplished by a method which is sensitive to the wishes and privacy of the girls. No direct evidence was presented to the Inquiry to suggest that this was not the case.

7.364 Accordingly, the Inquiry rejects this allegation.

**iv Boredom**

7.365 Ms Karen Hamilton from Sydney alleged that her daughter, Courtney Cruickshank, had been allowed to become bored in the Residence in January

1994 because of a lack of organised recreational opportunities. This was said to occur on weekdays between morning and afternoon training sessions during the school holidays.

**7.366** Initially Ms Hamilton said that there was "no organised activity or anything for them to do". Later in her evidence she contradicted herself by saying that on some days Ms Lincoln took the girls to the swimming pool and spa at the AIS. On other days when the girls requested to be taken to the pool, Ms Lincoln refused to do so. Ms Hamilton acknowledged that Ms Lincoln may have had other obligations which meant that she could not take them to the pool every day, but Ms Hamilton still believed that not enough was done. Ms Hamilton said that the girls were taken to the Belconnen Shopping Mall on Friday nights and on weekends she took her daughter out from immediately after Saturday training until Sunday evening.

**7.367** Ms Lincoln acknowledged that at times some of the girls did become bored. She said that over this period she had charge of 30 children, divided into three groups, each group having a different schedule. Matters would become complicated if one of the girls was ill or injured and Ms Lincoln had to take the girl for medical care. There were too many to take out as a group and it was not practical to take the girls to the Belconnen Mall on a Wednesday afternoon because many did not have any money for shopping. Parents did not always provide in that respect. Ms Lincoln said that she had to refuse to take the children to the pool because of other obligations, but occasionally because she was exhausted.

**7.368** However, it is well recognised that many children become bored during school holidays despite their parents' best endeavours to occupy them. Training times are varied during school holidays so that the sessions commence later. No other girls or parents have complained of there being any mistreatment in this respect. As indicated above, there are considerable informal recreational activities in-house in the gymnasts' quarters in the nature of games, crafts and videos. These were used by Ms Lincoln to occupy the children. Mrs Tian was keen that the children rest rather than pursue organised activities. This would have been especially the case for Courtney because she was new to the AIS: she would have been encountering increased training and coping with the demands of settling in to a new lifestyle. The gymnastics program in January is not a summer holiday camp. Courtney was taken out on Friday nights by the houseparents, and did not participate in the AIS-organised

Sunday outings because her mother had taken her. Of course, once school commenced this problem - if there was one - dissipated. There is insufficient in the evidence to suggest that the girls were systematically deprived of recreational opportunities so as to amount to mistreatment. There may have been some things to do and, on other occasions, good reason to rest. Ms Hamilton has correctly identified a resourcing problem which seems to have been rectified by the appointment of a second full-time houseparent.

7.369 For the reasons in the immediately preceding paragraph, this allegation is rejected.

**d. Alleged Victimisation**

7.370 It was alleged that two gymnasts, Lisa McTiernan and Karinda Whitwell, had been victimised by Mrs Allen. Although the word victimise was not actually used, it was clear that the conduct alleged could be described in that way. The Inquiry will use ordinary meanings of victimise, namely, to punish or discipline selectively and to punish unfairly, for the purpose of considering these allegations. The conduct alleged was also presented in a way that could be described as coming down hard on the girls or as picking on them.

7.371 Allegations were also made that Mrs Allen had made various offensive comments to those girls.

*i. Payback*

7.372 Mention was made of allegations of payback above under the heading "Alleged Secrecy". It was referred to as a means of enforcing the alleged rules about not communicating to parents what happened at the AIS.

7.373 To the extent that the allegations about the secrecy rules have been rejected, so must allegations about payback. However, under that heading, consideration of some specific allegations was reserved to this section of the report.

7.374 As far as the allegations defined it, the payback involved verbal confrontation. There is no suggestion of physical abuse, foul language (other than in one respect), or the deprivation of privileges (other than in relation to the shoplifting incident).

**7.375** Mrs Trentini did not make any allegations about payback concerning the Residence. She did offer this insight in relation to the gymnasium:

*I questioned Renee all the time. I wanted to go and say something [to the coaches] and she'd say, "Please don't say that, you'll [meaning Renee] get paid back." Paid back is hard to define sometimes. I think she means paid back like people would say to her, you know, "Why are you saying this to your mother? Why are you whingeing? You're just lazy, or you have to do it".*

**7.376** The occasion for payback was alleged to occur if a parent said something to Mrs Allen about a matter mentioned by the daughter to the parent. It was alleged that Mrs Allen would then confront the daughter thereby administering the payback.

**7.377** As a general proposition this is both outlandish and not supported by the investigations of the Inquiry. However, the specific allegations must be considered.

**7.378** Initially, it is important to recognise that quite innocent actions fit the broad definition of payback. For instance, a girl might tell a parent about some happening and this may give the parent cause for concern or even anger. The parent will telephone the houseparent to find out what is going on. The houseparent may not know of the happening about which the girl has spoken, or maybe the girl has not told the full story - intentionally or otherwise. In such circumstances, the houseparent can be expected to speak to the girl about it, or even show annoyance at not being told or having the situation misrepresented. That would be action within the broad definition of "payback", but not a form of mistreatment. On the other hand, the confrontation may occur in such a manner as to mistreat the girl.

**7.379** Mrs Whitwell drew to the attention of the Inquiry two alleged instances of payback.

**7.380** First, Mrs Whitwell said that she spoke to her daughter Karinda one evening toward the end of her time at the AIS<sup>56</sup> and it seemed to Mrs Whitwell that Karinda had a cold. She was concerned about that because Karinda could

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56 This would be late 1993 or early 1994.



develop asthma if influenza or flu symptoms occurred. Mrs Whitwell telephoned Mrs Allen and told her of the position. Mrs Allen said that she would have the doctor see Karinda in the morning if she was still sick. Mrs Whitwell said the following in her oral submission:

*She [Mrs Allen] walked from her flat into the girls' flat and told Karinda that how dare she ring up her mother and whinge about having a cold, and that conversation went on for a couple of minutes, and she stormed back out again. Obviously - well, I say obviously, she must have gone back to her flat. Karinda rang me up and said, "Mum, how many times have I told you not to complain about anything because then she - then we get into trouble if we say anything," and I asked her what happened. She told me.*

**7.381** Mrs Whitwell is reliant upon Karinda for the statement of the alleged behaviour of Mrs Allen. Karinda has declined to assist the Inquiry. Mrs Allen denied that events proceeded in the manner just described. Her version was as follows:

*Mrs Whitwell did ring me about Karinda - suspected had a cold - and I, after a phone call, spoke to Karinda and said, 'Karinda if you feel you're getting [a] cold speak to me as soon as possible because we can do something about it.' We have all the sports medicine things - it's not difficult, it's easy to sort out - very easy to deal with.*

**7.382** Taken at face value, fault could not reasonably be found with Mrs Allen's handling of the matter. However, the Inquiry suspects that by this stage in her career at the AIS, Karinda must have been proving a handful for Mrs Allen. It is distinctly possible that she could have displayed exasperation or annoyance with Karinda for not coming to her direct rather than troubling her mother. In her words, there is a hint of exasperation with Karinda. Many people have said that Karinda was very unhappy, and how she may have interpreted Mrs Allen's comments and retold them to her mother can only be the subject of speculation.

**7.383** There is insufficient evidence to establish this allegation. Therefore, the Inquiry rejects it.



**7.384** Second, the following incident appears to have its origins in the case of shoplifting. Mrs Whitwell alleged the following occurred:

*Robyn had actually told Karinda that she was a slut, that she was a whore, that she was a thief and that the only reason she was at the Institute was because her parents didn't want her, they didn't love her. She said that she was a thief and that the only reason that she was still there was because Robyn actually hadn't gone to de Castella and told him she was a thief otherwise she would have been chucked out of the Institute of Sport, and that apparently, from what Karinda told me, had been going on for about two and a half weeks...*

**7.385** These comments incorporate a misrepresentation of events relating to the shoplifting incident.

**7.386** Mrs Whitwell said she spoke to a coach and Mr Forbes about this and Mr Forbes said he would speak to Mrs Allen. The inference which might be drawn from this is that word got back to Mrs Allen. Mrs Whitwell continued:

*She [Karinda] rang me up in the middle of the day, which she hardly ever did, and she said, 'Mum?' I said, 'Yes?' She said, 'Mum, you are a liar, I am a liar. I have no problems whatsoever. The only problems I have are in my head,' and I just stood there with my mouth open. I didn't know what to say, and she said, 'Is that right, Robyn? Did I say it correctly?' Then Robyn left the room and Karinda burst into tears and said, 'Mum, I'm...I'm sorry, I had to do that. Robyn was standing right beside me and told me I had to say it.'*

**7.387** Assuming that this conversation did occur between Karinda and her mother, Mrs Whitwell had no way of knowing whether Mrs Allen was listening in on it. Mrs Whitwell did not hear Mrs Allen's voice. She said that she heard a door close at the point Mrs Allen is said by Karinda to have left and Karinda turned her face away from the telephone as if she was speaking to someone there, but other things could explain that, even Karinda's own deliberate action. Karinda has declined to assist the Inquiry.

**7.388** It made no logical sense for Karinda to call her mother a liar. In the course of Mrs Whitwell being questioned on this point by the Inquirer she

seemed to recognise that but replied, "That's what Robyn had told her to tell me."

**7.389** Mrs Allen presented a different version of events. She said:

*Karinda rang her mum and told her that I wouldn't allow her to go shopping [because she was grounded] and I asked Karinda to ring her mother back and tell her the truth. And later on I asked Karinda had she done that and she said, 'I just told mum I was too tired to go shopping.' And that was the beginning and the end, the whole incident.*

**7.390** These questions and answers between the Inquirer and Mrs Allen followed:

Q. *Did you stand at the phone with Karinda when she did that?*

A. *No, I didn't stand at the phone. She came - I asked her had she called her mum and she told me.*

Q. *What did she say?*

A. *I said, 'Did you call your mum back and talk to her?' and she said, 'Yes, I told her I was too tired to go shopping,' and I thought, well, she hadn't told her the real reason. I thought maybe that's - she doesn't want to tell her mum and I can understand that.*

**7.391** According to Mrs Whitwell, at some stage Karinda did tell her of an allegation of theft, but not of shoplifting.

**7.392** This is an almost incredible allegation. The following question and answer occurred:

*Inquirer: Did it strike you as a bit unusual that Robyn would force Karinda to say this rehearsed piece - that is what it sounds like, a rehearsed piece - and then just leave Karinda to talk to you on the phone?*

*Mrs Whitwell: Not at all, not at all, because Robyn was exactly like that. That's the way she operated, and I've got heaps and heaps of other examples.*

**7.393** Apart from the example in the immediately preceding allegation concerning Karinda's cold, Mrs Whitwell did not provide any more examples.

**7.394** It is possible that Karinda lied to both Mrs Allen and Mrs Whitwell about what she said to the other. She had been caught out shoplifting. She had admitted that to Ms Lincoln and it can be expected that she was very upset about what might be her mother's reaction to the whole affair. It is not unlikely that she was in a state of some panic or confusion. She could have said anything. Karinda, according to her mother, will now speak to no-one about her time at the AIS. On the other hand, Mrs Allen's version of events is entirely plausible and she was an impressive witness.

**7.395** Without the opportunity to interview Karinda and test the alleged version of events attributed to her, the Inquiry can only reject this otherwise almost incredible allegation.

**7.396** Mrs McTiernan said that girls were "reprimanded" if they spoke about "the unspoken". One example was provided to the Inquiry by Mrs McTiernan and it did not concern her daughter. The girl allegedly involved now lives overseas and her whereabouts were not immediately known. Even as explained, the incident was quite consistent with Mrs Allen being annoyed with a girl for not having told her parents the full story. The information provided by Mrs McTiernan was sketchy and at best third-hand. In view of the overall position regarding this particular type of allegation, the Inquiry saw no point in pursuing this incident further.

*ii. Miscellaneous*

**7.397** In early 1992, some telephone cords were cut in the Residence. Vandalism was suspected. Lisa McTiernan says she was wrongly accused by Mrs Allen of having cut the cords. Mrs Allen denies having either accused Lisa of being responsible or of even suggesting that she may have been. Mrs Allen does not know who was responsible. She says that she asked Lisa if she knew who did cut the cords, Lisa identified a possible suspect and that was the end of the matter. It is not difficult to imagine that a 14 year old girl when asked whether she knew anything about a particular incident could interpret that as an accusation that she was at least suspected of being involved.

7.398 Lisa McTiernan also alleged that in early 1992 Mrs Allen had accused her and another girl of forcing younger gymnasts to eat junk food. Mrs Allen denied the allegation. She added that little girls by their nature form secret little groups. Friendships can sometimes be fickle as can the composition of the groups. Ms Lincoln said that some of the girls once told her that there was a little group and to join, the new girl had to supply some lollies. Ms Lincoln suspected that this had some connection with the shoplifting incident. The houseparents have a responsibility to ensure that these games do not become unpleasantly exclusive or otherwise improper.

7.399 The Inquiry has concluded that Mrs Allen was not victimising Lisa McTiernan. In this respect the Inquiry believes that Lisa had become distrustful of Mrs Allen to the point where almost any of Mrs Allen's actions were perceived as being aimed at Lisa in an unpleasant way. Support for this proposition is set out below under the heading *Observations on the Circumstances of Selected Gymnasts*.

iii. *Offensive Comments*

1. In her written submission, Mrs Whitwell said that "the children were told that they were liars, cheats, sluts and thieves". This allegation was repeated in her oral submission; the word "whore" was added. These comments were attributed to Mrs Allen and claimed to have been made at what Mrs Whitwell called the secret meetings.

7.400 The references to lying and thieving appear to be in connection with the shoplifting incident and subsequent telephone call during which Karinda allegedly told her mother that both of them were liars. Mrs Whitwell added in relation to "cheat":

*There was no reference to cheating as in anything to with school or anything like that. I think it was a word that was used in conjunction with the other things... Just a word that was used to put the kids down... And the same with slut. It was never associated with doing anything improper.*

7.401 Lisa McTiernan said that when she denied having been involved with shoplifting, Mrs Allen had told Lisa not to lie to her. She did not allege

specifically that she had been called a slut or a cheat, even though she said she had been in trouble with Mrs Allen for allegedly visiting the young male gymnasts and in relation to her school work.

**7.402** Mrs Allen said these allegations are "totally untrue". It was put to Mrs Allen that reference could have been made to "thief" in connection with the incident of shoplifting. Mrs Allen responded:

*We are talking about the meeting, yes, where I would have said to the girls, 'This is thieving. This is something that is not appropriate.' That would be put in that context to all the girls.*

**7.403** Given her suspicions about shoplifting, it is quite possible that she might tell a girl not to lie to her if that girl denied involvement. That and the reference to thieving is unobjectionable.

**7.404** When informed of the allegation made by Mrs Whitwell (but not who made it), Ms Lincoln said:

*I have never, ever heard Robyn swear at one of the children; never, ever heard that... She's not that type of lady.*

**7.405** The allegation that Mrs Allen had called the girls sluts was raised at the 5 July 1994 meeting of parents and AIS staff. Ms Lincoln recounts Mrs Allen's reaction in these words:

*She told me and cried and said, 'I - I don't even say the word. How can they think that I would do that and say it to one of the children.' And she said to me, 'I'm glad you weren't there because it was so devastating.'*

**7.406** According to her mother, the source of the allegation concerning the words - cheat, slut and whore - is Karinda Whitwell. No-one else has said that these words were used by Mrs Allen. Karinda refuses to provide evidence. The use of the words is strongly denied by Mrs Allen. In these circumstances, the allegation must be rejected.

2. In her written submission, Mrs Whitwell alleged that at the so-called secret meetings, the girls



*...were told that the only reason that they were at the AIS was because their parents didn't want them.*

**7.407** Mrs Whitwell said that Mrs Allen had said this to Karinda. Also, she identified two other girls to whom Mrs Allen had allegedly made this comment: Tanya Moses and the sister of Lisa Taliana.

**7.408** Any such comment made to one of the girls by a houseparent would be quite inappropriate.

**7.409** Tanya Moses was at the AIS from June to December 1991. Tanya denied that any such comment had ever been made to her. She had never heard of any such comment being made to any gymnast. Mrs Allen denied that she had ever made such a comment to Karinda Whitwell. Strictly, the allegation is illogical. The AIS is not a repository for unwanted children. It is a gymnastics school for unusually talented children. It is their talent and willingness to stay, not their parents lack of care, which keeps girls in the AIS. Again, it must be noted that Karinda Whitwell has declined to present evidence to the Inquiry.

**7.410** The Inquiry rejects the above allegations made by Mrs Whitwell.

3. Mrs McTiernan alleged that in early 1993 Mrs Allen had said that Lisa was "at the Institute because her family did not want her". That allegation was made in her oral submission after Lisa had been interviewed. Lisa made no mention of such an incident and no response was received to efforts to organise a follow-up interview. Mrs McTiernan said that Kylie Shadbolt was told by Lisa that Mrs Allen had made this comment and that it was Kylie who broke this news to Mrs McTiernan. Kylie is now a coach in the employment of the AIS and declined to speak to the Inquiry. Mrs Whitwell had not heard of such a comment being made to Lisa.

**7.411** Mrs Allen denied making that comment. She said:

*That's the saddest thing I've ever read because that was - that would never ever be a thought that would ever enter my mind.*

7.412 However, the following series of questions and answers occurred between the Inquirer and Ms Lincoln:

Q. *Did she [Lisa McTiernan] get on all right with Robyn Allen?*

A. *Robyn was very fond of her.*

Q. *Of Lisa McTiernan?*

A. *Mm.*

Q. *Why do you say that?*

A. *I think she - I think she felt sorry for Lisa; that I don't think Robyn thought that her parents really --*

Q. *Cared for her?*

A. *Yeah. I remember Robyn saying to me once that she thinks 'Lisa has it better here than she does at home'.*

7.413 That Mrs Allen may have thought that Lisa was better off at the AIS than at home is significantly different from saying that the child was in the AIS because her parents did not want her. However, the former could be misinterpreted to mean the latter, but there is no direct evidence that a comment to the effect of Mrs Allen's thoughts was ever made to or overheard by Lisa McTiernan.

7.414 The evidence presented to the Inquiry in support of this allegation is insufficient to substantiate it. Accordingly, the Inquiry rejects Mrs McTiernan's allegation.

iv. *Observations on the Circumstances of Selected Gymnasts*

7.415 It is apparent that the bulk of the allegations of mistreatment in relation to the Residence come from two sources: Mrs Whitwell and Mrs McTiernan/Lisa McTiernan. Those allegations have not been accepted. In so deciding, the Inquiry has relied on the available evidence to determine whether the allegations have been sufficiently proved. Except where indicated, the Inquiry has not sought to make comment on the reliability of witnesses or their possible

motives in making allegations. Also, apart from noting that Karinda Whitwell has chosen not to provide evidence, no comment has been made on why that might be so.

7.416 Bearing in mind the significance that this Inquiry has had for the AIS gymnastics program and those that work for it, it is both fitting and important that the Inquiry set out some background which, in the Inquiry's view, sheds some light on why some allegations have come to made. This means making some brief comments on the circumstances of two gymnasts: Lisa McTiernan and Karinda Whitwell.

**Lisa McTiernan** Her story is unfortunate. She started at the AIS in October 1988. In early 1991, while still a very young gymnast, she was in a squad for selection to the team which was to compete in the World Championships in Indianapolis later that year. She had a good prospect of making that team and the Olympic Games in Barcelona the following year. She "loved" her coaches and liked the sport and the people. However, through the first half of 1991 she had a nagging elbow injury which could not be identified by the numerous tests which she underwent. Then in August 1991, the head of the elbow snapped off and that ultimately caused her career as a gymnast to end in September 1993. The injury appears to have been a product of the heavy training characteristic of elite WAG, although that cannot be verified because permission to access Lisa's medical records was not received. While she continued to train in a manner which protected the elbow, and she underwent an operation, in retrospect it is clear that her competitive gymnastics career was doomed from August 1991. The AIS kept her on. The Inquiry suspects that this was in recognition of her outstanding talent and in the hope that her elbow would respond to treatment.

7.417 In the meantime, her injury prevented a full training schedule. She started to put on weight as a result, and because she was maturing. This made training harder. As a 14 year old she became friendly with some of the boy gymnasts. She went to school with them and they were in her study group at the AIS. In particular, she made good friends with one of them who was much her own age and had an injury which restricted his training just like her. They could talk and share their problems.

7.418 Mrs Allen had been appointed as houseparent in June 1990 to replace Sue Johnson of whom Lisa was very fond; Lisa was described to the Inquiry as

Ms Johnson's "favourite". That factor together with some personality differences between Lisa and Mrs Allen laid the foundation for what was to come. Mrs Allen introduced study hall, and Lisa's tutor, Christine Canning, made sure she kept up with her studies to a greater degree than previously. On the study front and in the gymnasium things became more serious as she grew older and faced more responsibility. Her tutors said they caught her out saying that she had done school work which had not been done. She got into trouble from Mrs Allen for that. She also got into trouble for visiting the boys in their accommodation block: something that was not permitted. She missed her family. Her mother who had a large number of other children to care for could not visit as much as both she and Lisa would have liked.

7.419 Restricted by her elbow injury, success in gymnastics became a more distant reality for Lisa. This may have caused a sense of isolation. Her mother said that being in gymnastics at the elite level made Lisa feel special, but Lisa probably realised she was not progressing. Also, most of the other girls in the Residence were either much older or younger. Karinda Whitwell arrived at the AIS in September 1991 and, although there was an age difference of over two years between them, Lisa and Karinda became good friends. Ms Lincoln said that the pair of them tended to gang up on the younger children. Karinda was always unhappy and the unhappiness which each felt probably made matters worse for the other.

7.420 Nevertheless, Lisa was terrified of being "kicked out" of the AIS. She seems to have clung to a hope that her career could be salvaged. Matters probably came to something of a climax when Mrs Allen intervened to deal with the shoplifting incident in early 1992. Lisa believed that Mrs Allen was "making up all this stuff trying to get me out of there". Lisa kept to her room in the Residence as much as possible. She felt that by doing so she would not get into trouble. She said she became extremely lonely. Mr Bell who was tutoring her after March 1993 said that "it was clear to me that when I was tutoring she was living at the Institute because she loved the Institute life", but he added that she had lost the desire for gymnastics some time ago.

7.421 It was made very clear to the Inquiry that Lisa dislikes Mrs Allen. In fairness, Lisa acknowledged that while she found Mrs Allen not very approachable, Mrs Allen had offered to help with problems. Lisa said that around the time of her elbow injury Mrs Allen had been "actually pretty nice to



me". Most tellingly, she said that now she wonders whether her fears that Mrs Allen was set on having her kicked out were "just...in my head".

7.422 In October 1993, Lisa took up an AIS scholarship in diving located in Brisbane. Mrs Tian lobbied for that at Mrs Allen's suggestion.<sup>57</sup> Although Lisa has not continued with diving she remains in Brisbane to finish her final year of secondary schooling. Lisa's family is in Sydney. There are difficulties between Lisa and her mother - the kind that teenagers sometimes experience. The Inquiry suspects that Mrs McTiernan not only blames Mrs Allen for Lisa's unhappiness while at the AIS but as having a role in present difficulties as well. Mrs McTiernan impressed as a caring mother. She provided a measured and thoughtful written submission, but strong feelings and complaints came with her oral submission.

7.423 The Inquiry has concluded that the allegations of mistreatment of Lisa McTiernan in the Residence have not been proven. The fact remains that Lisa was extremely unhappy in the latter part of her time at the AIS and this has had an effect on her which is continuing. The Inquiry has concluded that these matters have coloured both the nature and terms of the allegations made by Mrs McTiernan and Lisa McTiernan. Except where indicated, the Inquiry has not relied on that factor, although in many instances it would provide additional support for the conclusions reached on the McTiernans' allegations.

**Karinda Whitwell** The majority of allegations about mistreatment of the girls in the Residence have been made by Mrs Whitwell. In large measure she is reliant upon her daughter, Karinda, for the information behind the allegations. According to her mother, Karinda has declined all requests to speak to the Inquiry. Karinda, who turns 15 this year, will not talk about her time at the AIS to counsellors to whom her mother has taken her or to any of her former gymnast friends from the AIS.

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57 Speaking of the period after March 1993, Mr Bell told the Inquiry:

Lisa shouldn't have been at the Institute. She was long past her use-by date and she wanted to - she really wanted to leave. Robyn went out of her way to ensure that she got a second chance. She went to Brisbane, I think in the diving. I was most impressed with the way that Robyn went in to bat for Lisa.



**7.424** That the allegations are based on hearsay evidence affects their strength to a very significant degree. It was the strong experience of the Inquiry that broad and alarming allegations became much less so or even disappeared when those who made the allegations were asked to substantiate them with evidence and by logical argument. It is entirely possible that this experience might apply to Mrs Whitwell's allegations if Karinda was willing to speak about them. In any event, the Inquiry has investigated Mrs Whitwell's allegations as fully as it can on the basis of the available evidence.

**7.425** It has been mentioned above in connection with the allegation of delay in providing Karinda with access to grief counselling that she may have had a motive for being untruthful to her mother. That motive might also explain some of Karinda's allegations in relation to other matters. The existence of the motive rests to a degree on circumstantial evidence and contains an element of speculation. However, without expressing any decided view, the theory behind the alleged motive must be acknowledged as at least credible.

**7.426** Karinda was at the AIS for a quite lengthy period: September 1991 until April 1994. She was talented. It might be that had she persisted, she would have been a contender for Australia's 1995 World Championship and 1996 Olympic Games teams. However, right from the beginning and for the rest of her time at the AIS she was identified by other gymnasts as having more than her fair share of problems and unhappiness. Tracey Kwan from Victoria who was at the AIS from October 1990 to February 1992 said that Karinda would be upset or tired. While that is not an unusual reaction from time to time, Tracey believed that Karinda was a little bit more upset and tired than other girls of her age. Kristy Wilson from Queensland who was at the AIS from February 1988 to December 1993 said that Karinda was not happy in the Residence and did not like the hard work in the gym. According to Kristy, Karinda "never seemed motivated" and "always seemed like she was dead". Mrs Wilson, who took Karinda out on a couple of occasions, commented that she always looked really sad. Mrs Wilson said, "She looks like she shouldn't be here, she doesn't seem to be enjoying it." Lisa Read who was at the AIS from January 1988 until December 1992 and Tanya Moses who was there from June until December 1991 remarked that Karinda cried a lot in the gym. While crying in the gymnasium is widely regarded as a form of release of tension or emotion and

not necessarily indicative of a deeper problem,<sup>58</sup> given the other comments, it may have been a sign of something else in Karinda's case. However, Lisa attributed Karinda's crying to the "general problems of being scared of skills". Tanya thought that while Karinda did try in the gym, she would also slacken off - she could have tried harder. In the Residence, Tanya shared a room with Karinda for a while. The following series of questions and answers occurred between Tanya and the Inquirer.

Q. *Did Karinda ever tell you why she was not really very happy?*

A. *Mainly because she missed her parents...and she was homesick.*

Q. *Was she ever getting into trouble with the coaches?*

A. *She was not in major trouble but like she'd always be not happy and not very happy at training and that.*

Q. *Do you know why?*

A. *No. I mean, I don't know, I think she wanted to go home.*

Q. *So she did not have her heart in it?*

A. *No, I don't think she wanted to do it heaps.*

7.427 Mr Forbes said,

*...she really did not ever want to be at the Institute... You know, 'I don't want to be here, I want to go'. There were signs to us. She always had little injuries, she always had problems - signs that tell us she's not happy and does not want to be here.*

7.428 Mr Bell who tutored Karinda said,

*She's like the ice maiden. She wouldn't talk. She wouldn't open up. She was very snotty, not just towards tutors, but towards the other girls, very cutting in her whole attitude. So, it was totally*

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58 Some gymnasts who have been noted for crying a great deal have gone on to pursue successful careers.

*defensive and Karinda - it suddenly dawned on me that she didn't want to be at the Institute.*

**7.429** This realisation came to Mr Bell in mid 1993, about three months after he had commenced to tutor Karinda. Later in his oral submission, Mr Bell described Karinda as "sour".

**7.430** Mrs Allen said that Karinda spoke to her about her unhappiness. Mrs Allen advised her to speak to her mother about it. Karinda replied, "Mum's not listening to me." Mr Forbes and Mrs Allen told the Inquiry that Karinda had spoken to Dr Fricker (the AIS Director of Medicine) and Ms de Prazer (an AIS sports psychologist) about her difficulties. The Inquiry sought to interview both Dr Fricker and Ms de Prazer on this issue but, as stated above, the promised permission was never received.

**7.431** Mrs Whitwell told the Inquiry that after Karinda had some discussions with Ms de Prazer, she was very excited. She told her mother that Ms de Prazer was wonderful and that at last she had someone at the AIS in whom she could confide. About 30 minutes to an hour later she telephoned her mother again and instructed her mother to take her out of the AIS immediately. Mrs Whitwell says that she has never been told the reason why, and that this came as a shock to her. The Inquiry has not been able to detect the happening of any particular external event (for example, an argument with someone) which might have been the trigger for Karinda to make her decision to leave.

**7.432** Mr Forbes suggested to the Inquiry that the counselling sessions with Ms de Prazer may have given Karinda the courage to tell her mother that she wanted to leave. This is plausible. The Inquiry accepts the evidence of Karinda's unhappiness at the AIS. It is curious that permission to interview Karinda's AIS medical and psychological advisers has been promised by Mrs Whitwell but never received. It is possible that Karinda has objected and her mother has rightly been guided by that objection. However, that has not been communicated to the Inquiry. If Ms de Prazer has information about the reasons for Karinda leaving the AIS, Karinda may not wish that to become known. Furthermore, by acting in the way that she did, Karinda achieved her objective of leaving the AIS but without having to discuss her reasons with her mother. Any such desire to avoid a confrontation with her mother is consistent with what appears to have been her behaviour in relation to the incident of shoplifting where she did not disclose her full involvement.

**7.433** Finally, in relation to other matters which have come before the Inquiry by virtue of Mrs Whitwell, when faced with a mother who was allegedly not listening to her requests to leave the AIS, did Karinda paint a black picture in the hope that it would encourage Mrs Whitwell to allow her to go home? This is speculation, but it cannot be dismissed out of hand.

**7.434** There are some other circumstances of potential relevance. Lisa Read described Mrs Whitwell as "pretty pushy". In gymnastics and other circles, this is "code" for a parent who drives a child notwithstanding a lack of interest on its part. Ms Read had a long career in gymnastics and might be well placed to make such judgments. Karinda took a number of short breaks from the AIS to consider whether she wanted to continue, and returned apparently committed to stay. Did her mother talk her into staying? It was alleged that under a sponsorship deal, Mrs Whitwell had the personal free use of a motor vehicle in return for Karinda putting on various displays for the car dealership. Presumably that sponsorship might cease if it was apparent that Karinda would not progress further in elite WAG.

**7.435** The foregoing has the potential for depicting Mrs Whitwell poorly. It is wise not to jump to conclusions. Ms de Prazer's counselling of Karinda could have been along the lines of giving her the strength and wisdom to recognise that all the hard work and sacrifice to reach the Olympics were more than she was prepared to give and that she should retire. That is an enormously hard decision to make. Karinda's behaviour is consistent with a desire not to discuss a traumatic decision, not necessarily a desire to avoid confronting an unreceptive mother. Also, Mrs Whitwell denied that she was pushy. To the contrary, she said she had often told Karinda that if she was not happy she should leave the AIS. According to Mrs Whitwell, Karinda would reply that she had to stay in Canberra because that was where the good coaches were to be found and she needed them if she was to reach the Olympics. In fairness to Mrs Whitwell, the Inquiry did not discuss the car sponsorship deal with her.

**7.436** Where the absolute truth lies may never be known. These matters have been mentioned not because it has been necessary to rely on them expressly for the findings in this report, but because they may shed light on why events have developed as they have, and will most likely be relevant should any further evidence become available in the future.



**7.437** The final point is to ask why Karinda was allowed to stay at the AIS for so long if it was apparent to the likes of Mr Forbes that there were "signs that tell us she's not happy and does not want to be here"? In fairness to Mr Forbes, this may involve a certain degree of hindsight on his part. On gymnastic ability, it seems clear that Karinda deserved her place in the program. It appears that the AIS believes that a gymnast who has the ability to stay should make the decision as to retirement herself; she should not be pushed. Obviously, that can avoid long-term regrets. Karinda did take short periods off to consider whether she wished to continue and always returned. Mrs Allen says she encouraged Karinda to speak to her mother about her unhappiness. It is not unknown for gymnasts to go through rough patches, to recover and go on to better things. It may well be that Karinda Whitwell is just one of those worst case scenarios which confounds all reasonable precautionary measures.

**e. Avoiding Houseparent/Gymnast Conflict**

**7.438** A very small number of gymnasts and their families have been most unhappy with Mrs Allen. That relations deteriorated to a significant degree cannot be denied. Whether that deterioration stemmed from any mistreatment at her hands is a separate issue which has been dealt with above.

**7.439** It would be surprising if every girl who lived in the Residence got on well all of the time with each houseparent who had charge of her. Some conflict is inevitable. Although conflict of this kind does not necessarily involve any mistreatment, the Inquiry believes that personal conflicts have played a hand in the making of the allegations of mistreatment. Therefore, it seems pertinent to offer comment about a few matters concerning the avoidance of conflict which came to light in the course of conducting the Inquiry.

**7.440** Steps for dealing with conflict can be taken in two general directions. First, mechanisms can be in place to minimise the potential for conflicts to develop. The appointment in mid 1994 of a second full-time houseparent was widely welcomed among those interviewed by the Inquiry as a significant measure which could avoid the potential for personal conflict. The presence of a second personality for five days a week made it more likely that a girl would have a person with whom she could develop a strong relationship. There is



someone different to talk to. Mrs Allen said that it represented a big improvement.

**7.441** Another comment that can be made in terms of minimising the potential for conflict is the need to improve the communication to parents and gymnasts of the detail of the program's arrangements. This needs to be in written form. Some references have been made to this above and need not be repeated.

**7.442** Second, mechanisms can be put in place for identifying and resolving conflict should it occur. A number of current and former gymnasts and their families said that if they had a problem with some aspect of the Residence, they had nowhere to go for advice or to talk things through and at the same time be assured that what was said would go no further. Lisa McTiernan said she reached the point where she trusted no-one. As indicated above, she was terrified of losing her scholarship and she believed that if she mentioned any problem she was having to anyone in the AIS that would come to the attention of Mrs Tian and might be a factor in any decision on her scholarship. To a large degree those fears were irrational, but that did not stop them from occurring. Patricia Kirkham who lived in the Residence for 6 months during 1990 said, "I didn't feel I had someone I could really trust to talk to." Mrs Whitwell said that just prior to Karinda leaving the AIS matters had taken a turn for the better because in Ms de Prazer her daughter had someone to whom she could talk to without matters getting back to the gymnastics program. Mrs Whitwell described Ms de Prazer in that capacity as a confidante. Current gymnast Nicole Kantek has used Dr Fricker in that role. She said they had private meetings and added:

*We talk about school, gym, your weight, eating, the Residence, family, if you are homesick, whatever, just what is on your mind... Like, he is someone I can go and tell what I feel - like, besides my mum, but tell him everything and he will not tell everybody else. Like, he will try and help me through it.*

**7.443** There are many existing opportunities for counselling in the AIS: the houseparents, the doctors, the chaplain, the coaches and others. They will be able to deal with the vast majority of problems. However, as has been discovered by the Inquiry, sometimes none of these may be appropriate.

**7.444** Bearing in mind the foregoing and findings elsewhere in this report of inappropriate conduct, the Inquiry recommends the designation of a person as a confidential counsellor for the gymnastics program. That person's role would be to be available to counsel gymnasts and their families in relation to any problems they may be experiencing with the program which cannot be conveniently dealt with in the other ways available. The confidential counsellor would be someone from within the AIS who is familiar with both the gymnastics program and the administration of the AIS. He or she would be available to listen to problems, suggest courses of action using his or her knowledge of the gymnastics program and the AIS and, if requested, to take matters further in the AIS on behalf of the gymnast or family. Unless requested to take matters further, all communications with the counsellor would be confidential. The identity and role of the confidential counsellor should be set out in the handbook given to gymnasts and their families. A person from the AIS sports psychology or sports medicine sections with an interest in counselling would most likely be an ideal confidential counsellor. It is not envisaged that this measure would involve any substantial commitment of resources, in fact it may involve nothing additional to what is already in place.

**e. Selection Criteria for Houseparents**

**7.445** Two people drew attention to what they regarded as being inappropriate criteria for the selection of houseparents. This inappropriateness was alleged to have resulted in the selection of houseparents who were not suitable and in turn that placed the welfare of gymnasts at risk. Each alleged inappropriate criterion will be considered separately.

**7.446** Also, it is convenient to deal here with some instances of alleged inappropriate behaviour by Mrs Allen because they have some connection with the selection criteria.

*i. No Involvement With Gymnastics*

**7.447** Mrs Bevans said the houseparent should be someone who was "most definitely...not connected with gymnastics". She said that the houseparent had to have an understanding of the nature of gymnastics and the demands which were placed on the girls, but beyond that the houseparent should have no involvement with the sport. The reasons for her claim were not clearly or fully explained. However, they appear to be twofold.

## i Put the Children First

**7.448** First, she considered it essential that the houseparent needed to be someone who could "put the children first".<sup>\*</sup> Thus, if the coaches were making demands on the children which were detrimental to their welfare, the houseparent would stand up for the children. This proposition is beyond dispute. However, Mrs Bevans did not explain how a connection with the sport would compromise this protective role of the houseparent. Also, she did not explain which types of connection with gymnastics would produce an undesirable result, specifically whether she had in mind both past and present connections. It is likely that Mrs Bevans would be concerned that a houseparent who has a current connection with the sport may be committed to its success and this might lead to one of two things occurring.

- a. The houseparent may be more likely to go along with a coach who is making unwarranted demands on the children because the houseparent believes that the coach can deliver results.
- b. The houseparent may become unable to make detached judgments about a child's welfare because she has become a fan rather than a supportive protector. In consequence, she may assist a very determined girl to hide minor illnesses and injuries and allow school work to become neglected.

**7.449** It is more likely that Mrs Bevans had in mind the former rather than the latter. However, both are issues of serious importance concerning maintaining independent judgment and having in place appropriate checks and balances so that no person or group is in a position to mistreat others unchallenged.

**7.450** Mrs Bevans did not draw to the Inquiry's attention any evidence which suggested that the events countenanced in subparagraphs a. and b. above have ever occurred at the AIS. Indeed, during her daughter's time at the AIS the houseparents had no connection with gymnastics (other than as houseparents) as far as the Inquiry is aware. On that basis, any allegation of mistreatment in that respect is rejected by the Inquiry. She was critical of the houseparents of that time for not standing up to the coaches but this did not have anything to do with a connection with the sport.

**7.451** There is a third possible issue. If the houseparent was a selector or the girl's coach, that would have the potential for inhibiting frank disclosure about injuries and other problems. It would also most likely work against a relaxed home environment. Such a situation would be undesirable. However, no such person has held the houseparent position.

**7.452** Before concluding on this point, some observations can be made.

1. It is quite conceivable that a houseparent can be guilty of the kind of conduct countenanced by subparagraphs a. and b. above notwithstanding that she has no other connection with the sport.
2. Whether that conduct is more likely because a connection with the sport exists is debatable. A person who is connected may be better equipped to know when to make a stand with the coach. Due to those connections, the coach may be less confident of forcing the issue if confronted by the houseparent. Much will depend on the circumstances and the individuals concerned.
3. That the AIS is aware of these issues is apparent from the Job Description for the houseparents set out in Appendix B. Among their job responsibilities is to closely monitor the well-being of each athlete. If a warning in relation to that well-being is detected it is clearly within the responsibility of the houseparent to do something about it. One of the enumerated Issues and Challenges for the houseparents is to "maintain an even-handed approach despite facing a range of expectations from athletes, coaches, parents, supervisors and teachers." Any favouring of a coach's demands over an athlete's well-being would be a clear breach of this expectation which the AIS has of a houseparent. Ms Mladenovich made the following comment as to how she views her duties:

*...my job is to look after their health - socially, emotionally - all those sorts of things - physically. If I think that there's something happening with her health, one way or another, then I'll say something to the coaches, to the psychologist, the - whoever it is that needs to - you know - help out with the situation - parents. But my duty as a houseparent is to*



*look after the kid first and support them in doing what they want to do, but, as you say, look after their health and welfare first-up. And I know that I have - you know - one of the kids who had a really tough night sleeping, I just let her sleep in and didn't take her to the gym the next day, in the morning - waited til she woke up in her own time... I think that our concern is the kid first and gymnastics second.*

4. Mrs Allen drew to the Inquiry's attention some incidents where she had suggested to the coaches that particular girls needed a rest from training or were not happy in the program and should be supported to leave. She used these instances to demonstrate that she took her protective role seriously.
5. Mr Forbes said that he believed some people in gymnastics incorrectly regarded Mrs Allen as having an administrative function in the AGF. This arose because she had been appointed as an assistant manager for touring national teams on some occasions. Mr Forbes explained that her role was 95% care and welfare and that she was not involved in the performance side of tours. She performed the kinds of functions for the AGF that she was accustomed to performing for the AIS. However, she had to be described by the AGF as an assistant manager in order to meet official international accreditation requirements.
6. There is something to be said for the view that in order to possess the necessary understanding of the nature of gymnastics and the demands which are placed on the girls, a significant past connection with sport at least would be a considerable advantage.

**7.453** Under the heading Punishments (Discipline) in Chapter 6, consideration was given to an allegation by Melinda Cleland concerning being required to perform five sets of 20 standing back somersaults. When Melinda was set this task by her coach, she started to cry. She told the Inquiry that she did not want to do the somersaults. According to Melinda, Mrs Allen approached her, asked what the matter was, Melinda told her and Mrs Allen went and spoke to Mrs Tian. Mrs Allen returned with Mrs Tian. Melinda said, "I said I didn't want to do



them and all this and they said that you had to do them and they were yelling and stuff". The issue which this allegation raises is whether Mrs Allen acted improperly by telling Melinda to finish the exercise. Was she supporting a coach who was making unwarranted demands on Melinda? Whether the demand was unwarranted has been considered above. Mrs Allen's action in asking after Melinda, and then checking with the head coach seem entirely appropriate for a houseparent. In relation to telling her to do the exercises, Mrs Allen said:

*Well, my thoughts were to encourage her to get through her training. At this particular time, Melinda was showing symptoms of not coping and, you know, from being away from home, and from the training program.*

**7.454** Mrs Allen added that she would have said something like, "Look, come on, why don't we get it over and done with and then you're finished." So Mrs Allen encouraged her to finish and tried to lift her spirits. If the exercise and Melinda's condition did not give obvious cause for concern (which appears to be the case), then Mrs Allen's conduct was not inappropriate. Melinda's reference to being shouted at cannot be relied on. As stated previously, many references to being yelled at proved to be situations where someone spoke firmly in a raised tone (not necessarily loud) and conveyed a message that the receiver did not like. To Melinda who was a very young girl struggling with her exercises, anyone who told her what she didn't want to hear would seem antagonistic. The manner in which she recounted the incident supports that impression. This allegation and supporting evidence do not establish any inappropriate conduct.

ii Need to Escape from the Sport

**7.455** The second reason why Mrs Bevans believes the houseparent should be someone who was most definitely not connected with gymnastics was because she envisaged the Residence as an escape from the sport, even though that was not completely possible because it was within the bounds of the AIS. It seems that Mrs Bevans believes that the ability to "escape" is compromised by a houseparent's connection with the sport. She neither explained how this compromise might take effect and lead to mistreatment, nor provided any evidence of mistreatment having happened because of it.

7.456 However, this was an issue which was raised more specifically by another person, Ms Margarita Cornelisson from Victoria. She has held a variety of administrative positions in gymnastics and has a close association with the Cheltenham Youth Club which houses the Victorian Institute of Sport program for elite WAG. Ms Cornelisson said:

*I just feel very strongly that it is very important for a child to have support outside the professionals in the sport and I believe the best possible form of that support is the family. I acknowledge it cannot always be and that therefore some other support mechanism needs to be put into place. What I am very firm about...is...that that other support that is put into place should not have any lead back to the professionals in the sport in any way.*

7.457 Ms Cornelisson then identified Ms Mladenovich as unsuitable as a houseparent because of her role as an international judge of gymnastics. She continued:

*...what I am looking at is the need for the child to see somebody who is not involved with the competitive side of their sport but who is involved with their lives dealing with those sorts of things, so they know and trust it has nothing to do with the required outcome on the competition floor or in the training venue.*

7.458 Ms Cornelisson believed that the girl would see the houseparent as a judge first and foremost and that would create difficulties in seeking the houseparent's help with personal problems. She qualified those comments by confining them to situations where the houseparent was only active as a judge for the particular child. Ms Cornelisson did not provide anything more specific which would shed light on the issue. She knew of nothing which suggested an actual problem had ever arisen in relation to Ms Mladenovich.

7.459 It was put to Ms Cornelisson that if a girl was dealing on an almost daily basis with Ms Mladenovich as houseparent, she would come to regard her as a houseparent first and judge second. Ms Cornelisson replied:

*Whether or not that ultimately happened, I don't think it is appropriate that the kids have to adjust to that.*

**7.460** This might be more a problem for senior girls based interstate who come into the AIS for short-term camps than for either younger girls who are not as interested in judges and results or long-term residents for whom that adjustment would be a smaller part of the overall stay.

**7.461** It was curious that everyone with whom this issue was raised, including Ms Cornelisson, did not regard the judge's independence as a judge being compromised in the event of having to judge one of the girls who she looked after in the Residence. The Inquiry was told that the scoring system and training for judges works against favouritism.

**7.462** Mr Peter Read, President of the NSW Gymnastic Association and father of former AIS gymnast Lisa Read, had this to say when the alleged difficulty was put to him for comment:

*..it makes it more difficult for the children to relate to that person, I would have thought. It's a bit like having a headmaster as a houseparent, if you will. You know, you can't go up and cuddle your headmaster, can you - or headmistress.*

**7.463** The only difficulty with the appointment of an active judge as a houseparent which the Inquiry presently foresees is that the girls may be a little on edge not to offend her but that may not even be a problem if there is so little scope for favouritism. However, in all likelihood the girls will see the houseparent as houseparent first and judge second. Especially for the scholarship residents, there will be too much exposure to Ms Mladenovich as a houseparent for that not to take over from any perception of her as a judge. Any adjustment which visiting senior girls may have to go through is not regarded as mistreatment by the Inquiry. It seems this is an issue that no-one had considered until Ms Cornelisson raised it. Ms Mladenovich is confident that this does not compromise her ability to fulfil her function as houseparent. Mr Forbes as administrator of the AIS gymnastics program agrees. There is no evidence of any girls having been mistreated.

**7.464** To the extent that these matters constitute allegations of mistreatment, the Inquiry rejects them.

*ii. Married Couple*

**7.465** Mrs Bevans from Victoria whose daughter Hollie had lived in the Residence from October to December 1987 and again from October 1988 to May 1990 said that the houseparents should preferably be a married couple. Although she did not address the point specifically, the implication of her suggestion is that a married couple will go further to replicate a family environment based on the traditional model. It was not clear whether she regarded it as essential that the couple have experience in raising children. Mrs Bevans did not press this claim strongly and in the end conceded that it was not necessary. Therefore, some brief observations will suffice.

**7.466** The Inquiry does not accept the claim that children are mistreated by not being cared for by a married couple. Given the widespread incidence of divorce, marital separation, single parenting and de facto relationships, it is much less able to be asserted that there is only one acceptable model for family life. While these situations might be regarded as less than ideal,<sup>59</sup> it is another matter to assert that they necessarily involve mistreatment of the children cared for in any of those situations. The Inquiry considers that it is preferable to look at the full set of criteria and that a person should not necessarily be disqualified because of being unable to bring a spouse to the position as well. Mrs Bevans was unable to provide any evidence to establish that the children had been mistreated simply by virtue of having been cared for by women alone for almost all of the Residence's history. In other residential environments such as boarding schools there is no prescriptive model that the carers be a married couple. It must also be borne in mind that the girls have their own fathers.

#### **f. Inherent Nature of Residential System**

**7.467** A small number of claims were made to the effect that having children live away from home was so undesirable that it amounted to a form of mistreatment of those children.

**7.468** Ms Judith Gillen who had been a tutor and assistant houseparent for the junior (under 18 years) female athletes at the AIS in 1986 claimed that:

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59 However, they may be better for children than a married family environment if the relationship of the parents is full of bitter conflict.



*every gymnast who has left the AIS for whatever reason has been marked by stunted social and emotional growth and less than adequate educational opportunities.*

**7.469** It became clear that in her written submission Ms Gillen was prone to make sweeping statements which contained considerable exaggeration. That this was so in relation to a number of allegations was expressly conceded by her during her oral submission. In this instance, when asked to explain and substantiate her allegation in so far as it applied to living away from home she said,

*I certainly - I wouldn't argue that no gymnast should be there. What I would want to know and be sure of was that all aspects of their life is still really carefully considered, especially given the relatively, the very short time span one can be a competitive gymnast. So, at one point you want them to put lots and lots of focus on their gymnastic career because that is what they are there for and that is their job at that stage. But also, I would not want - I don't want Australian gymnastics to be so short sighted that it churns out improved gymnasts and then worries less about them at the other end.*

**7.470** These sentiments which Ms Gillen expresses in the quotation from her oral submission could be expected to receive wide acceptance. The Inquiry has found that they are accepted and acted on at the AIS. Ms Gillen was present in the very first year of the Residence's operation. As might be expected, there was a period of adjustment and settling in. Many advances have occurred over the years in terms of providing services for resident gymnasts. While Ms Gillen was undoubtedly sincere in her concerns about welfare, she said that she had no knowledge of events at the AIS in recent years. It is very likely that she has virtually no direct knowledge of events in the Residence since she left at the end of 1986. She made no specific allegation of mistreatment of the girls in the Residence during her time there or afterwards.

**7.471** Mrs Bevans alleged that given the amount of training undertaken at the AIS, living away from home for girls in the 11 to 14 years age group would never work. She said, "It doesn't work for the well-being of the child..." In Mrs Bevans' view, the demands of the sport necessitate family support close at



hand. Also, she was simply opposed to children living away from home at such a young age.

7.472 Ms Gillen believed that children should not live in the Residence before they reached secondary school age, other than for training camps. Mr Read expressed a similar view. Mrs Carol Wilson of Queensland whose daughter Kristy was at the AIS from February 1988 to December 1993, said that the children should be at least 13 years of age before they live in the Residence. (Kristy did not live in the Residence.) Mrs Robyn Moore did not like to see nine and 10 year old girls living in the Residence away from their families for longer periods. Many parents of past and present gymnasts indicated that they sought to delay as long as possible their daughters going to the AIS so that they gained more maturity.

7.473 The AIS gymnastics program itself encourages the families of younger girls to relocate to Canberra after they have proven their ability and continuing interest in a three month trial. Typically these girls have come from locations where there are insufficient opportunities to develop their gymnastic skills. As stated above the AIS recognises the value of close family proximity for younger gymnasts. While a significant number of girls who were receiving scholarship support from the AIS were nine, 10 or 11 years old, at the commencement of the Inquiry only one girl who lived in the Residence was under secondary school age and she was 11 years of age. However, at times children as young as nine years have lived in the Residence for extended periods.

7.474 Although strenuous efforts are made to care for the girls in the Residence, family life cannot be replicated. Homesickness is a significant problem, although some gymnasts said that the more independently minded or older girls thrived on the lifestyle (sometimes to the disappointment of their parents who may sense rejection).<sup>60</sup> Nearly all girls experience homesickness and it is an important reason - along with not being able or willing to perform at the high levels required - for girls to leave the AIS in their earlier years there.

7.475 Nevertheless, the Inquiry does not believe that there is sufficient evidence to establish that the residential program involves some inherent

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60 On the other hand, some short term visiting residents do not like what they see as the institutional nature of the Residence. This tended to be older girls who lived at home and might be expected to be more settled in their ways.

mistreatment of the girls. Boarding schools are a fact of life in Australia. The need for a residential gymnastics school received widespread support from the Australian gymnastics community. For example, the Victorian Gymnastic Association Inc. saw the need to maintain a residential program to serve those parts of the country which lacked the resources to provide for local gymnasts who wished to pursue elite WAG. The Victorian Institute of Sport provides a residential service to gymnasts from country Victoria and, in one instance, from interstate. The Western Australian Institute of Sport has made a similar arrangement. However, in both cases the girls are housed in private homes which may be regarded as less institutional and more like their previous family life.<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, on a larger scale, billeting can have limitations especially in terms of consistent and reliable care. It was also put to the Inquiry that in some places where gymnasts live at home, they spend up to three hours a day in a car driving to and from home, gymnasium and school and that breakfast is eaten and home work done in the car. It was argued that this detracts from the value of home life and places pressure on gymnasts in a way which does not occur if a gymnast lives at the AIS.

**7.476** While being separated from family is less than ideal and there is understandable unease about girls under about 12 years of age living away from their families for extended periods, that of itself does not make the AIS Residence a form of mistreatment. In relation to the standards of care in the Residence, the Inquiry has been unable to discover any mistreatment. There is no compulsion for gymnasts to go to the AIS. There is a perceived need to provide opportunities for those girls who have the ability and desire, but cannot advance their careers locally. That means providing a residential program for those whose families cannot relocate. The prevailing view in the gymnastics community is that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages for the limited number of girls affected - although for the very young girls that may be less clear. The Inquiry has insufficient evidence before it which would warrant taking an opposite view.

**7.477** To the extent that these matters constitute allegations of mistreatment, the Inquiry rejects them.

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61 Even so, these arrangements would still come within the terms of the criticism levelled by Mrs Bevans.

7.478 A further issue arose in relation to those families that relocate to Canberra once their daughters have proven their ability and desire to pursue gymnastics at the AIS. It is a major event for a family to move to Canberra to support a girl in her gymnastics career. That career may prove to be very short for a number of reasons including loss of interest, injury, unexpected physical growth which inhibits the pursuit of the sports' skills and lack of improvement in skills. The process of relocation can have immense implications for a family: change of employment for parents, change of schools for brothers and sisters, separation from extended family and friends, sale and purchase of the family home. Two families were interviewed who expected to be faced with having to make a decision in the near future; they were dreading doing so. It was alleged that a realisation of what her family has done to enable her to continue at the AIS will place a powerful but subtle pressure on the gymnast to perform well, and to stick at her gymnastics even when she is losing interest. That pressure may even come from her parents. Mr Barry Logan of Perth put it this way:

*...when they have their bad times and when they have their bad days or their injuries surely the question must be put back on to them: well, kiddo we've given up an awful lot to get here, right, you're just going to have to stick it out.*

7.479 Dr Les Sharp made a similar point. He foresaw a situation where a parent who was concerned that her or his daughter was losing interest or having other difficulties might refrain from mentioning that to the head coach because it might jeopardise not only the girl's position in the program but the effort in relocation.

7.480 It may be recalled that relocation is seen as the way to avoid the problems which young girls face when living away from their families. Those problems are at the root of allegations that the residential system inherently involves mistreatment. However, if the advocated solution in turn exposes the girls to psychological pressures of the kind identified, that is quite undesirable. The Inquiry would regard that as a form of indirect mistreatment.

7.481 However, while those psychological pressures are foreseeable possibilities, no evidence was drawn to the Inquiry's attention to suggest that have occurred or that they are inevitable occurrences. Parents and gymnasts who were interviewed in relation to this point appeared to have addressed the potential for the problem very sensibly. For example, Kristy Wilson's family

moved from Wollongong to Canberra in 1988 when she was eight years old. She said:

*It was my choice in the beginning. Like, no-one forced me or told me you have to do it, you have to stick with it. It was my choice all along, you know. My parents were good in that sense that if, when I had enough, fine, you know, it's your choice.*

**7.482** Mr Chris Hayward has a daughter, Michelle, in the program at present. The Haywards moved from Adelaide to Canberra in July 1994. He said this about the possible psychological pressures Michelle might feel to stick with the program:

*I've thought about that and, I mean, there's always that possibility; but that certainly isn't the case and we've told her that in as many different ways as we can... If things didn't work out and the family decided to go back to Adelaide, we could always do that. But, I mean, we're basically very happy here and there's certainly no pressure from the family for Michelle to succeed. We always told her that she has actually already succeeded by being here and as long as she enjoys what she's doing, then that's fine.*

**7.483** The implications of relocation and the possibility that a child may, for any number of reasons, leave the AIS at any time are discussed between parents and senior administrative and coaching staff in the gymnastics program before relocation. Ms de Prazer said she was available to counsel any families at this stage. She had counselled a couple of families who had relocated to Canberra and now their child was unsure of whether she wished to continue. She did not indicate that she had experienced any particular concern that a child either felt under pressure or was being pressured to stay due to the family's effort made in relocation.

**7.484** Without wishing to trivialise this serious concern which has been raised, the only pressure the Inquiry discovered was pressure to leave the AIS. The life of being the parent of an elite gymnast is very demanding too. Parents may be secretly relieved if a child wishes to retire. One father went so far as to endeavour to bribe his daughter with the promise of her own colour television if she would retire and thereby enable her family to leave Canberra for warmer climes!

**7.485** While the prospect of untoward pressure on a gymnast to stick with the program against her will because of what her family have done for her may exist, no evidence came to the Inquiry of that having been the case and there can be no necessary expectation that such pressure will routinely occur. Gymnasts and parents interviewed appeared to have a sensible attitude to the issue and relevant counselling is available from the AIS.

**7.486** To the extent that these matters constitute allegations of mistreatment, the Inquiry rejects them.

Historical Document



## 8: SCHOOLING

### 1. INTRODUCTION

8.1 The female gymnasts at the AIS pursue either primary or secondary school studies.<sup>62</sup> Their school careers cannot be described as "normal". In order to accommodate their training schedules, their school days are shorter than for other students (although the degree to which this occurs varies with their level in gymnastics). They do not participate in school sport and some other school activities. As they progress as gymnasts, they may miss attending school for varying periods while they participate in national and international competitions. The lead-up to a major event such as an Olympic Games may see them defer their school year.

8.2 These circumstances lead to questions about whether the gymnasts receive an adequate education. For instance, to what degree do these disruptions to the normal school schedule disadvantage the gymnasts' education? If there is significant disadvantage, what measures are taken to overcome it?

8.3 In the Inquiry's view, the AIS has special responsibilities in regard to the education of the gymnasts. They are not young adult athletes who might be in a position to defer their vocational training or tertiary education while they pursue a career in sport. They are children who, while they are children, must receive that basic education which is essential to equip them both for life and further education after their competitive gymnastics careers are over. It would be scandalous if the AIS allowed a situation to develop where the demands of gymnastics compromised the attaining of that education.

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62 The Inquiry is aware of two girls who pursued their early years of tertiary study while still gymnasts at the AIS in the early 1990s. There may have been some more from the 1980s, but there numbers would be very small. The girls accommodated their study and gymnastics commitments by means of deferring their studies or undertaking them part-time. There were no allegations of mistreatment by the AIS in relation to tertiary study. That level of education will not be reported on any further in this chapter.

8.4 A number of comments and allegations were made to the Inquiry which suggested that the gymnasts' education either is or has been compromised. Most of these concerned the issue of whether enough was done to compensate for the demands of training and competition. One allegation was that Mrs Tian did not regard the girls' education as a priority. Most of these allegations were expressed in general terms and concerned the situation some time ago.

8.5 It is convenient to start by explaining the current educational arrangements for the gymnasts. With one exception, all the gymnasts at the AIS - whether they are resident or non-resident scholarship holders - attend either Aranda Primary School or Canberra High School. There were two main sources of information about the schooling arrangements:

1. Mr Bill Weatherstone who is the principal of Aranda Primary School. He made an oral submission at the Inquiry's request.
2. Ms Helen Burfitt who is the Principal of Canberra High School. She made a written submission and, at the request of the Inquiry, an oral submission as well.

8.6 Additional and confirmatory information about educational arrangements was obtained from gymnasts, their families and AIS staff. Also relevant are the tutoring and study hall arrangements explained above in Chapter 7 as these are central to the AIS's educational policies.

8.7 Following an explanation of the educational arrangements, the allegations of mistreatment are set out and considered.

## 2. PRIMARY SCHOOL (YEARS 3 TO 6)

8.8 Mr Weatherstone has been the principal of Aranda Primary School ("Aranda") for six years. When he was appointed, the school had been taking AIS gymnasts for about 12 months. At that time, Aranda had about five or six students in the senior years: years five and six. These girls would have been 10, 11 or 12 years of age. At the time of the Inquiry, enrolment had grown to 18 gymnasts in years three to six; girls aged from eight to 12 years. Enrolment was expected to increase again later this year.

**8.9** The girls are currently enrolled in a composite or multi-age class. This means they all share the same classroom and teacher. The class is composed exclusively of gymnasts. This method of teaching is long established in relation to small schools, particularly in rural areas. Increased consideration is being given to using them in metropolitan areas. Mr Weatherstone said:

*Multi-aged classrooms at the present are something that is currently being looked at in a real way right across eastern Australia. Multi-aged classrooms are not new. There are hundreds of them in terms of small schools around Australia where children are learning satisfactorily.*

**8.10** The gymnasts are bused to school from the AIS as soon as their morning training is finished. Aranda is two kilometres from the AIS gym. They arrive at different times depending on their level in gymnastics. The more advanced girls (usually the older ones) arrive about 11.00 am and the others about 9.00 am or 10.00 am. Also, arrival time may vary according to the day of the week. The gymnasts leave at the end of the normal school day and return to the AIS for training.

**8.11** Until this year, the girls were placed in classes with other students of their own age. This meant that when they arrived the class was under way. Not only had they missed some of the material, they - like other children - were occasionally in need of a settling-in period before they were ready to learn. This might be especially so if they were still distracted by what had happened in the gymnasium that morning. Arrival at class could occur in the middle of what Mr Weatherstone called "key learning time". Not only was all of that disruptive to other children and demanding of the teacher, it was not an ideal learning environment for the gymnast. Mr Weatherstone said that as far as possible, he had endeavoured to place girls of the same year in the same class "to try and give them some socialisation". While this went some way to reduce a sense of isolation which a sole gymnast in a class might feel, it also seems to the Inquiry to be the seed from which current arrangements have germinated. Mr Weatherstone arranged for one of his teachers who had AIS students and "who had a particular empathy for young girls and had an empathy for they were doing" to be available as a liaison officer for the AIS and parents, and to keep watch on the girls' progress.

**8.12** With the build-up to the Olympic Games in 2000, Mr Weatherstone was informed that the number of gymnasts could grow to 25 and that girls as young as eight (year three) could be involved. He said:

*I was then of the opinion that we...could no longer suitably meet their educational, social and emotional needs, as pertaining at the school, under the present situation.*

**8.13** In 1994 when numbers grew to 13 or 14, he instituted occasions when all the gymnasts were brought together for specialised small group learning. There they could relate to one teacher who would work through areas where it was felt by the teacher that the girls needed extra support. This occurred during times when the rest of the school was engaged in sport.

**8.14** In 1995, the multi-age class was introduced. This was possible due to increased funding from the ACT Department of Education brought about by the greater number of gymnasts attending Aranda. The multi-age class has a number of relevant advantages. Instruction can be tailored to the girls' arrival time; not the need of the other students in the class. There is better socialisation and mutual support among the students. It also more easily permits special arrangements being made for those students who are on short-term visits such as trials and those who go away to participate in national competitions (none of the primary school girls are competing internationally). Mr Weatherstone said that if the girls were going to a competition in another location, a geography or history class might be based on that location. Liaison with parents and the AIS is easier because there is one point of direct contact. The teacher is more knowledgeable of the demands which the sport places on the girls and can respond more appropriately in the educational setting.

**8.15** The teacher for the composite class is Mr Chris Duncan. Mr Weatherstone described him in these terms:

*He is a young man with five years' teaching experience. He is a highly motivated, dedicated, hardworking young character who is a very fine teacher and he relates extremely well to the children. He is a no-nonsense fellow too and he puts [in] the effort and work...*

**8.16** Mr Weatherstone added that the girls were "very fortunate" because they had the benefit of 18 "individualised learning programs". A further innovation occurred this year when Mr Duncan attended the National Clubs Championships in Adelaide in July. The AIS took all of primary school girls and Mr Duncan to this event. His role was to continue offering tuition in times off from the competition and training program.

**8.17** On two afternoons per week, the girls are "integrated within other classrooms according to their levels". Mr Duncan arranges for the girls to attend excursions pertaining to their level if that fits within their training times. Thus, if the year 4 students are visiting a museum, the girls of that level from within the multi-age class go on that excursion with all the other year four students.

**8.18** However, the fact remains that the girls, especially the older ones, do not receive as many class hours as other children. They make up some hours by having classes when they would otherwise be participating in school sport, but that does not compensate fully. Of the eight key learning areas in ACT schools, the gymnasts do not receive any instruction from the school in two: health, sport and physical education, and a language other than English (LOTE). The first is regarded as being compensated for by their gymnastics careers. Mr Weatherstone identified French as the LOTE at Aranda and said that it was impractical to offer it to the girls, especially when many are present only for relatively short periods (say, three months) and may have been exposed to another language at their previous school. He added:

*[that the school wanted to make sure that the girls'] reading abilities, their literacy and their numeracy are up to par or better; let's work on the social and emotional skills, the personal development stuff as much as we can... Do the arts and the crafts and the sciences as much as we possibly can integrating them within those things. But we cannot give them, in the time we've got available to them, the same exposure to the...key learning areas. It is just impossible.*

**8.19** In summary, it appears that in three key learning areas - English, mathematics and social education - the girls receive the full measure of tuition, if not more. In another three - science, art and technology - they receive a diminished amount of tuition. In one - LOTE - they receive no tuition. In the



eighth - health, sport and physical education - it is considered that gymnastics represents a substitute.

8.20 Nevertheless, Mr Weatherstone appeared satisfied with the education the gymnasts are receiving. He said:

*...from all the information I have - [I] feel very comfortable with the educational program he [Mr Duncan] is presenting for most kids.*

8.21 While this might suggest that Mr Weatherstone was not "very comfortable" with the situation for some kids, it was clear to the Inquiry from his other comments and the manner in which he made them, that he regarded the position as satisfactory overall. He said:

*...while it has taken us six years, I think we have achieved a much better deal for the children at the present moment, largely in terms of their education, because that is where my interest is. I believe we are catering for them in a very significant way now. I am not saying we didn't do it well before, I think we are doing it better now, and I think we are giving the children, by virtue of the way we are doing it, the emotional and social support at our school. [Emphasis added.]*

8.22 Also of relevance is that the Inquiry was told by many people that gymnasts as a group are very disciplined and above average in intelligence. Therefore, it might be expected that they can cope with the educational challenges that they face with better results than many other people. Mr Weatherstone said:

*...with these students, all of the students that we have currently - and to say it is probably true of most of the students we've had from the AIS - are all capable kids who are keen to learn and willing and able. We have had no AIS students that I am - can come to mind who have been behaviour problems, who are disruptive, who are uninterested, so if you consider you have 18 little persons - and they are little - 18 little persons sitting in a classroom working with a dedicated teacher who is extremely prepared on individualised programs, you have a very good situation.*

**8.23** Quite clearly, the present arrangements are the product of evolution as better ways of doing things are sought and found, and of responses to changing circumstances. Mr Weatherstone said that over the years matters such as training times and whether children attended non-urgent medical appointments during school time had been the subject of negotiation between Aranda and the AIS. The Inquiry suspects that at times Aranda and the AIS did not see matters in the same way and that it has taken time to understand each other's priorities and to develop workable solutions.

**8.24** Mr Weatherstone describes the present relationship with the AIS as "very productive". There are a number of "social" exchanges, including excursions by the senior students to the AIS gymnasium to view training. Also, there is a formal meeting between representatives of Aranda and the ACT Department of Education, and AIS education officers and gymnastics personnel (including Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes) four times a year to review the term just completed. It was clear to the Inquiry that both the school and the AIS put a very considerable effort into endeavouring to ensure that the primary educational arrangements for the girls are satisfactory.

**8.25** Two other matters warrant brief mention. They are participation in organised physical activities at school and socialisation with other students.

**8.26** The AIS does not permit the gymnasts to participate in any physical activity at the school. In essence, this means no school sport. Mr Weatherstone said that the reason which is advanced is that the AIS wishes to avoid the chance of the girls sustaining an injury which may disrupt their individual coaching programs. He said that a secondary reason is that some school sport may require physical skills and training which conflict with those needed for gymnastics. In Mr Weatherstone's opinion these were reasonable restrictions. The school imposes no constraint on the girls participating in school yard games and using the playground equipment.

**8.27** Mr Weatherstone said that the AIS gymnasts tend to stay together at recess times, but that their behaviour was not much different from other children who also tend to stay together according to their class. He added:

*...it is dependent on the personality of the little girls too. Some of the girls have buddied up - particularly senior girls - buddied up with mainstream kids and taken part in whatever they were doing.*

8.28 One gymnast explained that the girls at times just liked to sit quietly because that provided a rest between training. However, if they felt like it they could and did join in with lunchtime games and activities. Other gymnasts identified various active games that they played such as handball and "tips".

8.29 Mr Weatherstone said that they were involved in social activities such as sleepovers at their school friends' homes on Saturday nights,

*...but not to the extent that the other children are because many of them, as you know, are interstate kids that are not part of the clique.*

8.30 Mr Weatherstone said the gymnasts are 'well accepted in the school community'. He pointed out that they are a little different, and in colder weather they wear their distinctive AIS jackets over their school uniforms (there is no school uniform overjacket). However, they do not appear to be systematically singled out for any unpleasant attention of the kind which can occur between young children. He added:

*...in fact, to be quite honest, the only times recently I've had to speak to students was to speak to sixth grade boys who are really interested in sixth grade AIS girls and tell them to 'lay off, stay away'.*

8.31 It is a matter of "considerable pride" to the school community, to the teaching staff and to Mr Weatherstone to be "involved with these children".

### 3. HIGH SCHOOL (YEARS 7 TO 10)

8.32 Ms Burfitt has been the principal of Canberra High School (Canberra High) for almost five years. Over the years, Canberra High has taken students from the AIS who were participating in a variety of sports including gymnastics, swimming and tennis.

**8.33** At the time of the Inquiry, the students from the AIS who were enrolled at Canberra High were all gymnasts: nine girls and seven boys. The girls were spread over three years as follows: two in year 7, five in year 9 and two in year 9. Unlike the arrangements at Aranda, at Canberra High the girls are integrated into mainstream classes.

**8.34** The gymnasts are bused to school from the AIS as soon as their morning training is finished. Canberra High is about four kilometres from the AIS gym. They arrive at about 11.15 am. The gymnasts leave at the end of the normal school day and return to the AIS for training. Classes are conducted according to a timetable with set starting and finishing times. The starting time of the first class after the gymnasts arrive is at 11.35 am. According to Ms Burfitt, the girls "get off the bus, go around and sign on, have their morning tea and wander off to the 11.35 class". Compared with the arrangements which prevailed at Aranda before the multi-age class was introduced, the arrangements at Canberra High have two advantages. First, the girls do not arrive in the middle of a class; rather they are there from its beginning. Second, because they are in attendance for the introductory portion of the class and have had a substantial interval between leaving the gymnasium and going to class, they will be as ready to learn as the other students. However, they have missed a large portion of the school day; namely, two single classes of 40 minutes and one double class of 80 minutes.

**8.35** The Inquiry considers that there are three ways in which the gymnasts' high school education differs from the normal pattern. Each of these puts the gymnasts at a disadvantage and requires some compensating action. The differences are:

1. Loss of morning class time due to daily training commitments (this amounts to about one half of daily class time);
2. Less time for homework and assignments due to afternoon and early evening training commitments;
3. Loss of class time due to travel and competition commitments.

**8.36** The compensating measures which have been brought to the Inquiry's attention are as follows.

**8.37** First, the gymnasts are enrolled in what Canberra High calls its program of excellence. Normally, students at the school undertake seven subjects in any one semester. However, students enrolled in the program of excellence are exempted from some of these. Ms Burfitt explained the program in this way.

*What we want to do is to give the students who study outside of this school some recognition for the time that they spend in a program which the school cannot provide. There are criteria for the program of excellence; things like the program has to be excellent, the student has to be exceptionally talented, the school does not offer the program itself and any student and their parents who think they might meet that criteria can approach me and ask if they can be enrolled in a program of excellence. What it means is we give them a time allowance. Instead of doing the seven subjects that all the other students are doing, they might formally enrol in four subjects or five subjects or six subjects and they have what we call a free line [a blank or free study period in their class timetable]. When that free line comes up, which comes up at different times of different days, those students will go to the library and do private study. They generally do the homework and the assignments that they cannot do after school because they are busy doing their outside commitment.*

**8.38** The program may apply to students involved in performing arts, sport and other activities.

**8.39** Ms Burfitt told the Inquiry that the gymnasts are given two lines (subjects) of allowance under the program of excellence. The gymnasts must enrol in English, mathematics and science. Also, one of the two other subjects must be a second language or a social science. The fifth subject is chosen from the school's range of optional subjects. The allowance has increased over the years as the demands of training, competitions and travel have increased.

**8.40** Enrolment in the program of excellence is something that appears on the student's Year 10 Certificate which is granted to her upon satisfactory completion of her high school studies.



**8.41** In addition to providing time during the day to undertake assignments and homework, these arrangements mean that some of the class times missed in the morning will be blank or free periods only.

**8.42** Second, during 1995 Canberra High has been able to arrange for one of its teachers to be available in the library to tutor the gymnasts on material that they had missed in normal class time. The teacher, Ms Margaret Kestenbaum, is available for ComCare reasons, probably only for this year. In recent years, the AIS sent its own tutors, either Ms Christine Canning or Mr John Bell, to the school for short periods to provide extra tuition. Ms Kestenbaum also acts as Canberra High's liaison point for the AIS study hall program.

**8.43** Third, there are the study hall arrangements at the AIS. Ms Burfitt considered these formal study arrangements to be a useful initiative. She said:

*...the AIS students do spend much more time doing homework than a lot of students at Canberra High. They do not have the hours of watching television and the hours of talking on the phone to their friends that other students have got.*

**8.44** Fourth, the AIS students are exempted from school sport. This releases some extra time for study.

**8.45** Fifth, if students are away at competitions, allowance is made for assignments which cannot be submitted. Ms Burfitt said:

*I say to staff to assess them on the work that they do when they're present, not assess them on the work they haven't done. And that is very difficult, particularly for sequential subjects like maths or a language.*

**8.46** Ms Burfitt said that when marked on that limited basis, the gymnasts' performance was "very good".

**8.47** Notwithstanding these measures to compensate, it is inescapable that the volume of knowledge and learning skills to which the students are exposed is diminished. They miss a substantial number of classes. Catching up on missed classes rather than attending them is usually an inefficient use of time. Ms Burfitt emphasised that gymnasts could miss out altogether on two of the

eight key curriculum areas: most likely arts and technology. She said that from an educationalist's point of view, that may or may not be regarded as serious depending upon whether you spoke to "a science/maths type person, or an arts/technology/cultural studies type person".\*

**8.48** In answer to a question whether, in her opinion, the gymnasts were mistreated in their education, Ms Burfitt said this:

*In my opinion, if they take advantage of all the support that is provided for them and use it as fully as they possibly can I would probably say no, given that they have a priority in a sport area. So, I would probably say, given all those things no. But education is not just about getting As and Bs and Cs in English, maths and science. It is about working with people, co-operating with other people, developing positive and healthy relationships with people and adults and what I see is that the opportunities for the AIS students to do that in what I call a normal school setting - the opportunities are reduced, generally because they are just not there. But they have experiences that a lot of my other students will not have like overseas travel, interstate travel. That sort of thing.*

**8.49** On the basis of reports that Ms Burfitt had from her staff who teach the gymnasts, she believed that generally the gymnasts were "fairly disciplined and well motivated", although some do get behind and are not as diligent as they might be.

**8.50** Ms Burfitt said she had an excellent working relationship with the education officers at the AIS. In terms of informing the school if the children were away or ill, she said the AIS was better to deal with than parents. There are a number of "social" exchanges between Canberra High and the AIS. Also, meetings have been held between representatives of the school and senior personnel in the gymnastics program. However, in the Inquiry's view, the AIS's working relationship with Canberra High is not as strongly developed as it is with Aranda. There appears to be a recognition of this within both Canberra High and the AIS, and a determination to do something about it.

**8.51** There are a number of issues on the agenda for discussion between the AIS and Canberra High. The AIS would like to see the continuation of the

service provided this year by Ms Kestenbaum. It has been asking for some time for the school to schedule the classes for the subjects the gymnasts are studying for a time after they arrive at the school. This does not seem possible for the school under present timetabling and financial arrangements. The school would like the gymnasts to arrive at 10.55 am in time for the class that commences then; but this would require variation in training arrangements. Canberra High is exploring multi-age classes for some subjects such as maths and science, but any proposals are at the developmental stage.

**8.52** According to Ms Burfitt, the girls keep to themselves around school recess and lunch times. However, they do have non-AIS friends and this inclination to stick together is more prevalent with the younger girls. In class, they must work in groups with other students. She has "no evidence that there is a problem with their social skills. When asked whether the girls' social skills in relation to getting on with other kids "are pretty normal" she answered, "I think so, yes". Even so, the girls are excluded from a number of social events at the school. Ms Burfitt said:

*They are not able to join in with a lot of the activities that we have at school that do have a socialisation aspect to them. I have referred to the athletics carnival, the swimming carnival, the school camps and various excursions. They generally do not get involved in those at all, so they do not get to meet other students outside of the formal school setting.*

**8.53** Also, they do not attend the school social which is held once a term on a Thursday night.

**8.54** Ms Burfitt said that she was "not aware, through our student management process, of any student management problems involving nastiness to the AIS kids, or by the AIS kids". When asked how other people around the school feel about the AIS gymnasts, she replied:

*Love them. We like having them, they are good for the school. They are good for our image. We like having them, they are nice people, they are nice students. They add a dimension to the school which we value, which is that here are students who are particularly committed to something which is different and hard,*

*and hard to achieve, and that, we believe is a good role model for the other students in our school. So we value having them...*

#### **4. COLLEGE (YEARS 11 TO 12)**

**8.55** The nature of WAG is such that an AIS scholarship holder who is old enough to be in Year 11 or 12 of secondary education (15-18 years of age) will be at or near the peak of her gymnastics career. She can expect to be participating frequently in international competition and to be pursuing especially demanding training for major events such as World Championships or Olympic Games. This will mean substantial periods away from school while attending training camps, selection trials and competitions. Also, the physical demands of the sport are at their greatest at this time.

**8.56** It is well recognised that Year 12, in particular, is a crucial stage in a young person's education. In the Inquiry's opinion, it appears impossible to make a simultaneous commitment to gymnastics and school in Year 12 such that the girl's potential in each area is achieved.

**8.57** The AIS has been aware of this difficulty and has responded. The measures adopted at various times have involved supporting gymnasts in relation to distance education or part-time study, as well as making study hall and tutoring arrangements where appropriate.

**8.58** The process of selection leading to the highest level in gymnastics, means that the number of gymnasts in this category is necessarily small. Even in the very significant period of 1991 and 1992 which encompassed the 1991 World Championships in Indianapolis and the Olympic Games in Barcelona, only five girls were in this category.

**8.59** One gymnast is currently studying at this level. She is undertaking Year 11 by distance education through Karabah High School in Queanbeyan, NSW. She lives at home with her parents in Canberra and both she and her parents say they are happy with this arrangement for her schooling. Another very recently retired gymnast, Rebecca Jackson, had been studying at Lake Ginninderra College. She and her family were satisfied with the educational arrangements.



**8.60** No complaints were received about this level of education. No evidence of particular educational disadvantage was brought to the Inquiry's attention. This is illustrated by examining the circumstances of the five gymnasts from the 1991-1992 era who were studying at this level. Two of the five were interviewed by the Inquiry and both were about to complete tertiary education. Another is known to be pursuing tertiary education at a less advanced stage. A fourth has moved overseas and authoritative information about her career path was not available to the Inquiry. However, Mr Forbes believes that she intended to and was capable of pursuing tertiary studies. The circumstances of the fifth are not known.

**8.61** The general impression gained by the Inquiry is that gymnasts are academically ambitious. A large number of former gymnasts who were interviewed have gone on to tertiary education, or have high aspirations in that regard.

## **5. ALLEGATIONS**

**8.62** Most of the allegations and comments concerning inadequate educational arrangements related to the earlier years of the AIS.

### **a. HISTORICAL COMPLAINTS**

**8.63** Mrs Cathy Langtry (nee Blake) who was at the AIS in 1984 and 1985 said she attended Lyneham High School in Canberra. This was before the Residence was opened. She said that she did not receive an adequate education because she had to catch up a lot when she returned to Sydney once her AIS career was over. However, she blames this on her own lack of motivation (others succeeded where she did not), absence of immediate family support and a less disciplined environment at school compared with the Catholic school she had attended in Sydney. Cathy was confident that the present tutoring and study hall arrangements would have prevented her problems from arising. She said that the school had accommodated the gymnasts' needs as athletes in an understanding way by such measures as extensions for assignments.

**8.64** Cathy's comments were more in the nature of an observation relevant to how matters may be improved than an allegation which was pressed home. She appears not to have suffered any lasting educational difficulty. Some



might say that the AIS should have seen to it that she was kept up to the mark and the extra work she had to do in Sydney was some harm suffered as a result of the AIS's neglect. There may be some argument that Cathy's host family had this responsibility rather than the AIS, although that could prove to be a complex legal issue. Others might say that the extra work she had to do in Sydney was her own responsibility and was a temporary factor only. The matter may now be regarded as trivial. Also, circumstances have been very different for some time and, in view of what the Inquiry took to be Cathy's own attitude, there is no occasion to pursue the issue.

**8.65** Ms Megan Scriven reported that she had not kept up with her work too. Her situation is discussed at length under the heading **Historical Matters** in Chapter 7 on **The Residence**.

**8.66** Mrs Barbara Watts whose daughter Katie was at the AIS from September 1986 until June 1988 described the education system as "not great". She seems to blame this state of affairs on the houseparents of the time, Ray and Bronwyn Stanton, whom she alleged did not support the girls with their homework like a family would have done. This is a quite general expression of concern, and no evidence was presented to suggest that Katie's education had been adversely affected during her time as the AIS.

**8.67** Ms Judith Gillen was an assistant houseparent and tutor at the AIS in 1986. She is a school teacher by occupation. She alleged in her written submission that

*...every gymnast who has left the AIS for whatever reason has been marked by...less than adequate educational opportunities.*

**8.68** Later in her written submission, she alleged that "the gymnasts are not always adequately cared for...educationally at the AIS".

**8.69** However, in her oral submission, Ms Gillen explained her allegations in the following terms. Her concern was confined to girls who would be "forced to or encouraged extremely strongly" to go to the AIS "for more extended periods of time than...they would normally go to training camps". She continued:

*...the actual conditions are not always conducive to always efficient study, as might be in their own home environment, it is*

*harder for them to do things like get to libraries, do research, do those sort of activities that increase in their senior school years. Whereas, if there is someone there that is able to do that with them, or if they are actually at home, of, you know, their parents or their siblings, or whatever would do it because that is - I mean, fairly common in non-sporting families as well. But, especially in their senior years when they are having to make a choice anyway. But, I think perhaps at times their education is more interrupted maybe even than it needs to be...*

**8.70** Her concern appeared to be as much current as historical, if not more so. She seems to be worried that if State-based senior gymnasts have to spend time in Canberra away from their homes and schools for extended periods they will be disadvantaged in their education because the study environment will be unfamiliar and they will lack the support that a family might provide. Although Ms Gillen does not say so, this concern could be applied equally to those girls who live in the Residence on a full-time basis, but not those AIS girls who live in Canberra with their families.

**8.71** Ms Gillen, however, added that

*I wouldn't call it abuse by any stretch of the imagination. A disadvantage and something that needs to be continually monitored I guess, yes and you know the gymnasts are counselled and so on.*

**8.72** Thus, it becomes unnecessary to decide upon Ms Gillen's allegations because she is not alleging any mistreatment. In any event, Ms Gillen was largely ignorant of the residential, schooling, tutoring and study hall arrangements which have prevailed for some years - they should allay her concerns.

**8.73** To the extent that the foregoing constitute allegations of mistreatment they are rejected for the reasons given.

**b. Recent Allegations**

**8.74** Ms Julie Gregory, the mother of Nadia Knight, who was at the AIS from April until June 1994 was critical of a number of aspects of Aranda. These

related to loss of class time, that her daughter's teacher was not sympathetic to the training demands on the girls, the girls were not allowed to go into the heated library on cold days at recess times, the toilets were outside and cold, the AIS did not communicate to the parents the detail of the educational arrangements, and promised additional mathematics classes were not provided. Some of these matters pertain to administrative arrangements at the school and the AIS. Also, some are about the physical conditions at the school. As such they are outside the scope of this Inquiry. There is no suggestion, or evidence to suggest, that physical conditions at Aranda are so poor that the AIS should not be associated with the school. Other matters which are relevant to possible mistreatment are considered generally below.

**8.75** Mrs Helle Weir and her daughter Elise alleged that AIS coach Jenny Clack told Elise that she was not allowed to use the school playground equipment. Elise was at the AIS during part of 1993. It was alleged that this instruction was given after Elise had injured her calf muscle on a tyre swing in Aranda's playground. Ms Clack said that she was concerned that Elise and the other girls in the group she coached were using gymnastic type playground equipment in a way that could lead to danger. They might experiment with tricks they had not fully learned or do things that would normally require a coach's presence for the purpose of spotting. She told the girls not to use the school equipment in that manner. Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes know of no general restriction on the use of playground equipment. Mr Weatherstone's evidence is that there is no restriction. The Inquiry accepts Ms Clack's version of events. Her instruction to Elise and her colleagues was entirely appropriate. This allegation is rejected.

**8.76** Mr Planes alleged that "...kids in seventh grade did not know what science was all about". He added:

*Lisa Valletta was there for five weeks and the parents basically removed her because she wasn't going to school until 11 o'clock in the morning.*

**8.77** Mr Planes did not elaborate. It is possible that Mr Planes was referring to the experiences of Lisa Valletta when he made both statements. However, Mr Lewis Valletta, the father of Lisa, denied ever having spoken to Mr Planes and can only speculate how Mr Planes might come to make claims about his daughter's experience at the AIS.

**8.78** Contrary to what Mr Planes says, Mr Valletta told the Inquiry that he and his wife did not remove Lisa from the AIS. She returned home of her own initiative, notwithstanding that they were willing to support her staying at the AIS if she so wished. Lisa, who was 12 years of age, lived in the Residence for seven weeks at the commencement of 1995. Lisa told the Inquiry that she had two reasons for returning home to Sydney before completing her three month trial scholarship: they were homesickness and "missing too much school". Mr Valletta said the predominant reason was homesickness. The secondary reason was school. He said that Lisa likes everything to be under control. She was at Canberra High in year 7 studying science and Japanese for the first time and was finding it unsettling because of the newness and missing some classes.

**8.79** Lisa was not arriving at Canberra High until 11.15 am and missing classes in the manner identified above. As for "not knowing what science was all about", Lisa told the Inquiry that science topics such as physics and chemistry were simply timetabled for later in the year. Had she stayed longer, she would have received the tuition in them. As is evident, Mr Planes has overstated matters.

**8.80** Lisa now attends Westfields Sports High School in Sydney. There her classes do not start until she arrives from training; much like the situation which prevails at Aranda. Although Lisa trains for fewer hours at this school than at the AIS, Mr Valletta asks why such an arrangement in relation to class starting times cannot be repeated at the AIS? Obviously, Westfields Sports High School is in concept a very different school from Canberra High.

**8.81** Mr Valletta's comments serve to underline the questions which were asked at the commencement of this chapter, namely: "to what degree do these disruptions to the normal school schedule disadvantage the gymnasts' education? If there is significant disadvantage, what measures are taken to overcome it?"

**8.82** A number of other matters which might give cause for some concern came to the attention of the Inquiry. In essence they concentrated on the theme that if what had to be achieved in a day was too much for the number of hours, the most likely item which would be cut back was school. Such a situation might arise if training was running overtime or if a girl required medical treatment.



**8.83** A number of reports from gymnasts and parents came to the Inquiry's attention which indicated that occasionally one or more girls might be kept back to work on a routine, especially if the girls were having difficulty and a major event was approaching. That morning finishing time could be problem, but also that it was being monitored, emerged from Mrs Allen's evidence. She was asked if she had any disagreements with the coaching staff. She said that she did have disagreements about various "little things that occur at different times". She said that if one arose "you talk it out and you sort it out". She gave the following example:

*There might be little things like, 'They must finish at 11.00 am so they're there for the school bus' and it tends to maybe get a little bit tight towards a big competition that's coming up because they want to fit in - every minute in, and I'll say, 'The bus will go; they have to be ready', you know, that's all. And that depends on the time and what's going on.*

**8.84** As mentioned above, Mr Weatherstone said that over the years the issue of whether children attended non-urgent medical appointments during school time had been a matter of negotiation between the AIS and Aranda. The school's preference is that if they occur at all during school hours, that should be during lunchtime. Some other reports suggested that medical treatment, especially physiotherapy, had occurred during school hours. Ms Burfitt had heard of some instances of that occurring over the years too, but in her opinion it was not regular or significant. There may well be little option for parents and houseparents when it comes to making appointments to see medical specialists and radiologists. In Ms Burfitt's words, "You take what you can get." However, in relation to general medical and physiotherapy services which are provided on the AIS campus, it should be possible to ensure that these do not clash with school hours. There was insufficient evidence to establish that this was a significant problem.

**8.85** The Inquiry places great weight on the evidence and professional opinions of the principals of Aranda and Canberra High. Both were very impressive witnesses. It was clear that they were keenly interested in the educational and related social welfare of the AIS gymnasts. While they aim to co-operate with the AIS, the Inquiry believes that they would not be reticent to act if the girls' education was being compromised by gymnastics to the point where that education would not prove adequate. Although both principals were



of the opinion that the girls are not mistreated in their education, Mr Weatherstone was confident and Ms Burfitt bordered on being doubtful. The evidence available to the Inquiry supports the difference in their degrees of confidence: the prevailing arrangements for the primary school children seem to suit their needs more satisfactorily than do the corresponding arrangements for the high school children. Also, the Inquiry must recognise that according to the evidence presented, the special arrangements at both schools are authorised by the ACT Department of Education.

**8.86** The Inquiry accepts the principals' views that there is no mistreatment. It has to be acknowledged that some educationalists and observers are unlikely to agree. However, given that the Inquiry must allow for the overriding circumstance that the girls are embarked on a career in elite gymnastics which will necessarily require lengthy periods of training and competition, there must be a recognition that there will be not be as much time for the normal educational processes. Girls training at elite gymnastics centres around Australia require, in one form or another, special arrangements for their education. The question then becomes whether the girls at the AIS are receiving an adequate education in all the circumstances, or are the demands on time imposed by the AIS gymnastics program just too great? In reaching the decision that they receive an adequate education, the Inquiry has been influenced by the opinions of the two school principals. Also, it is strengthened in that decision by the knowledge that many parents and gymnasts have expressed their satisfaction with the educational arrangements. Furthermore, former gymnasts are progressing onto and beyond tertiary education satisfactorily. Finally, it was very clear that the AIS gymnastics staff genuinely regard the attaining of an adequate education as an important objective<sup>63</sup> and that there has been a series of measures aimed at finding new and better ways of educating the gymnasts. In that respect, it was clear to the Inquiry that matters have come a long way since the establishment of the Residence and the previous homestay arrangements, both in terms of the arrangements with the schools and the degree of educational support which the AIS can offer from its own limited resources.

**8.87** Various concerns were drawn to the Inquiry's attention about possible changes in the manner of delivery of education. Mrs Bevans, Ms Burfitt, the

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63 For instance, Ms Canning told the Inquiry that in her role as a tutor she had always felt she had strong support from Mr Forbes and Mrs Tian.

Victorian Gymnastic Association and Mr and Mrs Jackson said that it had been proposed in the past that secondary education be undertaken by correspondence. Mrs Bevans, the VGA and the Jacksons expressed their strong opposition to such a change. Also of relevance is that Mr Forbes has proposed to the AGF that education be "on-campus" at the AIS. Mrs Allen told the Inquiry that the ideal situation for primary education would be to have a school on campus. Dr Sharp strongly opposed any such developments. The concerns of Dr Sharp, Mrs Bevans, the VGA and the Jacksons are outside the scope of this Inquiry as they relate only to possible future conduct. However, it may be noted that in reaching their influential conclusions that the gymnasts were not mistreated in relation to their education, both Mr Weatherstone and Ms Burfitt regarded the socialisation aspect of school life with other children as a very important aspect of obtaining an adequate education.

**8.88** Some concerns were raised by families about the difficulties faced by children arriving into the ACT education system from interstate. This presents problems associated with differing curricula. Ms Burfitt explained that these problems were encountered by other children who move across educational system boundaries, and that the school had a number of children of defence force personnel who were in exactly the same position. While this is an issue which needs to be understood and weighed-up by prospective AIS gymnasts and their families, it does not involve mistreatment of gymnasts by the AIS.

**8.89** In her oral submission, Mrs Whitwell alleged that "we as parents were discouraged from even contacting the school directly". She did not identify precisely how or when this occurred. Mrs Allen denied this allegation. She said:

*The only thing they were told in the orientation was that - and with Mrs Whitwell it would have been that Cindy Lincoln was the liaison officer...[for]...the school and, 'If you've got any problems ring, you can ring Cindy, or we have an educational officer.' There is no time that they have ever been told they cannot - the parents are free to contact the school any time they like.*

**8.90** There may be some confusion here on Mrs Whitwell's part. The AIS education officers or houseparents assist parents who live interstate by performing some of the functions that are normally the preserve of a child's parents, such as attending parent/teacher interviews. By special arrangement

with the schools, the AIS receives regular reports on the progress of the girls.<sup>64</sup> Those reports are then forwarded to parents for their information. These are additional to the schools' normal reports direct to parents. The Inquiry is satisfied that these arrangements are not intended and could not reasonably be interpreted as excluding direct contact by parents with the schools, and have not been represented as such. Also, it was clear to the Inquiry that the schools are quite willing to accommodate direct communication from parents. Both principals explained in some detail the channels which exist for doing so.

Historical Document

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64 The frequency of these reports has varied over the years according to who within the AIS had responsibility for organising them.

## 9: LIFESTYLE ISSUES

### 1. INTRODUCTION

9.1 The great amount of time that elite WAG gymnasts must devote to their sport restricts the opportunities to pursue other sporting and physical recreation opportunities, hobbies and social activities. In this respect, the girls at the AIS are no different from other girls at a similar level in gymnastics in other parts of Australia or overseas.

9.2 Some aspects of the social life of the girls are considered in the Chapters on the Residence and Schooling. This chapter considers some selected issues which apply to the AIS girls outside school and irrespective of whether they are living in the Residence or at home.

### 2. RESTRICTED SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

#### a. General<sup>65</sup>

9.3 The older girls pursuing elite WAG, say 14 years and over, do not participate in a full range of social activities. Many people in the sport claimed that the girls, wherever they train, are to some degree "sheltered". As far as the Inquiry could ascertain, this is a product of the sport and the devotion of time to it. The situation is no different from a girl who might be a prodigy with the violin or unusually gifted intellectually and pursues tertiary studies at an early age.

9.4 Even so, there are opportunities for social activities and the pursuit of them gave rise to allegations of inappropriate restrictions on contact with members of the opposite sex.

#### b. Boyfriends and Fraternisation With Boys

##### i. General

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65 In relation to this topic, cross-reference should be made to the gymnastics program rule in the AIS Residence concerning the prohibition on males being in the female gymnasts' accommodation block and the female gymnasts being in male accommodation blocks

**9.5** In her written submission, Ms Michelle Telfer alleged as follows:

*It was also known that Ju Ping disallowed all of her gymnasts to have boyfriends and comments doubting a gymnasts' dedication to the sport were made when they did small things such as not wearing their hair in a ponytail outside training hours.*

**9.6** In her oral submission, Ms Telfer said that she never heard Mrs Tian say that the gymnasts were not allowed to have boyfriends: it was just "common knowledge". She said that some of her team mates on the 1991 World Championship and 1992 Olympic Games teams who were based at the AIS had boyfriends in breach of this rule. According to Ms Telfer, Mrs Tian did not know of these relationships.

**9.7** Mrs Tian said that she had a "rule" that gymnasts should not have boyfriends until after their competitive careers. No evidence came to the attention of the Inquiry that this rule was formalised or that anyone had ever been punished merely for its breach.

**9.8** A different expression of the situation came from Mrs Robyn Allen when she said, "Boyfriends are not encouraged at all." Mrs Allen stated the rationale for this approach in these terms:

*it's seen as a conflict of interest with their commitment to their sport and their schooling.*

**9.9** Ms Kym Dowdell, the National Women's Technical Director of the AGF, said that Mrs Tian discourages her gymnasts from having boyfriends. She added:

*...and so would every coach in this country. I mean as much as you can... Because it's a distraction to their training. The girls train 30 to 40 hours a week and they need to have their focus on what they're doing, and if their focus is on something else, then she - well, she then isn't getting 100% from that athlete.*

**9.10** Mrs Tian told the Inquiry that she had raised the issue of boyfriends at a parents' meetings in the past 12 months and had received parental support for her "rule".



9.11 Mrs Cathy Lantry (nee Blake) was at the AIS during 1984 and 1985. She had a boyfriend and said that Mrs Tian placed no restriction on the gymnasts in that regard (although Mrs Tian was there from only March 1985 onwards). Mrs Blake said:

*Well, she [Mrs Tian] said to us that - I'm sure she said to us, that, 'You shouldn't have boyfriends in that they are more of a distraction to your gym - that you are there for the sole purpose of trying to do well,' which everybody was but of course distractions happen.*

9.12 Mrs Debbie Clarkson (nee Graham) who was at the AIS from September 1983 until December 1987 said:

*...we weren't lined up and said we couldn't [have boyfriends] as far as I remember... I mean, basically we didn't have any time... I think there were four of us who she [Mrs Tian] was aware of who had strong boyfriends come the end of it and she wasn't pleased but, I mean, there was nobody who was going to say we couldn't do it.*

9.13 Mrs Clarkson identified the reason for Mrs Tian's displeasure as the distraction which a boyfriend caused.

9.14 Lisa Read said that Mrs Tian objected to boyfriends and did not like the girls' to distract their attention. She said that she and other older AIS gymnasts in the 1990-1992 period had friends who were boys (although it would appear that Mrs Tian did not know of this). Ms Read's father told the Inquiry that his daughter's friend had provided good support and understood the great demands on time which the sport required at this very high level.

9.15 Mr Read had this to say about "the rule that you shouldn't have a relationship":

*The idea behind that sounds a bit harsh, but if you stop to think about it, it does make a lot of sense. These kids had to keep their eye on the ball, and an over-the-top emotional relationship would take the eye of the ball; simple as that.*

**9.16** Monique Allen was another of the older gymnasts of the 1990-1992 period. She said that the gymnasts were not allowed to have boyfriends:

*Well, basically, it was known that from Day 1, there was no boys. Yes, it did [cause some problems]; I mean, especially as you got older. You suddenly realise, "Hey, there's boys out there."*

**9.17** Ms Allen had a boyfriend for a period of time but Mrs Tian did not know of it. Asked if she thought the "rule" was a fair one, Ms Allen replied:

*Yes; especially now, looking back - the headaches they cause, yes, definitely.*

**9.18** Ms Allen said some of the girls on the national team who were based at WAIS such as Michelle Telfer had boyfriends and that she thought, although she wasn't sure, that the rules at WAIS "weren't as strict as ours".

**9.19** Ms Kay Mahlook, the Executive Director of the VGA, told the Inquiry that the head coach in the VIS WAG program, Ms Fiona Bird, encourages her eldest gymnast to have a boyfriend and to go out.

**9.20** The Inquiry finds that the AIS women's gymnastics program does have an informal rule or policy against the gymnasts having boyfriends. Discussions which the Inquiry held with gymnasts of about 14 years and younger established, as might be expected, that they were not really interested in boys because their lives are filled with gymnastics, school and family. The rule is irrelevant to them. For older girls who may be interested in boys, the rule is a nuisance, not an obstacle. The AIS gymnasts will have social contact with boys if they wish and without the coaches knowing.

**9.21** The other major WAG training centres at VIS and WAIS do not have the same informal rule as the AIS. However, the inescapable fact is that any older gymnast who is seriously pursuing an elite career will have only a limited amount of time available for social contact with boys. If matters reach the stage where boys are a diversion it may be expected that coaches at VIS and WAIS would discourage contact, if only because it threatened the gymnast achieving goals for which she had worked long and hard.

9.22 Therefore, the difference between the AIS on one hand and VIS and WAIS on the other is arguably one of form rather than ultimate outcome.

9.23 No evidence was presented to the Inquiry that any gymnast at the AIS had ever been disadvantaged or suffered any punishment just for having a boyfriend or, in relation to earlier years when the girls openly had boyfriends, no evidence was presented of any direct or improper attempt to break up relationships. No evidence was presented to the Inquiry that suggested any girl who had wanted to have a boyfriend had not developed that friendship because of the rule against boyfriends.

9.24 On that basis, the allegation that the rule against boyfriends mistreats gymnasts would have to be rejected.

9.25 However, it may be argued that gymnasts who wish to have boyfriends should not have to "run the gauntlet" of such a rule. Also, is such a rule socially repressive and intrusive upon personal freedom?

9.26 Such a prohibition may be viewed as supported by the argument that to succeed in elite gymnastics there has to be a commitment to temporarily avoiding other activities (e.g. risky recreations such as horse-riding), or changing their normal pattern (e.g., education). In other words, if these changes to a "normal" lifestyle are justified by an elite gymnastics career as has been found to be the case elsewhere in this report, the deferral of social contacts with boys can be similarly justified. Other factors which might support such a prohibition are parental support and Ms Allen's reflection that a rule is convenient (although she broke it).

9.27 On the other hand, a situation where the gymnasts who wish to have social contact with boys and to develop emotional attachments in their private time<sup>66</sup> are prohibited from doing so creates a strong argument for saying that it constitutes an inappropriate intrusion by the AIS upon the gymnasts' personal freedom. Although a rule about not having boyfriends may have some parallels with other areas in which changes are made from a "normal" lifestyle in order to pursue an elite career, the issue is emotionally charged in a manner which a rule about, say, avoiding risky physical activity is not. There are many parents who have concerns about their 15-17 year old daughters having boyfriends, but

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66 With parental consent where necessary.

there are many who do not. However, for a government sports school to seek to control such personal and emotional matters in the girls' private time is inappropriately invasive of personal freedom. It would not be tolerated in employment or schools generally.<sup>67</sup> Further, some gymnasts in the past have been adults and to apply the rule to them but not to other adult athletes at the AIS is discriminatory. A rule which simply prohibits boyfriends is an inappropriate way in which to deal with a legitimate concern about commitment to an elite career.

**9.28** If gymnasts were counselled from time to time, in conjunction with their families where appropriate, to the effect that the commitment required to succeed in WAG at the AIS would leave little time for any significant social contact with boys and that the emotional diversion which could arise from any contact may be prejudicial to their careers - but such contact was not prohibited - that approach would not meet with any objection in relation to restrictions on personal freedom.

**9.29** The Inquiry has before it no particular incident of mistreatment of gymnasts because of the rule against boyfriends. However, the Inquiry finds that the "rule" is inappropriate and recommends that it be revoked. It would be open to the AIS to supplant it with the counselling process referred to in the preceding paragraph.

**9.30** Whether the AIS should go further and encourage a certain amount of social contact with boys as appears to occur with the eldest gymnast at VIS is a matter of coaching style upon which the Inquiry makes no comment.

**9.31** Ms Telfer's second allegation refers to the requirement to wear hair in a ponytail. To recall the allegation:

*...comments doubting a gymnasts' dedication to the sport were made when they did small things such as not wearing their hair in a ponytail outside training hours.*

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**67** The situation would be different in the Residence where the houseparents may need to restrict, say, the number of nights a non-adult gymnast went out just as a parent might. If a non-adult girl developed an emotional attachment, the Inquiry believes that the houseparent should be guided by the wishes of the girls' parents.



9.32 Ms Telfer informed the Inquiry in her oral submission that the reason for this requirement was that wearing hair loose is more attractive to males and is therefore an inappropriate thing to do. Ms Telfer had not heard any AIS coach mention such a rule. She based her allegation on a story she had heard from a current WAIS gymnast who had heard from another gymnast whose identity Ms Telfer did not know that this other girl was wearing her down and was told to put it up.

9.33 Mrs Tian said that she preferred girls to wear their hair short because it saved time in the mornings before training, but it was not an order - "I give ideas". If hair was not short, she suggested it be worn in a ponytail when training for safety reasons - to keep it out of the girls' eyes.

9.34 The Inquiry is not satisfied that there is a rule, for the reason alleged, about the way hair is worn when girls are not training. No evidence of such a rule came to the attention of the Inquiry from any AIS gymnast. Ms Telfer's information is gossip and does not warrant further investigation. The Inquiry rejects this allegation.

ii. *1991 World Championships in Indianapolis, USA*

9.35 As has been indicated previously, the 1991 World Championships in Indianapolis, USA represented a landmark for Australian women's gymnastics. Australia finished sixth in the women's teams event - by far its highest ever placing. This performance was widely acclaimed in the international gymnastics community. Late in the evening of the day this occurred most of the female and male gymnasts from the Australian team gathered in the hotel room assigned to Ms Lisa Read and Ms Michele Telfer. The women's individual all-round and individual apparatus finals for which Australia had some qualifiers were still to come in the Championships.

9.36 The presence of male gymnasts in the rooms of female gymnasts was prohibited by AGF team rules. Mrs Tian discovered the gathering, issued a reprimand and told the boys to leave. The behaviour of Mrs Tian on this occasion is the object of a complaint by Ms Michele Telfer.

9.37 This complaint is made against Mrs Tian in her capacity as National Women's Coach which is an AGF position. However, it does relate to treatment



of AIS scholarship holders by a person who is also the AIS Head Coach for women's gymnastics and for those reasons the Inquiry regards the complaint as within the terms of reference.

**9.38** In her written submission, Ms Telfer alleged as follows:

*After the competition at the World Championships in Indianapolis in 1991, the seven female team members were screamed at for allowing the male team members to watch television in one of their rooms. Ju Ping was hysterically angry that we had broken her rule which involved not associating with the males in the team. Ju Ping told myself and my room mate that because we had broken her rule, we may not be considered for selection for the Olympic Team (which was to be announced one year later).*

**9.39** Ms Telfer was 17 years old at the time the eldest girl was Monique Allen who was 19 years and the others ranged from 13 to 18 years of age. The male gymnasts were generally older.

**9.40** From Ms Telfer's oral submission, it emerged that the gymnasts were in high spirits over their success, it was about 1.00 am in the morning, some of the gymnasts did silly things like hide behind the curtains and beds before Mrs Tian was let into the room, and the girls had secretly ordered chocolate cake and ice cream sundaes from room service which they were worried might arrive when Mrs Tian was there.

**9.41** Ms Telfer told the Inquiry that Mrs Tian was

*absolutely hysterical, like, screaming. I swear the whole hotel could hear her.*

**9.42** Ms Telfer was asked whether the final sentence in this statement was exaggerated and she said that it was. She read to the Inquiry extracts from her diary kept at the time in which she described Mrs Tian as a "raving lunatic, totally psycho" and as "so mad it was frightening". She had also written in her diary, "I could imagine a coach going psycho if they walked in and we had a strip show going or something but it wasn't like that at all." In further oral evidence Ms Telfer alleged that:

*I felt that she had lost control... Ju Ping had a tone about her voice... it was sort of a pitch that she hit... I thought she was out of control like she - she couldn't have rationally done that or acted in that way.*

9.43 Ms Telfer said her room mate Lisa Read was so upset over the incident that she cried.

9.44 Ms Telfer was not an AIS gymnast. She trained at WAIS in Perth. Four of the seven gymnasts in the national team were based at the AIS: Monique Allen, Lisa Read, Kylie Shadbolt, and Julie-Anne Monico. None of the other girls on the team made any complaint about this alleged incident. Two of them, Monique Allen and Lisa Read, made submissions on other matters and the opportunity was taken to interview about this incident.

9.45 Ms Read described Mrs Tian "as a bit angry", but also answered "yes" to a question asking whether Mrs Tian had "blown her stack". She describes the scene when it was realised that it was Mrs Tian knocking at the door as one of "panic" and the efforts of people to hide as "funny". She said that those efforts only served to anger Mrs Tian further. The following series of questions and answers occurred:

Q. *Would you describe her [Mrs Tian] as hysterical?*

A. *No.*

Q. *Was she apparently in control, even though very angry?*

A. *Yes.*

Q. *Could you understand what she was doing?*

A. *Yes.*

Q. *Was she rational?*

A. *I think so. Just a little bit angry.*

Q. *Were you frightened?*

A. *Oh, yes. It's just the - frightened of - someone who had been caught doing something you weren't supposed to do.*

**9.46** Later Ms Read said that Mrs Tian was no more angry than she had seen her on other occasions and added:

*She wasn't extremely angry or anything. She just, you know, raised her voice and we knew we were in trouble and that type of thing.*

**9.47** She does not remember crying, but recalls being a "bit anxious and worried about it". Ms Read considers that in the circumstances Mrs Tian's action was unnecessary and that the breach of rules could have been overlooked.

**9.48** Ms Allen described the incident in these terms:

*Well, someone knocked at the door. We knew that the boys weren't meant to be there. So, one of them hid behind the curtains. I think someone hid behind the side of the bed, and Ju Ping came in and told us to get to bed and told the boys to get out... She was pretty angry... she didn't go over edge, but she was pretty mad. I think it was all just like a combination of things that we had just come sixth in the world, and that threw her, because she didn't expect us to come sixth at all, and she suddenly thought, what are we going to have to do now to, like, stay sixth at the Olympics and she was...very stressed... I think that was just, you know, one of the straws that broke the camel's back. She'd had a big week... I'd seen her that angry before [but not more angry]... It was Ju Ping going off.*

**9.49** Ms Allen said that not all of the girls on the team might have experienced Mrs Tian as angry as she was on that occasion. She told the Inquiry that the girls thought at the time that they did not deserve to be in trouble.

**9.50** Mrs Tian said that she had found the male gymnasts in the girls' room. It was after midnight, three girls had still to compete in the individual section of the Championships<sup>68</sup> and that her attention had been attracted by the noise. She knew nothing of room service having been ordered.

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68 They were Monique Allen, Joanna Hughes and Kylie Shadbolt.

**9.51** Mrs Tian confirmed that there was a team rule that boys were not allowed in the girls' rooms. She said that the rule was made at her instigation with the approval of coaches and parents. There had been no complaints. She told the Inquiry:

*Especially in international competitions because so many different countries together in one building and everything and I have responsibility for the children and the family. I don't let the boys into the room, especially in the night.*

**9.52** In relation to the circumstance that some team members were still in the competition, she said:

*But I teaching them, always they understand, that when kids still have a competition, I do not want other kids to interrupt the kids. Instead of waiting, all team work together, everybody gives support to those three kids for the next competitions.*

**9.53** She said she was angry, but had no recollection of yelling or screaming.

**9.54** Mr Forbes, who is also the AGF men's national coach, supported the rule but knew nothing of the incident.

**9.55** It was suggested to the Inquiry that it is in the euphoria created by the release of tension following a successful major competition that incidents of improper behaviour are most likely to occur and that vigilance by management is warranted at such times.

**9.56** From other evidence given to the Inquiry by Ms Telfer, it was clear that she did not like the rule. Monique Allen and Lisa Read appear to have accepted the reasons for the rule. It can be said that because the rule about boys in rooms was instigated by the AIS head coach and can apply to AIS gymnasts on the national team, it is a matter within the terms of reference even though the rule is an AGF rule. Nevertheless, the rule is not so harsh or oppressive that it can be regarded as an abuse or mistreatment.

**9.57** In relation to the of enforcement of the rule, all the girls interviewed considered that Mrs Tian could have handled the incident differently - perhaps by ignoring it. However, that is not an issue for this Inquiry. Apart from an

angry reprimand, no punishment was imposed and there is no evidence of any offensive or degrading language having been used by Mrs Tian. As far as the Inquiry is aware, Mrs Tian took the incident no further than issuing the reprimand. Whether or not to issue a reprimand for a breach of the rules is a matter for the coach and does not raise issues of mistreatment in present circumstances. The only possible concern may be in relation to the degree and manner of the display of anger by Mrs Tian. Did it cross the boundary of acceptable conduct? Michelle Telfer's evidence suggests that it did. However, as to part she admits she exaggerated. In other respects, the Inquiry does not accept that Mrs Tian's reaction is accurately or fairly described. While Ms Telfer may not have seen Mrs Tian this angry before, the colourful language used by Ms Telfer is more a reflection of a teenager's dislike of Mrs Tian, her irritation over the rule, and the stressful surrounding circumstances, than a balanced observation of events. The reports of Monique Allen and Lisa Read are to be preferred, even allowing for the prospect that the girls are generally supportive of Mrs Tian and might be prone to downplay an exhibition of anger by her because they have seen something similar before.

**9.58** The Inquiry rejects this allegation.

*iii. Breach of Curfew and Absence Without Knowledge*

**9.59** One occasion prior to 1988 was drawn to the Inquiry's attention when three 17 year old gymnasts who were living in the AIS Residence failed to return by the designated time. They were locked out of the Residence area and climbed back in over a fence. They could not obtain entry to their block and slept in the games room. However, the security guard who had finally locked up had reported their non-return and a substantial police search had been launched. They were discovered the following morning sneaking into their rooms when the block was unlocked.

**9.60** Mr David Rycroft, the father of one of the gymnasts, Mrs Leanne Noack (nee Rycroft), claimed that the AIS management had handled the situation "fairly humanely" but that Mrs Tian had overreacted when she had the opportunity to speak to the girls in the gymnasium. Mr Rycroft was told by his wife that Mrs Tian put on a "disgraceful exhibition". AIS management was considering significant disciplinary action against the gymnasts and Mrs Rycroft had flown to Canberra to support her daughter. Mr Rycroft said that Mrs



Rycroft witnessed part of Mrs Tian's ticking off of the girls before she had to leave.

9.61 This was not an incident which Mrs Noack or any other gymnast sought to pursue. There was no evidence of foul or offensive language being used or of the girls receiving extra or unfair punishment from Mrs Tian. It might be expected that the incident would have been very distressing to Mrs Tian and that she may have been angry and passionate. A severe ticking off could not be dismissed as unwarranted, although others may have chosen to handle the situation differently. Mrs Rycroft, herself, may have been not a reliable observer because she might be expected to be already upset from the surrounding circumstances. It was alleged that some visiting coaches who were not identified had considered that there was an overreaction. However, that may be explained by Mrs Tian's difficulty with the English language and her tendency to speak loudly when she is passionate about something.

9.62 In the circumstances, the Inquiry did not consider it necessary to seek Mrs Tian's response to this allegation. There is insufficient evidence to establish the allegation. Accordingly, it is rejected.

9.63 An incident preceding the Olympic Games in 1992 was drawn to the Inquiry's attention. Some girls left the Residence one night without leave but were detected by security guards when they returned. Although few details were available, the Inquiry is satisfied that the incident was handled sensibly by AIS management.

9.64 The occurrence of such incidents is entirely to be expected. That AIS management appears to handle them sensibly and not vindictively or disproportionately gives some cause for confidence that other lifestyle issues will be dealt with appropriately as well.

### **3. RESTRICTED RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

#### **a. General**

9.65 Various allusions were made to the proposition that AIS gymnasts are unnecessarily deprived of appropriate recreational activities, with consequent ill effects on their social development. Some of the allegations are linked to a

view that the AIS coaching philosophy goes too far in terms of the demands that it makes on gymnasts.

**9.66** The Inquiry suspected that some of these allusions were closely linked to the broader debate in the gymnastics community about financial and technical issues rather than resting on sustainable allegations of mistreatment or abuse at the AIS.

**b. Risky Physical Recreations**

**9.67** The AIS does place some restrictions upon the gymnasts undertaking physical activities which might lead to them sustaining injuries disruptive to their training and competition schedules.

**9.68** Participation in school sport and playground activities have been considered above. It may be recalled that the gymnasts do not participate in school sport, but engage in normal school playground activities.

**9.69** Owing to the risk of injury, the AIS discourages such activities as skiing, horse riding, the use of skateboards and the riding of bicycles and motorbikes. Restrictions on other physical activity are very common in elite sporting circles. In gymnastics, there are two main reasons for these restrictions. First, it would be a tragedy for a gymnast if a fall from a bicycle broke her wrist and finished a promising career into which she and her family had already invested a huge effort. Second, a considerable sum of public money is spent in developing gymnasts and the AIS may be seen as protecting its "investment".

**9.70** Provided the gymnasts have a sufficient range of physical recreational opportunities so as not to stunt their personal development, these restrictions should not be regarded as inappropriate. No restrictions are placed on activities such as going to the beach, surfing, swimming, walking and hiking, and playing volleyball (with a balloon to protect their fingers). Of course, some of these activities will be rare events given time and geographical limits. A number of gymnasts informed the Inquiry of AIS organised visits to the snow and proximate alpine areas going back over the years.

**9.71** Reference should be made also to the section on recreational opportunities available to girls who live in the Residence.

9.72 Mrs Tian told the Inquiry that the youngest gymnasts are not prohibited from riding bicycles. Almost all of those girls live at home and she regards it as a parental responsibility to ensure that any riding activities are properly supervised. Riding of bicycles by the older gymnasts (senior and junior) is discouraged, and in the lead-up to major competitions, banned. Riding by the gymnasts who live in the Residence is banned.<sup>69</sup> Over the years before restrictions were introduced, three gymnasts were mildly injured in falls from bicycles which caused disruption to their respective training programs and that prompted the restrictions.

9.73 While these various restrictions have their supporting reasons, they do not attract universal acceptance. For instance, VIS does not place restrictions on riding bicycles. Some of the girls do miss the opportunity to go for a ride. Sonia Brown of Newcastle who was at the AIS in May and June 1992 told the Inquiry of her "anger" when assistant houseparent Cindy Lincoln went riding with a friend and Sonia could not go with them. On the other hand a number of current gymnasts and parents said they were not bothered by this restriction.

9.74 The Inquiry has concluded that the AIS gymnasts are not deprived of physical recreation to such an extent that they may be regarded as mistreated. In reaching that conclusion the Inquiry has given due weight to the circumstances that they choose to lead lives which are almost totally consumed by gymnastics, school and family. In the limited time available for physical recreation (which will be much the same at whichever major Australian training centre a gymnast pursues her elite career), an AIS gymnast has a restricted but still substantial range of options for physical recreation. That the restrictions to some degree are different in other gymnastics centres is not decisive.

### **c. Recreational Opportunities While on Tour**

#### *i. General*

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69 Riding is banned for all athletes within the confines of the AIS quadrangle because severe injuries have occurred to pedestrians in the past as a result of collisions. Riding by gymnasts in other areas is banned also, principally because of the difficulties of supervision in the open and public area of the AIS campus and surrounds.

**9.75** A number of complaints were made concerning the manner in which touring teams were managed. They tended to fall into two categories. The first concerned restrictions on the opportunity to take a break from training and competing while on tour in order to take in some sights and do some shopping. The second concerned restrictions on contact between families and gymnasts prior to major competitions.

**9.76** The first of these categories will be examined in this section. The second will be examined below under the heading **Communication With Families During Training Camps and Tours**.

**9.77** The tours which are the subject of both categories of complaint are almost entirely non-AIS tours. The touring teams have been to Olympic Games, World Championships and Commonwealth Games as well as some other major events. Generally, these teams have been under the immediate management of the AGF, even though the team may have been, say, a Commonwealth Games team. Almost all of the complaints have come from people who have no immediate connection with the AIS. The link with the AIS has been that Mrs Tian was the head coach for those tours.

**9.78** The Inquiry has been prepared to consider the complaints under its terms of reference because they relate to alleged behaviour by Mrs Tian towards the teams which always included some AIS scholarship holders. A theme which underlies these complaints is that Mrs Tian places excessive demands on the gymnasts and is not sympathetic to the need for recreation and family contact. In effect, the complaints are about the philosophy of the AIS gymnastics program towards achievement.

**9.79** All of these complaints should not have reached this Inquiry. Individually, they are all trivial, although the issue which collectively they claim to raise is important. That the complaints have come to the Inquiry is sad testimony to the inability of the sport of gymnastics to find solutions to both simple and complex problems and to ensure that when something is agreed upon as a solution, it has sufficient endorsement to stay that way. Also, these complaints reflect what must be an inadequate dispute and grievance resolution procedure in the sport and failed channels of communication.

*ii. Barcelona Olympics 1992*

**9.80** Dr Geoff Sussman alleged that Mrs Tian subjected the gymnasts to a fairly strict disciplinary regime at the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992. He referred to two incidents which he regarded as imposing an inappropriate level of control over gymnasts.

**9.81 Uniforms at Men's Hockey Final** After the gymnastics team had finished competing in Barcelona in 1992, it was decided that the girls would go to watch the men's hockey final in which the Australian team was competing.

**9.82** Dr Geoff Sussman is the President of the Victorian Gymnastic Association and was at the hockey match. He said:

*The gymnasts arrived in their full blazer uniforms, which I thought was totally inappropriate, that they were in full official walk out uniform.*

**9.83** Dr Sussman told the Inquiry that the girls should have worn their casual official uniform in the afternoon heat and that the light wool walk out uniform that they did wear was inappropriate. He said that the girls removed their blazers and painted their faces with green and gold block out. No evidence was presented that any girl had suffered any adverse physical effect from wearing the particular uniform. Dr Sussman added:

*I just thought it was somewhat unusual on one of the last things of the Games that they seemed to be regimented into having to all come in full dress uniform.*

**9.84** Lisa Read said she felt a bit silly in the uniform and Monique Allen said she wanted to wear her own casual gear. However, neither raised the incident as a complaint. Ms Allen recalled wearing her full dress uniform and Ms Read her "uniform".

**9.85** Mr Forbes said that the AOC had requested that some form of Australian uniform or attire be worn and that the gymnastics team manager, Mr Jeff Cheales, after consultation with Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes, had requested that the male and female gymnasts wear their official casual uniform, not their full dress uniform. According to Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes the official casual uniform was worn. Mrs Tian recalled wearing "green shorts" and added:



*Because we are a travelling team - okay, we are all travelling team. We come to hockey, hockey team want to look at them, important to support our team to win. We have a uniform which look to support, we are coming... Not my idea, but I support the idea.*

**9.86** Mr Cheales said that it was his decision that the girls wear a uniform but there was a "fairly strong recommendation" from Mrs Tian that the girls wear a uniform to "look Australian" at the hockey. He told the Inquiry that the girls did not wear their formal suits, but had on what he called the march-on uniform which consisted of an open neck short sleeve shirt and a bottom called a "skort" - a combined skirt and shorts. He does not recall whether they had a jacket. However, they were certainly not dressed up such that they would have been oppressively hot. Mr Cheales said that the girls were not happy about the decision because they "wanted to wear any old thing".

**9.87** There is a substantial conflict of evidence about the nature of clothing worn. No evidence of any harm having been suffered by any AIS gymnast came to the attention of the Inquiry. The incident is trivial.

**9.88** The Inquiry rejects any allegation of mistreatment in relation to this incident.

**9.89 Night Excursion** Dr Sussman referred to an incident where one of the Olympic team physiotherapists in Barcelona helped some of the gymnasts climb out of a window so they could go exploring in the Games Village one evening. The implication of Dr Sussman's allegation is that the girls were not allowed out at least on that night. He provided no other information about this incident such as the time of night the incident occurred.

**9.90** If any of the team were yet to compete, such a restriction would appear to be justifiable. If the team had finished competing there could still be good reason for the restriction. However, there is no real evidence of any mistreatment. No harm is alleged to have occurred and no girls have complained.

**9.91** The Inquiry rejects any allegation of mistreatment in relation to this incident.

iii. *Victoria, British Columbia Commonwealth Games 1994*

**9.92** Three allegations were made about the way the gymnastics team for the 1994 Commonwealth Games team was managed. Each was alleged to be an example of an AIS coaching philosophy that amounted to mistreatment of gymnasts.

**9.93 Not allowed to march in opening ceremony.** It was alleged by Ms Kay Mahlook who is the executive director of the Victorian Gymnastic Association and Mr John Hughes who is the Treasurer of the Cheltenham Youth Club which hosts the VIS gymnastics program that gymnasts on the Commonwealth Games team were not allowed to march in the opening ceremony of the Games. Ms Mahlook described it as a pity that girls missed out on those things and Mr Bill Cribbes who is the President of the Cheltenham Youth Club attributed it to the "machine-type sort of mentality" found in Australian gymnastics including the AIS, but excluding the VIS. Each of Mr Cribbes and Mr Hughes had a daughter who was a member of the team.

**9.94** The Executive Director of the AGF, Miss Peggy Browne, and Mr Forbes confirmed that the girls did not march in the opening ceremony. The reason for this was that the girls were competing not the next day but the one after that. Mr Forbes said:

*...the coaches had decided that it was in the best interests to achieve our goals if we did not expose them to the excitement and the exhilaration that occurs at an opening ceremony and in fact can drain the athlete... the Commonwealth Games was a major goal for us and we tried to leave no stone unturned in making sure the kids' preparation was 100%.*

**9.95** He added that the gymnasts' preparation plan provided for an important fine tuning training session the day before their competition started and they needed to be in good condition for it - which would not have occurred if the girls had marched in the ceremony. Also, the world's top gymnastics countries such as Russia, Bulgaria and Romania would not march at a major event's opening ceremony if competition was so close to the ceremony. He acknowledged that a couple of USA gymnasts might march at an Olympic Games.

**9.96** This is an issue which has arisen from time to time in various sports. Marching in a major ceremony is a treat. It may be regarded as a reward for the hard work and dedication over many years. It may serve to rekindle enthusiasm and commitment if it is flagging. This is the thinking behind Mr Cribbes' comment about a "machine-type mentality".

**9.97** This is a contentious issue. It is about the best way in which to ensure that a gymnast performs to her potential. However, it is not an issue about mistreatment or abuse. Although this incident was presented as another example of the AIS coaching philosophy which allegedly goes too far in terms of its demands on gymnasts and therefore amounts to mistreatment, the incident in isolation does not involve mistreatment. It is about foregoing a pleasure in pursuit of a greater goal. Whether or not the sacrifice will have a positive or negative effect on that goal is for the coaches to decide, not this Inquiry.

**9.98** In relation to the allegation that this incident is another example of an AIS coaching philosophy which amounts to mistreatment because it asks too much of gymnasts, the Inquiry cannot resolve this allegation without making a decision about how many pleasures of one kind or another must be foregone in order to achieve the pleasure of success in gymnastics at whatever level the gymnast aspires to. The "machine-type mentality" which Mr Cribbes describes might be regarded by others as "uncompromising dedication to the pursuit of excellence". In other words, how hard can a coach ask a gymnast to apply herself before "mistreatment" occurs? This is not the kind of mistreatment which this Inquiry has been established to investigate. The Inquiry's function is to investigate specific allegations of mistreatment in relation to matters such as residential arrangements, medical care and physical abuse. The issue of how hard a gymnast can be expected to apply herself is an issue for the gymnasts, the coaches, the sport and the broader community to decide; it is not an issue which this Inquiry can resolve under its terms of reference.

**9.99 Limited ID for events** Mr Hughes said:

*They were denied any opportunity of visiting any other sports. In other words, you know, they get that ID which only allows them into the gymnastics area and into the residential area where they are staying at the time.*

**9.100** This had nothing to do with the AIS. Both Miss Browne and Mr Forbes told the Inquiry that the ID received by the gymnasts was the standard issue for all athletes at the Games. This was a matter for the Games organising committee. The girls had the opportunity after their competition to see other events (subject to their early return - see below), but the Australian team had only a limited number of tickets made available to it by the Games organising committee because of the large crowds and small venues.

**9.101 Required to leave the Games early** Mr Hughes alleged that the gymnastics team left the Games before they were over. The implication of this was that the gymnasts were denied the opportunity to more fully experience the Games in a relaxed atmosphere. Ms Mahlook said the team had to leave early to go home "to get back into training".

**9.102** Again, this had nothing to do with the AIS. Miss Browne told the Inquiry that when South Africa was invited to attend the Commonwealth Games upon its readmission to the Commonwealth, the Games organising committee was fearful that there would be insufficient accommodation for all athletes. A request was made for those sports competing early to leave as soon as practical after their competitions were over. Travel arrangements were made on the basis that the WAG competitors would leave a couple of days after competing. The Australian Commonwealth Games Association has informed the Inquiry that as it turned out there was no shortage of accommodation. However, by the time this became clear, the AGF was tied to its travel commitments to return the team to Australia, and various coaches and officials who may have been able to supervise the girls had made their own forward travel arrangements to other locations. While there was a forthcoming international competition for which training was required, it was an incidental matter and not the reason for the early return of the team.

*iv. 1995 European Tour*

**9.103** Following the Australian championships in May this year, a team was selected to go on a tour to Europe as part of the preparation for the World Championships in Japan this year. Mr Cribbes' daughter was a member of that team. He said that his daughter had telephoned the previous night to tell her family how she was. Mr Cribbes said:

*So they are sitting in a house... you are in another country, you might as well be anywhere, and all they have seen is the four rooms of a house. They go training, come home, go training, then they fly off somewhere else.*

**9.104** Mr Cribbes said that his daughter had sought permission to go for a walk but had been refused by the manageress. She had then asked Mrs Tian who said she could go, but by then the team was moving on.

**9.105** This incident is a minor grievance. In itself it involves no mistreatment of the kind which this Inquiry was established to investigate. However, it is alleged to be another example of an AIS coaching philosophy that amounts to mistreatment of gymnasts. Nevertheless, the Inquiry cannot deal with it on that basis for the reason set out under the heading *Victoria, British Columbia Commonwealth Games 1994* above.

**9.106** However, some explanation of this incident is useful because it demonstrates how parents can react to half a story from their children and how, in the present volatile state of relations in Australian gymnastics, issues can take on dimensions which are out of proportion.

**9.107** Mr Forbes explained to the Inquiry that immediately upon completing some 34 hours of travel from Perth to the United Kingdom, the team went to the United Kingdom equivalent of the AIS: an old hunting estate near Manchester called Lisseleshalle. The estate is relatively isolated being about 5 kilometres from the nearest village. They arrived on 5 June. They had to recover from the trip, adjust to the new training and competition equipment and compete on 9 June. Between training sessions the girls had lunch which was followed by a rest period of about an hour during which they could read or go for a walk in the estate's garden. On the morning of Wednesday 7 June, the girls took time off and were taken by bus into the nearest population centre which Mr Forbes described as a "very quaint English town".

**9.108** Obviously there were recreational opportunities of which Mr Cribbes was presumably unaware. The schedule was a tough one, but the AIS gymnastics program staff have only limited control over that notwithstanding Mrs Tian being the National Coach. Financial considerations, pressures to perform and produce medals which come from all directions and logistical considerations are the principal factors behind tough touring schedules. The Inquiry gained the



impression that the coaches are the strongest opponents of touring schedules and lobby for more recreation time, often with limited success.

9.109 This is an incident which would have been best handled by a more cautious acceptance of information from a teenager and, if necessary, by AGF grievance procedures.

v. *Edinburgh Commonwealth Games 1986*

9.110 The gymnastics competition at these Games was not an official event. It was held in Glasgow. Mrs Clarkson alleged that the gymnasts did not "really see anything of Scotland" and had to do London in six hours on the way back to Australia. This is a complaint which is similar in nature to the complaints about the Victoria Commonwealth Games in 1994. For the same reasons it cannot be resolved by this Inquiry under its terms of reference.

9.111 The time available for sightseeing had little to do with Mrs Tian and the AIS. Responsibility for travel and effective free time rested with such bodies as the AGF and the Games organising committee. Mrs Tian told the Inquiry that the team faced a two hour drive from the competition venue to their accommodation. She said:

*Kids need sleep, and things. I got really angry with who made the organisation for that one. Not professional.*

9.112 Mrs Graham claimed that tours which she went on before Mrs Tian arrived at the AIS had more time for sightseeing than those after she arrived. It was put to the Inquiry that this might result from Mrs Tian's requirement that gymnasts focus on the event until after it was over and her more professional attitude.

9.113 The vague claims made by Mrs Clarkson do not disclose any specific mistreatment in relation to this trip. Insofar as it may be argued that the complaint points to the broader issue of the AIS philosophy toward training, it is not within the scope of the Inquiry for the reason set out above.

vi. *Usual Practice Regarding Outings*

**9.114** The Inquiry took the opportunity to examine the practice of the AIS coaching staff in relation to recreational opportunities while on tour.

**9.115** The Inquiry found that numerous gymnasts over the past decade had been on tours with Mrs Tian and other AIS coaching staff. While every tour was different in terms of what it offered for recreation, the girls said that usually recreational opportunities were left until after the competition was finished, although occasionally going for a walk with a group or brief shopping trips occurred before the competition commenced. Up to and during the competition complete focus on the event was required and those girls who did not qualify for individual finals were expected to continue with full training for the dual reason of supporting their team mates who still competing and maintaining their own condition. After the event, shopping and sightseeing trips were conducted. As an example, AIS gymnasts have competed in China many times and there have been many trips to the Great Wall of China.

**9.116** Mrs Tian said that she had never "heard one word of complaint" about recreational opportunities on tours during her whole time at the AIS. She added that after an event

*...they never ever miss shopping, never ever because I know girls like shopping, same as me.*

**9.117** The absence of a morale-boosting sightseeing opportunity has usually been the result of financial or logistical considerations beyond the control of AIS staff.

*vii. Not Allowed to View Videos and Kept in Hotel Rooms*

**9.118** Ms Fiona Bird is the head coach of the VIS WAG program. In her written submission to the Inquiry she said:

*Girls are kept in their [hotel] rooms prior to and after competitions and are not allowed to watch videos.*

**9.119** Ms Bird referred the Inquiry to an occasion at the Nikon International Competition in Sydney in 1993. She was an assistant coach to Mr Tian for the Australian team. Some girls had finished competing, while others were still to

compete in the individual finals. It was about 1.30 pm and three girls who had finished competing indicated their desire to view a video in their room. Ms Bird had no objection. They were not due to train until 6.00 pm. She let Mr Forbes know for financial reasons, he told Mrs Tian\* and Mrs Tian said that she wanted the girls to rest, not to watch the video. These events are not disputed by Mrs Tian and Mr Forbes.

**9.120** Notwithstanding the wording of her written submission, Ms Bird said that there was no rule that the gymnasts are not allowed to watch videos at all. She was just referring to this one incident. She added:

*I just thought it was a control that was unhealthy for the kids' psychology. It thought it was unnecessary... It was very unnecessary given that situation and I felt that their individual needs and feelings really hadn't been addressed.*

**9.121** Ms Bird said that there would be occasions when watching a video was not appropriate, but this was not one of them.

**9.122** Mrs Tian said that she wanted the girls to have a sleep after their lunch because starting from about 3.00 pm onwards they would have been having massage. Mrs Tian said that she had no objection to girls watching videos to relax and that she had done so with them. The Inquiry was told that girls could look at videos, provided something suitable was available and it did not conflict with some other activity or the need to sleep.

**9.123** The Inquiry finds that the incident occurred as alleged by Ms Bird. Was Mrs Tian's action inappropriate in all the circumstances? Was it inappropriate to ask three girls to go to sleep rather than watch a video? The incident on its own is trivial. Mrs Tian's action cannot be described as an inappropriate thing to do in all the circumstances. She felt that they needed a rest and that time was the best time to do take it. All three girls were AIS gymnasts and Mrs Tian knew them better than did Ms Bird. There may have been a better way of doing things; it is obvious that Ms Bird thinks so. However, that is a matter of disagreement between two coaches who seem to have some different ways of doing things. To Ms Bird the incident probably represents a good example of their different ways, but this Inquiry is not the place to resolve them.

**9.124** The Inquiry rejects the allegation concerning not watching videos.

**9.125** Ms Bird's second allegation arising from her written submission concerns girls being kept in their rooms prior to and after competitions. During her oral submission Ms Bird said that aside from training sessions, eating, physiotherapy and massage appointments, and travelling to and from the venue, there is not a lot of time anyway. She had no knowledge of the girls being locked in their rooms. She added:

*Well, they just sort of stay there, there's nothing more for them to do and if they were found wandering downstairs or anything then they'd be very quickly told to go back to their room... I think it's probably more after the competition that really concerns me... it's just only my opinion that we need to have a bit more flexibility for the individual for their preparation, but that's just my opinion. I could understand if she [Mrs Tian] wanted to just say across the board: people rest before the competition. Okay, I accept that. I just felt afterwards that it was a control thing rather than, you know, care for the kids really.*

**9.126** Ms Bird's allegation is quite generally expressed: keeping girls in their hotel rooms after competitions. They are not locked in; they are not confined because they go out for training and meals. This allegation is about recreation after an event. Ms Bird's allegation is in conflict with a significant volume of evidence received by the Inquiry about post-competition outings referred to above under the heading *Usual Practice Regarding Outings*.

**9.127** Given the general terms of Ms Bird's allegation and the conflicting evidence, the Inquiry finds that this allegation is not substantiated.

#### **4. CONTACT WITH FAMILIES**

##### **a. Holidays and Home Visits**

**9.128** Elite gymnastics training is a year-round calling. The necessity to maintain condition and motor skills means that long breaks are out of the question. Mr Forbes told the Inquiry that a break of three days will mean six days to return a gymnast to the position she was in when the break commenced. Overall nine days are lost from a carefully planned program of development leading to a major event such as a world championship or an Olympic Games.

9.129 Mr Forbes described the AIS WAG program prior to Mrs Tian's arrival in 1985 as a "holiday camp approach". To minimise the effect described in the preceding paragraph, Mrs Tian reduced the Christmas break and other days off. The length of the Christmas break varies according to the year's forthcoming schedule. The Inquiry was given examples of between four and 10 days off. The opportunity for home visits during the year is not quite as relevant now that the number of girls living in the Residence is smaller as a proportion of the overall program. However, these opportunities tend to decline as girls become more advanced and their competition and training schedules more intense.

9.130 Mr Forbes described Mrs Tian's arrival as "a culture shock for Ju Ping" because she was not accustomed to what the Inquiry gathers might have been a casual approach to the elite competitive side to the sport in this country. However, he called it "a major culture shock for Australia". These changes caused friction with Mrs Crampton, and upset the girls and their families. Mrs Tian had to learn what Australia Day and Anzac Day were about, but these difficulties have been overcome with time.

9.131 Just how much in the way of holidays the girls receive falls within the question explained elsewhere in this Chapter: how hard should the gymnasts try for success? This is not a question which this Inquiry has been established to resolve.

9.132 One strong complaint was received from Kellie Larter and her family. She was at the AIS from January 1984 until mid 1988 and was from Launceston. Perhaps of all the girls she was the most isolated from her family. Even after nine years she feels aggrieved about the occasion when one afternoon in 1986 she flew to Hobart to receive an award at an evening ceremony for her medal winning performance at the Commonwealth Games, only to return first thing the next morning for an afternoon training session in Canberra. She does not understand why she could not have spent the day with her family who came down from Launceston to be with her for the evening. Mr Forbes has only a vague recollection of the incident and thought a competition had been approaching for which Ms Larter had to be prepared. From what Ms Larter said, it may have been possible to accommodate her, but the Inquiry does not have the full picture and it is not for the Inquiry to decide.



**9.133** This was the only significant complaint or incident of this kind drawn to the Inquiry's attention.

**9.134** Some other gymnasts and their families mentioned the willingness of the AIS coaching staff to accommodate requests for special holidays and home visits if competition and training schedules permitted. Examples were provided to the Inquiry.

**9.135** Given the priorities of the AIS, the Inquiry is satisfied that the AIS is neither inconsiderate nor inflexible on these matters. Indeed, it was clear that the AIS staff and Mrs Tian in particular are very keen to see that the girls receive awards in person so that they may gain the full measure of the recognition of their efforts.

**b. Communication With Families During Training Camps and Tours**

**9.136** Mrs Tian is the National Coach for WAG. When teams go to major events such as World Championships or Olympic Games, she asks that families and friends do not contact the gymnasts prior to the event. The general reason is to enable the girls to concentrate on the event. Specifically, there have been problems with family and friends telephoning and not being aware of time zone differences. One girl received four telephone calls in the middle of the night. Also, if the girl's family has come to watch the event, they may wish to go shopping or sightseeing with their daughter. Mr Forbes said, "Please let us get on and do our job. We're here for gymnastics." Mrs Tian said that after the event was the time for telephoning.

**9.137** It appears that the rules for the AGF training camp at the AIS immediately preceding the 1992 Olympic Games contained a rule limiting the number of telephone calls per week to one.

**9.138** Michele Telfer complained about the no-contact rule as it applied to the 1991 World Championships in Indianapolis and about the 1992 Olympic training camp rule.

**9.139** There are commonsense reasons for the no-contact rule as it applied to the 1991 World Championships. Parents of other gymnasts on that team accepted the rule although they would have preferred it to be otherwise. Mr Read suggested a no-contact rule of 48 hours prior to the competition's

beginning. This is an administrative and communication issue. The Inquiry does not consider that it involves any mistreatment of gymnasts in all the circumstances.

9.140 In relation to the Olympic training camp rule, Mrs Tian saw no reason why there should be any restriction. Both she and Mr Forbes claimed to be unaware of the rule. The Inquiry was not able to establish who was responsible for the rule although it would appear to be an AGF rule for which the AIS is not accountable.

9.141 These allegations are rejected.

## 5. MISCELLANEOUS

### a. Value System: Honesty

9.142 Mrs Glen Bevans of Victoria alleged that the AIS taught the gymnasts to be dishonest. Mrs Bevans' daughter, Hollie, attended the AIS from October to December 1987 and again from October 1988 until April 1990. She said:

*There were just lots of little practices. Naturally enough, it taught them to be dishonest. Little things like not being allowed to ride bicycles and what have you. I saw my Hollie and Ruth [Moniz] ride into the bushes one day and I wondered what on earth they were doing but one of the Chinese coaches was driving down the road. I know it's not really very funny but we had a bit of a giggle about it. It did teach them to be dishonest. And even with the food, if I would be shopping in the Belconnen Shopping Centre - my other daughter Emma and myself were standing there one night. All of a sudden we had all this stuff in our hands and it was Lisa McTiernan and Ruth and other girls had bought sweets and what have you...saw someone coming and left us standing there with our arms full of sweets.*

9.143 AIS policies in relation to bicycle riding and consumption of lollies by gymnasts have been considered above. It is clearly illogical to say that the AIS teaches dishonesty just because a gymnast endeavours to hide her breach of the AIS policies.

**9.144** It may be that the substance of Mrs Bevans' complaint is that by imposing policies which the girls will inevitably disobey, dishonesty is taught through promoting disrespect for rules and authority. However, there is no necessary connection between general concepts of dishonesty on the one hand and disobeying such policies on the other.<sup>70</sup> Also, such an assertion assumes that the policies are so unfair that the girls as a group would be justified breaking them and the Inquiry has not found that to be the case.

**9.145** This allegation is rejected.

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70 Indeed, one person suggested to the Inquiry with tongue in cheek that parents who have rules about access to biscuit jars would be guilty of teaching dishonesty.

## APPENDIX A:

## LIST OF SUBMISSIONS

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ACRON Boris	CALTON Mark
ALLEN John	CANBERRA HIGH SCHOOL
ALLEN Monique	Helen Burfitt
ALLEN Robyn	CANNING Christine
ARANDA PRIMARY SCHOOL	CHAO Howard
Bill Weatherstone	CHEAH Mr David, Mrs Linda and
ASTON Carole	Katherine
AUSTRALIAN COACHING	CHELTENHAM YOUTH CLUB
COUNCIL: Peter Corcoran and	W J Cribbes and J Hughes
Gene Schembri	CHETKOVICH Liz
AUSTRALIAN GYMNASTIC	CLACK Jenny
FEDERATION Jim Barry, Peggy	CLARKE Barbara
Browne, Peter Sharpe and	CLARKSON (GRAHAM) Debbie
Murray Chessell	CLELAND Mrs Heather and Melinda
BARNES Dr Peter	CLEWS Wade
BELL John	CORE D C
BENDELI Nick	CORNELISSON Margarita
BEVANS Hollie	CRAMPTON Frances
BEVANS Glen	CROAK R
BINGHAM Anne	DE PASTEL Lieve
BIRD Eileen	DE PRAZER Vicki
BIRD Fiona	DIMITRIEVITCH Adrian
BOOTH Rachel	DOUGLAS Linda
BOURNE Mark	DOWDELL Kim
BOURNE Katie	FARROW Kate
BOURNE Rosemary	FORBES Warwick
BOWMAN Peter	FRICKER Dr Peter
BRETTELL Paul	FUJIKAKE Mrs Catherine
BROADBENT Ross and Julie	FUJIKAKE Mr and Amelia
BROWN Mrs Libby and Sonia	GILLEN Judith
BROWNE Peggy	GYSEN Mr Antonius and Brooke
BROWNING Catherine	HAMILTON Karen
BROWNING Michelle	HARDMAN David
BURKE Dr Cheryl	HARVEY Mrs and Alyssa
BURKE Dr Louise	HASSAN Peter
BURRIDGE Stephanie	

HAYWARD Mr Chris, Mrs Valerie  
and Michelle  
HILL Fran  
HINTON Mrs Anne and Jesika  
HITCHCOCK Bob  
HO Karen  
HOLLOWAY Mrs Lorraine and Mr  
Brendon  
HONDA Kazuya  
HONDA Rhonda  
HORTON Mark  
HRISTOFSKI Kathy  
INGE Karen  
JACKSON Mr & Mrs Don, Rebecca  
and Kellie  
JIANG Shao Yi  
KANTEK Mrs Linda and Nicole  
KENNEALLY Dean  
KERR Roslyn  
KERR Ann-Maree  
KIRKHAM Mrs and Patricia  
KNIGHT Ian and GREGORY Julie  
KOSTENKO Sascha  
KWAN Mr and Tracey  
KYPREOS Nick  
LAM Debbie  
LAM Kate  
LANTRY (BLAKE) Cathy  
LARTER Kellie  
LARTER Mr Leigh and Mrs Brenda  
LAWS Greg  
LEOTTA Kerrie  
LINCOLN Lucinda  
LOGAN Barry  
MAHER Debbie  
MACKELLAR Alex  
MCCONVILLE Jan  
MCKELVIE Mrs Vicki and Sandi  
MCTIERNAN Lisa

MCTIERNAN Ann  
MEREDITH Ken  
MILLER Annette  
MILLER Mr and Ceris  
MLADENOVIC Danica  
MONIZ Mr, Mrs and Ruth  
MOORE Robyn  
MORRIS Kim  
MORRIS Peta  
MOSES Mr Kevin, Mrs Jenny and  
Tanya  
MUDDLE Lee  
NELSON Reverend Peter  
NOACK (RYCROFT) Leanne  
ORMSTON Garry  
ORPIN Mrs Karin and Candice  
QU Derui  
PAVEZ Carmen  
PINNINGTON Hugh  
PLANES Gui  
READ Peter  
READ Lisa  
RICHARDSON Glenys  
RICHARDSON Jenny  
RODIONENKO Andrei  
RYCROFT David  
SAFRAN Zora  
SANDO Dr Brian  
SCRIVEN Megan  
SHIBAOKA Mr Atsushi, Mrs Patricia  
and Naomi  
SHARP Dr Les  
SPORTS MEDICINE AUSTRALIA,  
SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BRANCH  
Lynne Haysman  
STEPHAN Gene  
STEVENSON Nicole  
STEWART Carolyn  
STEWART Dr R J



SZJKO Paul  
TALIANA Lisa  
TATAI George  
TELFER Michelle  
TIAN Ju Ping  
TIMPSON Chris  
TRENTINI Mrs Robyn and Renee  
TURNBULL Shann and  
MARKWELL

Pauline

TURNER (BRIGGS) Reverend

Anne

TURNER Neville

VALETTA Mr and Mrs Lewis and  
Lisa

VICTORIAN GYMNASTIC

ASSOCIATION Dr Geoff

Sussman and Kay Mahlook

VICTORIAN INSTITUTE OF  
SPORT

Dr Frank Pike and Peter Spence

WATTS Barbara

WAYNE Geoffrey and Laima

WEIR Elise

WEIR Helle

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN

GYMNASTIC ASSOCIATION

Bob

Biltoft, Steve Chetkovich and

Gratton Wilson

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN

INSTITUTE OF SPORT Wally

Foreman and Steve Lawrence

WHITWELL Sheryl

WILSON Rebecca, SKINNER Lisa,

LAM Kate, DAVIDSON Jade,

KANTEK Nicole, FUJIKAKE

Amelia, CROAK Alexandra

WILSON Sue

WILSON Mrs C and Kristy

WILSON Bob and Ruth

WILSON Mrs Sue and Joanna

WOOD Jackie

ZUKER David

## **APPENDIX B: AUSTRALIAN SPORTS COMMISSION JOB DESCRIPTION**

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### **JOB DETAILS**

Position Title:           Gymnastics House Parent           Position Number:

#### **A. PRIMARY JOB PURPOSE**

The primary job purpose of the Gymnastics House Parent is to maintain a constant, stabilising home-like environment suitable for the age-range (8-21) of the female gymnasts in Residence and provide care, support and enrichment for the gymnasts in personal, social, vocational and recreation matters and in any other way that is appropriate. The House Parent attempts to compensate as much as possible for the fact that the athletes are living away from home.

#### **B. JOB RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. To help gymnasts balance their high level training requirements with the development of other life skills such as self-respect and self-reliance in preparation for their international careers at the ages of 11 and 12.
2. To closely monitor the well-being of each gymnast.
3. To help new gymnasts adjust to the AIS environment.
4. To maintain a happy, safe, clean and comfortable home-like environment which supports all members of the team.
5. To provide personal counselling and display understanding at all times eg during hard training times and periods of homesickness.
6. To monitor gymnasts activities:
  - wake gymnasts for early morning training (6.00 am)
  - accompany gymnasts at all times, including to and from training

- eat all meals with gymnasts in Residence to monitor balanced eating habits
  - organise gymnasts for bed at night, showers etc.
  - do laundry as required
  - provide transport in AIS vehicles in respect of:
    - Medical appointments
    - Dental appointments
    - Church
    - Airport, bus and train terminals
    - Shops, recreation
7. To assist with all shopping requirements.
  8. To attend all medical appointments and administer all medication or treatment as prescribed by a Doctor.
  9. To assist with educational problems as appropriate, monitor academic progress, liaise regularly with schools, collect sick athletes from school, attend P/T evenings.
  10. To discipline gymnasts where necessary.
  11. To keep accurate records of significant events pertaining to breaches of discipline, illnesses etc
  12. To maintain a welcoming open home to gymnasts with 24 hour access if necessary.
  13. To organise extra recreation activities eg. Arts/crafts, cooking, sewing etc. on weekends and during holidays.
  14. To monitor sick athletes at close quarters.
  15. To travel at short notice with teams on National/International tours (age-range 8-24).
  16. To work as a key member of the gymnastics program and in close consultation with the Head Coaches.

17. To liaise regularly with EAS Staff (Athlete Supervisors, Education Officer and the Manager) on relevant issues.

18. To liaise regularly with parents and assist with areas of concern.

### **C. ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

1. To understand special requirements and demands on elite gymnasts.

2. To provide frequent counselling on a wide range of issues.

3. To be in a state of continual readiness to respond immediately to gymnasts needs, no matter how trivial.

4. To maintain a harmonious working relationship with a diverse group of individuals-athletes, athlete supervisors, coaches and Residence operations staff.

5. To maintain an even-handed approach despite facing a range of expectations from athletes, coaches, parents, supervisors and teachers.

6. To work under pressure and remain calm in emergencies.

7. To tolerate interruptions to personal time and space.

8. To work independently and as part of a team.

9. To exhibit exemplary personal standards of conduct.

10. To respond wisely to the demands of varying needs of young children who are remote from the influence of their parents.

11. To be organised and be able to provide constant guidance for young children who look for and need a stable environment which meets the demands of school, training and home-life expectations.

### **D. DECISION MAKING AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

1. Personal counselling - to decide when counselling is necessary/appropriate to help a gymnast.
2. Discipline - to implement appropriate measures for minor indiscretions.
3. EAS Budget Expenditure - to decide what funding is required in terms of travel, recreation and housekeeping issues.
4. Liaison with all associated stakeholders - to use initiative to liaise regularly, with coaches, parents, EAS staff, teachers etc.
5. Variation to gymnasts routine outside of training - to grant or withhold permission for gymnasts to stay away from school, visit friends, go on recreation activities.
6. Medical matters - to decide to take a gymnast to the doctor, dentist, hospital etc
7. Dealing with daily problems - respond appropriately to such things as sleeping in, missing the school bus, running out of money etc.

## **E. JOB DIMENSIONS**

### **E2 People Management**

Relief Gymnastics Houseparent - provides relief for the House Parent 2 days/week and when the House Parent takes leave. The relief House Parent assumes all the responsibilities of the House Parent.

### **E2 Quantitative**

Operating Budget - all operating costs are covered in the EAS and Gymnastics budgets.

## **F. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

1. To be available and willing to assist in all areas when required.
2. To be a good role model for the gymnasts.



3. The gymnasts will be living harmoniously in clean and tidy living quarters and balancing all components of their lives.
4. To have gained the respect of the gymnasts and key contact people.
5. To be seen as making a positive contribution to AIS Residence living.
6. To maintain motivation for job over a period of time.
7. Key contact people will be well-informed of each gymnasts progress in relevant areas of their lives.
8. Absence of major incidences in relation to the Residential Gymnastics program.

#### **G. JOB HOLDER REQUIREMENTS**

**G1 Qualifications** - sound educational qualifications

**G2 Experience**

- at least 5 years working with and relating to young children and adolescents.
- at least 5 years in positions of authority and care of others: used to making judgements in significant matters.
- evidence of successful living in a communal living situation.
- experience in the workings of an education system.
- must have a current drivers license.

**G3 Specific/Technical skills and knowledge** - must have experience in the sport of gymnastics eg coaching, technical areas, administration or as a competitor.

**G4 Personal Attributes**

- enthusiastic, energetic and able to be on duty 24 hours/day for 5 days each week.
- a patient and sympathetic listener.
- discrete with confidential information.

- fair and consistent when applying rules
- non-judgemental and objective in dealing with personal issues.
- not allow personal problems to intrude into job/
- flexible in responding to requests for help
- accepting of individual differences and supportive as much as possible
- display maturity: willing to do what is appropriate in every situation no matter how unpopular one may become as a result.
- able to cope with the demands of working for lengthy periods with young children in their own environment with little assistance and outside interaction with other adults.

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