



5 December 2008

## 'OH GOD! IT'S SCHOOLIES'

### Background

*Over recent days I have read numerous articles in different publications which have referred to the successful and safe schoolies' week celebrations. For example the Courier Mail published an article highlighting how lucrative schoolies' celebrations are for local businesses such as McDonalds and Hungry Jacks. The Assistant Police Commissioner, Jim Keogh, is quoted as giving Queensland schoolies '8 out of 10' for their behaviour. There have been other articles claiming that 'once again' the majority of those that were arrested were 'toolies'. Indeed there has been little negative to say about the behaviour of the 2008 school graduates.*

*Before relaying my schoolies experience I want to emphasise that I don't consider myself a 'wowser' or someone who can't appreciate the need for young people to be able to party. On the contrary, I have supported my nephews in convincing their parents to allow them to go to schoolies. In my talks to school leavers over the years I have assured them that they will have a wonderful, and most importantly, safe time at the celebrations.*

At the kind invitation of the remarkable Angela Driscoll, who is manager of the Chill Out Zone<sup>1</sup>, I attended schoolies at the Gold Coast on Friday night. I did suggest to Angela that I could come down on a weekday but she was adamant that if I really wanted to appreciate the issues that society has with alcohol related events then I should visit schoolies on the last Friday night. I could hardly refuse.

I arrived at the Gold Coast at approximately 6.30 pm and arranged to meet Angela outside McDonalds in Cavill Avenue. Sitting outside McDonalds I was surrounded by schoolies who were having their nightly meal. Some were dancing to the music blaring from a DJ

---

<sup>1</sup> The Chill Out Zone is a year round mobile immediate care centre situated in the night club precinct of Surfers Paradise. It is funded by the Department of Communities.

- Management & Promotion – Sport & the Arts - Developing & Facilitating Educational & Training Resources -

---

---

7/125 Russell Street  
PO Box 3476  
TOOWOOMBA VILLAGE FAIR QLD 4350

Phone: (07) 4659 9277 Facsimile: (07) 4659 9377  
Email: [adair@provincelawyers.com](mailto:adair@provincelawyers.com)

- Proudly sponsored by Shannon Donaldson Province Lawyers -

adjacent to the local kebab store and all appeared to be having a good time. I was glad that I was not the only person aged over 18 in the vicinity. There were a number of middle aged English tourists having an ice cream and an American couple pushing their baby in a stroller. It would be wrong to suggest that the schoolies were behaving inappropriately in any way. I didn't see any signs of intoxication and they all seemed in good humour.

Angela arrived and as we walked past the empty bars, restaurants and coffee shops (which are not frequented by schoolies) she seemed to be known by all. There is nothing like being with a local to put one's mind at ease.

From 7 pm to 9 pm Angela briefed me about what to expect that night. The statistics that she gave in relation to the number of schoolies who had been treated as a consequence of alcohol or drug related incidents seemed quite low. I remarked to her that that the schoolies appeared to have been tamed. She noted that it was a good year - and certainly better than last.

A distant roar from the crowd at 8.30pm announced that the 'Red Frogs' stage had opened and that the Schoolies Hub was now in full swing. This roar marked the start of my tour.

I was taken to the schoolies HQ where I was decked out with a VIP pass and off we went.

The Esplanade was a totally different environment from what I had experienced just two hours before. We were immediately in a throng of schoolies. We made our way to the 'first recharge zone' being manned by Rosies<sup>2</sup>. To the uninitiated a 'recharge zone' is a small tent manned by volunteers who provide water to schoolies and also look for signs of schoolies 'at risk'. If volunteers spot someone at risk they escort them to the Queensland Ambulance Service tent.

After checking on Rosies we went behind the Red Frogs stage. The Red Frogs<sup>3</sup> stage is one of 2 stages which provide house music for the Schoolies Hub. I was invited on stage by one of the Red Frogs volunteers to observe the Schoolies Hub. It was an amazing sight. Directly in front of the Red Frogs stage was the mosh pit. It was pumping with what seemed like hundreds of schoolies all pressing to get closer to the stage and all enjoying the experience. Looking out beyond the mosh pit the crowd thinned but only slightly and in the distance you could see the second stage where the crowd became dense again. I stress 'in the distance' because the sheer expanse of the area and numbers was incredible.

The Red Frogs certainly knew how to get the crowd going. To me they were the conductors of the crowd bringing them to a fever pitch and hyping them up. The Red Frogs volunteers were young, vibrant and sober. They were certainly the funkier Christians I have ever encountered.

---

<sup>2</sup> Rosies is an arm of Oblates Youth Australia who identify with the Oblates of Mary Immaculate.

<sup>3</sup> Red Frogs Australia Chaplaincy Network is an initiative of the Citipointe Church Brisbane. They aim to support schoolies through their week long celebrations and to provide positive presence amid their partying activities. They assist through walk homes, cooking pancakes, room cleans, handing out Red Frog lollies and offering emotional support. The Queensland Government funds Red Frogs Australia to recruit more than 1200 volunteers to provide practical in-house support to school leavers.

We then moved from the stage and made our way to the Schoolies Hub<sup>4</sup>. By this stage I must confess that I was feeling quite apprehensive. The crowd was thick as we moved closer to the Hub. It seemed that 3 out of 4 of the schoolies that we passed were highly intoxicated. (I'm not talking tipsy. I'm talking 'smashed' 'drunk', 'plastered', 'legless'). The pushing, the jostling, the language and the attitude certainly let you know that they were in control of the night. They were schoolies and the street was theirs.

As we made our way into the Hub it was remarkable to see that the only thing the security guard was checking was that no one was bringing alcohol onto the beach. In comparison, licensed venues would be required to turn away anyone who was intoxicated. This was not a problem entering the alcohol free Hub. No matter what the level of intoxication schoolies were being allowed in as long as they weren't carrying alcohol.

Once on the beach we made our way to the Scripture Union<sup>5</sup> recharge zone. If Cavill Avenue was intimidating the Hub was just downright scary. The only people that seemed sober in the Hub were officials such as police and volunteers. I was pleased to arrive at the recharge zone where I eagerly followed Angela behind the tables which had been set up to dole out water to the many schoolies gathering in front.

This recharge zone was the only one in the Hub. It was a small white tent with tables manned by young Scripture Union volunteers giving out water. The other half of the tent was enclosed and a partition divided the tent in two. Behind the partition were chairs and stretchers. On a table were stacks of sick bags.

Standing with one of the young volunteers looking out to the schoolies mass I remarked to her that it was a wild night. Bearing in mind that it was just after 9 pm she replied that this was nothing and to wait for an hour. She said in an hour the room would be full of drunken schoolies and the floor would be covered with vomit. I told her I couldn't imagine anything worse than dealing with a room full of drunken young people who were vomiting uncontrollably as a result of having too much drink. She good naturedly said that she had come to terms with it and it doesn't worry her any more. I made a comment about the number of schoolies that simply wouldn't make it to the tent. She told me that they are usually sick on the beach and the sand soaks it up.

Looking out into the crowd I got a further sense of the total anarchy that was occurring. Ten metres away from the entrance to the tent a young fellow with no shirt and no shoes pulled down his pants and urinated where he was standing, in the middle of his friends. (This gives a totally new meaning to the 'golden sands' of Surfers Paradise). There is another couple who are seriously 'getting it on'. He has his hand up her short skirt and little is left to the imagination. He is certainly providing entertainment for his friends who are standing around him.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Schoolies Hub is the controlled Government funded section of the beach at Surfers Paradise Esplanade that is fenced each night for exclusive access by schoolies. The area hosts alcohol free entertainment over 9 nights comprising 2 stages with DJs.

<sup>5</sup> Scripture Union is an inter-denominational organisation dedicated to providing youth with professional care and a Christian message to help them find hope and contentment. It is also the largest employer of school chaplains in Australia.

For those of you who are thinking I sound like an old fogey let me say that it wasn't like anything I have ever seen in my years of going to B & Ss, my days at Gatton College, New Years Eve events, cricket matches, the nights at State of Origin or the long days at Ballymore. This was out of control. It may be an alcohol free zone but what that means is that before these young people come into the Hub they ensure that they have drunk as much as they possibly can at their units in the hope that it will get them through the night.

Angela was on the move again and beckoned me to come with her. As we made our way back to Cavill Avenue a group of 3 girls ran up to Angela screaming that their friend had just been bashed and had passed out on the beach. Angela told them to calm down and asked to be taken to her. We followed them for about 15 to 20 metres to where a girl was lying on the sand surrounded by her friends. It was quite hard to see her because the area is not well lit. Angela passed me her handbag and her jacket and crouched down beside the girl. At this stage the girl launched into a torrent of abuse about how *'a f... slut has just f... smashed me and if I f... find her I will f... slam the f... bitch'*. It goes on. Her friends responded with expletive filled sentences about how they would help her find *'the f... bitch and make her f... sorry'*. Angela calmed them all down and nominated one of her friends to help take her to the ambulance centre.

Now you're probably thinking that these must have been pretty tough and rough looking girls. Quite the contrary. They were all slight attractive young girls. Even in her distressed state the victim caused young men's heads to turn

If an invisibility cloak had been available at this stage I would have grabbed it! There I was walking along behind Angela carrying her handbag and jacket as she helped the girl to the Hub exit. Throughout this whole episode Angela displayed her remarkable ability to disarm volatile situations with her humour which automatically put the young people at ease.

When we reached Cavill Avenue the situation didn't get any better. The only difference from the beach is that it is well lit.

As we walked along Cavill Avenue (with me still holding Angela's handbag) we had to squeeze through the shirtless or singlet clad young men who in their intoxicated state were trying to assert themselves by sticking out their chests. The scary thing was that these young fellows who were flexing were big fellows. As we made our way through I could hear taunts of *'f..... toolie'* directed at me. Not game to turn around, I just puffed my chest out and tried to make the VIP tag around my neck more prominent. Mind you it is hard to look authoritative when you are carrying a handbag and lady's coat. I was grateful to see the adult populated ambulance centre ahead. The entrance was surrounded by Red Frogs volunteers, SES and most importantly ambulance officers.

Angela escorted the young girl into the ambulance tent and asked her friend to remain outside with a Red Frogs volunteer. Angela told the ambulance officer what had occurred at which stage the girl burst into tears, sat down and told the ambulance officer about the *'f..... bitch that bit my f..... finger'*.

Looking around I saw that I was in a large tent that is divided into 3 rooms. The first room is a make shift reception area. Seated on chairs were 2 young men both sporting bloody

- Management & Promotion - Art Culture & Sport - Developing & Facilitating Education & Training Resources -

noses. There was another young man with his foot bandaged. Apparently laceration of the feet is common amongst schoolies as footwear (unless it is thongs being worn on arms) tends to be an inconvenience. Angela beckoned me through to the next room where she introduced me to a number of ambulance officers. She also introduced me to a doctor from the Gold Coast Hospital who has given up his night to assist. The second room is where all the supplies are kept and where the overworked ambulance officers can take a few moments of well earned rest.

The third room is a 20 stretcher ward. In this room there were already 4 young people who had succumbed to the affects of alcohol. Three of them were being closely monitored by the ambulance officers who have sick bags at the ready. The fourth girl had passed out with a blanket over her. I was informed that by the end of the night the room would be full and there wouldn't be a stretcher vacant. The ambulance officer mentioned that at 2am they go home. I asked what happens to those that are asleep on the stretchers. This is when Angela and her team take over. I quizzed Angela about this as I had been under the impression that the recharge zones and the ambulance service would be open all night. This is not the case. At 2 am Angela and her team shut down at Orchid Avenue and relocate to the ambulance centre. When all the other organisations have closed up shop Angela and her small team remain on watch. Angela considers that it is their role, and duty, to make sure that the young people remain safe.

As we left the ambulance centre two SES volunteers dragged in another young girl who was extremely upset that they would not allow her to continue partying with her friends. When I say 'dragged' I mean dragged. The girl was resisting and screaming at the top of her voice *'Why won't you let me go and party with my f..... friends. I want to go to the f..... Hub, Why won't you let me go to the f.....Hub. Why won't you let me go and party. Why won't you let me f..... go'*. This girl could barely stand because she was so drunk. I looked for a reaction from the ambulance officer and SES volunteers. All they do is smile as if it is nothing unusual for them.

We headed off again. This time we made our way to the crime prevention van. Not surprisingly the crime prevention van, which has a huge police logo on it, is one of the quieter sections. It seems that the presence of the police has a calming effect. Outside the crime prevention vehicle there was a lady from a drug prevention agency giving out surveys to schoolies. She handed one to Angela and me. I scanned through it and noticed that it asks questions such as how many different types of drugs have been tried. Most of the questions about drugs are concerned with illegal activity but the questions about alcohol relate to the usual symptoms that go with alcohol abuse. As I looked around I could see two tables of young people completing the questionnaires. At one table there was a group of the ever happy Red Frogs volunteers and at the other table a group of intoxicated young men and women who were helping each other fill out the surveys.

Angela introduced me to the crime prevention team. It consists of crime prevention police officers as well as police volunteers from the region. They are older than those volunteers at the recharge zones and with age comes experience and respect. It seems that they are the first port of call when a schoolie needs something. There was a steady flow of requests. *'Have you seen my mobile phone?' 'Has my licence been handed in?' 'Do you know where the toilets are?'* All requests are answered politely but unfortunately this is not always reciprocated by the schoolies.

- Management & Promotion - Art Culture & Sport - Developing & Facilitating Education & Training Resources -

We were off again, this time to the 'stay cool' stage. Perhaps the best way to describe the crowd at this stage is that it is like the front row of a heavy metal concert. Again it is hard to imagine that this is an 'alcohol free' event.

We left the stage and made our way back to Cavill Avenue stopping off at the Drug Arm<sup>6</sup> recharge zone. On the way I observed numerous events which would normally result in a person being locked up. One memorable incident was a young fellow grabbing a girl's breasts in both hands as she passed. Angela yelled at him but he was soon lost in the crowd and the girl didn't take offence anyway. On another occasion a young fellow saw a girl coming from the other direction and took a fancy to her sunglasses. He took them and put them on. She slapped him full force across the face and he called her a '*f..... bitch*'. She responded by again slapping him across the face, calling him a '*f...dickhead*' and stormed off.

We finished our tour and it was back to home base for Angela which is the mobile Chill Out Zone located in Orchid Avenue. To get to Orchid Avenue we had to walk down Cavill Avenue mall. It was shoulder to shoulder with schoolies. Normally, being chivalrous, I would take the lead and thread a path through the mass for Angela to follow. Not tonight. I was on Angela's coat tail as she managed to weave her way through the schoolies. I was eyed off by the schoolies. I felt like shouting as I passed through the crowd '*I am not a toolie*'. The further we got into Cavill Avenue the better it became. The schoolies thinned out and all of a sudden I started seeing people who looked as if they were old enough to drink.

Don't get me wrong. Orchid Avenue was alive with people but there were a number of things that I noticed straight away. Firstly, the standard of dress - there were no bare feet or chests. Secondly, it was a much older crowd. Thirdly, the police appeared to be more visible. Perhaps this is because the police station is located in Orchid Avenue or perhaps it's because they do have a greater presence there because they expect more problems from the older element. The other thing which stood out was the abundance of security guards standing outside each of the nightclubs located in Orchid Avenue. There was a sense that if anything were to start then it would be over very quickly as they all looked alert and ready to react.

We soon arrived at the Chill Out Zone. Throughout the night Angela had given me some details about the Chill Out Zone. It operates 52 weeks a year and is manned by volunteers who all have senior first aid officer certificates and come from different walks of life. The Zone provides immediate care to anyone affected by alcohol and/or other drugs and offers first aid to individuals injured in assaults and accidents. It occurred to me how important this service is in saving unnecessary attendances at the Gold Coast Hospital Emergency Department and ambulance call outs.

The first thing that struck me about the Chill Out Zone staff was how calm and good natured they are. They were all in good spirits and it was infectious. In the short time I was with them there was a steady flow of young people with problems. I got the distinct

---

<sup>6</sup> Drug Arm is supported by an association of Christian denominations. It seeks to inform and be informed by the churches about issues of concern in their communities.

impression that some of the people who were stopping by were regulars. They have got used to the service. As I stood with Angela I became aware of how well she is known and respected. I suppose that you don't run an organisation that provides a valued service that operates 52 weeks a year without becoming well known in the district.

Angela suggested that I have a tour of one of the nightclubs. The nightclub chosen was the renowned Cocktails and Dreams run by Lino Girardi.

As we made our way into the nightclub (feeling quite important as we were ushered to the front of a long queue) I couldn't help thinking how different this was from the 'alcohol free' event which was happening 500 metres away. Firstly, those in the queue waited patiently and happily. Some of them were well on their way to becoming drunk but they didn't show the outward signs of intoxication. At the front of the queue there were 3 staff members who monitor the numbers, standard of dress and ensure that the patrons are not too intoxicated to enter. Likewise, inside the venue it was also well controlled.

Angela took me upstairs and introduced me to Lino. It is hard not to be impressed by Lino. He is a large man, well dressed with a foreboding presence but on meeting him he immediately put me at ease with his affable nature. It was difficult to have a conversation with Lino given the volume of the music, but he managed to tell me how he runs the establishment. I had the impression that while liquor licensing laws dictate the management practices Lino seems to leave nothing to chance.

As I stood with Lino and surveyed the night club, the contrast with the absolute anarchy that existed at the Schoolies' Hub couldn't have been more stark. Here there was still dancing (with a DJ of some repute) and the crowd was dressed to impress. It was obvious that many of these young men and women had a few drinks under their belt and were out for a good time. The high ratio of staff members to crowd was very noticeable. Lino explained that he encourages his staff members to interact with the crowd so that they can monitor mood and hopefully prevent trouble before it occurs. He told me he caters for around 1,000 patrons a night and with a transient holiday crowd there is always a chance of trouble occurring and sometimes it can't be prevented. Lino knows that if he allows intoxicated people into his venue or allows intoxicated people to be served he places his business at risk.

I left Lino to his livelihood and made my way back to the Chill Out Zone. It was now 12.00 am. I estimated that there were around 10 patrons gathered around the Chill Out Zone having water and talking with the Chill Out staff. The queues outside the nightclubs have increased. They continued to wait in the hope that they will get in. I told Angela that my night was over. I thanked her for taking the time to educate me and giving me a taste of what it is like to work at the front line.

As I set off to find my car I passed groups of young schoolies all looking the worse for wear. There was a young man lying in a flowerpot whose friends were trying to get him to sit up and keep going. Down one side street was a group of 3 or 4 young men standing around as their friend was being sick. There were a couple of girls walking ahead of me who were subjected to none too subtle remarks as they walked through a group of young men. The fellows looked menacing. Fortunately I spotted 2 police officers on horses and

- Management & Promotion - Art Culture & Sport - Developing & Facilitating Education & Training Resources -

given their proximity, I was confident it would be safe to pass. I walked through the group of young men. As I passed the taunts of 'f... toolie' followed me.

To say I was happy to be opening my car door and to be escaping from the Gold Coast is an understatement. As I pulled up at the lights I had a lasting image of my night at schoolies. A group of young girls and 2 young men walked across the road in front of me. Standing on the corner was a young bare chested man yelling abuse at them challenging the males in the group. Fortunately the young men had the sense to avoid responding to his challenge. Getting no response the fellow started yelling at another group.

I had a 2 hour journey back to Toowoomba to reflect on what I had seen. I like to champion the rights of this generation - the right to party, the right to enjoy life to the fullest. What I saw at schoolies was youth out of control. Alcohol will always be used as a social lubricant but not much socialising is occurring when they are drinking themselves into a stupor, vomiting and passing out.

While the government funded Schoolies' Hub provides an alcohol free event it has created its own problem with schoolies drinking as much as they possibly can in their units in the hope that the effects will last them all night. As an observer I can confidently say that if these young men and women behaved in the same manner in any place other than schoolies they would end up spending the night in the watch house. For example, if they behaved like that at the cricket, or a football match, or at a hotel it simply would not be tolerated. Yet because they are schoolies it would appear that a decision has been made to tolerate their behaviour for this week. While it may help parents, teachers and government officials to rest easier promulgating the Schoolies Hub as an alcohol free event and relying on what seems like hundreds of well meaning Christian volunteers to promote a drink free lifestyle, in reality what we have created is a hell of a mess by tolerating this type of behaviour.

I came away from the event with a wonderful respect and admiration for the police, the ambulance officers and the likes of Angela Driscoll who are all based on the Gold Coast and whose livelihoods are dedicated to assisting people throughout the year. Every parent with a child who has attended schoolies at the Gold Coast should be sending Christmas cards to these groups.

I also felt for the law abiding owners of licensed establishments like Lino who are doing all they can to allow patrons to experience a safe night. I also have a degree of empathy for the Gold Coast residents. I can't think of any other region that would welcome thousands of intoxicated teenagers to their area and allow them to run riot on their iconic landmarks. To me schoolies treated the Gold Coast with contempt and a level of arrogance that wouldn't be tolerated elsewhere.

On a final note Queensland schoolies week officially ended on Sunday night. As the next wave of schoolies arrived from New South Wales the Schoolies Hub was being pulled down, the stage dismantled, the recharge zones packed up and the volunteers disbursed. All that remains is the local police, the ambulance officers and the Chill Out Zone. God bless them.

Adair

- Management & Promotion - Art Culture & Sport - Developing & Facilitating Education & Training Resources -

---

---

7/125 Russell Street  
TOOWOOMBA Q 4350

Ph: (07) 4659 9277  
Fax: (07) 4659 9377

Email:  
[adair@provincelawyers.com](mailto:adair@provincelawyers.com)

- Proudly sponsored by Shannon Donaldson Province Lawyers -