

Restrained 'by law'

August 2010
4WardEver UK

State-sponsored child abuse

provided by: John Bowden - 12th August 2010



In 2004 15 year old Gareth Myatt died whilst being "restrained" by three members of staff at a privatized children's prison called Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre in Warwickshire. In the same year 14 year old Adam Rickwood hanged himself in another privatized children's jail, Hassockfield Secure Training Centre in Co. Durham. A Judge later ruled that the guards who "restrained" Adam shortly before his death had used unlawful force on him. Six years later and following a sustained campaign by parents of imprisoned children and groups like the Children's Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) a shocking government document detailing control methods used on children, some as young as 12, in custody has been revealed under the Freedom of Information Act.

Published by the Prison Service in 2005 and classified as a restricted government document, the manual provides staff in secure training centres with authorization to inflict physical pain on children with so-called "restraint and self-defence techniques". The methods of physical force described in the manual are so legally questionable that the government was prepared to be taken to a tribunal to fight against disclosure of the document despite a ruling by the Information Commissioner that it should be publicly released. Previously government officials had even refused to provide a copy to the Parliamentary Human Rights Committee. Eventually the Ministry of Justice was forced to back down and release the document; its contents made the reticence of the Justice Ministry to shame with the public, such information all too self-explanatory.

Some of the "restraint" methods used against children in custody approved by the Justice Ministry, currently headed by the liberal-thinking Ken Clark, include ramming knuckles into the ribs of children and raking shoes down the shins. It also authorised staff to: "Drive straightened fingers into the young person's face, and then quickly drive the straightened fingers of the same hand downwards into the young person's groin area".

"Use an inverted knuckle into the trainee's sternum and drive inward and upward". "Continue to carry alternate elbow strikes to the young person's ribs until a release is achieved". "Nose distraction techniques" - sharp blows to the children's nose - had already been found by the Court of Appeal to have been routinely and unlawfully used against children in at least one secure training centre. The contracting out of such brutal methods of control and punishment to institutions run by private firms for profit raises an obvious moral question and issue.

Instructions issued to staff in the secure training centres reveal a calculated understanding that such "control techniques" could lead to serious injury to the child and even death; "the techniques could risk a fracture of the skull and temporary or permanent blindness caused by rupture of the eyeball or detached retina". There is also an acknowledgement that some techniques could cause asphyxia; staff are told that while applying headlocks to children that "if breathing is compromised it could lead to a medical emergency".

Carolyne Willow, national co-ordinator of CRAE, said: "The manual is deeply disturbing and stands as state authorisation of institutionalised child abuse. What made former ministers believe that children as young as 12 could get so out of control so often that staff should be taught how to ram their knuckles into their rib cages? Would we allow teachers etc., to be trained in how to deliberately hurt and humiliate children?"

Images of Abu Graib prison in Iraq are evoked by instructions instruction to force difficult children to "adopt a kneeling position while a second member takes control of the head by grabbing the back of the neck while cupping the chin". Whilst in this position steel handcuffs are applied to the child. Ms Willow describes such methods as "The ritualistic humiliation of children and a clear abuse of human rights".

Phillip Noyes, director of strategy and development at the National Society for the prevention of cruelty to children said: "These shocking revelations graphically illustrate the cruel and degrading violence inflicted at times on children in custody. On occasions these restraint techniques have resulted in children suffering broken arms, noses, wrists and fingers. Painful restraint is a clear breach of children's human rights against some of the most vulnerable youngsters in society and has no place in a decent society".

During the 12 months up to March 2009, restraint was used 1.776 times in the UK's four secure training centres.

In the Houses of Lords on 21 July 2010 Lord McNally in response to questions about the methods of control described in the manual said "we use the word "children" very casually to describe often very large and quite violent young people in these centres", and "we also have a duty of care to the staff who deal with these often very violent young people".

Often disturbed and unruly children, some as young as 12 years of age, are metamorphosed in Lord McNally's mind into large and physically violent young adults as he tries to defend what Ms Swaine the legal director of CRAE, describes as "Guidance given in a staff authorised manual to violate human rights because it allows staff to deliberately hurt children outside cases of life-threatening necessity".

What the manual actually reveals is an attitude and mindset that believes damaged and already brutalised children can be made to conform by the use of even more brutality and cruelty. In reality what such treatment creates is more severely disturbed young people seriously alienated from and actively hostile to society. What is being manufactured in these secure training centres are ticking time bombs that are then delivered into the wider community.

A disproportionate number of seriously violent offenders and long-term prisoners are the product of a childhood spent in children's homes and youth custody institutions where physical abuse and violence formed a routine part of their treatment. When the lesson being taught to children in custody is that power is represented by the power to hurt and control then that lesson will eventually be learned and practised in their own lives.

What is sown behind the walls of child prisons will eventually be reaped by the wider community. The campaign to stop the abuse of children in custody shouldn't be viewed as it is by tabloid newspapers and those responsible for that abuse as the prerogative of "wishy-washy liberals"; the wider society should realise that it has a vested interest in stopping the de-humanization of imprisoned children.

*John Bowden
August 2010
HMP Perth*



Links to news articles:

‘Disturbing’ secret manual reveals brutal methods used on youths

18th July 2010

A government manual instructing prison staff on how to inflict pain on teenage inmates was today labelled ‘state authorised child abuse’. The Ministry of Justice was forced to release details of its approved ‘restraint and self-defence techniques’ for children in secure training centres after a lengthy freedom of information battle. — Mail On Sunday [Read More >>](#)

Child custody restraint manual is to be released in full

July 2010

After three years of secrecy and resistance, the Youth Justice Board (YJB) has agreed to hand over the instructors' manual which governs the use of physical restraint in the country's four privately-run child prisons. — Children’s Rights Alliance [Read More >>](#)