

# *The* **WARTS**

*and*  
**ALL**

*of working in a  
boarding school*

a staff member's point of view



## WHY WORK IN BOARDING?

If you are thinking of becoming a staff member, working with boarding students, it is important that you understand the inclusive nature of our schools. The stereotypes and myths which abound that a boarding education is for an 'elite' and that, as such, our staff must be of a similar ilk are all wrong! A boarding education caters for the needs of such a diverse group that our staffing will always reflect this. If you are thinking about applying for a position on a boarding staff you should not feel that a lack of personal history in boarding in anyway hinders your professional pathway. Your 'voice' within the boarding staff community is just as valid, and often incredibly useful, as someone's with a richer boarding personal history. Boarding is a wonderful profession to be a part of, and continuous training in boarding school work is available to help you on your way. In fact a residential boarding experience can be hugely advantageous for your future career pathway because of the level of pastoral support you need to provide as well as the wide variety of expectations placed upon you.

There are some incredible benefits of a career pathway in boarding, not least of which include fiscal, social, academic, and personal gains. These will always need to be weighed against the somewhat 'all consuming' nature of boarding life. However, staff must be careful not to prioritise these gains against the essence of why we work in this industry, the wellbeing and support of the boarders. The benefits are great, but, at times, so are the demands! The role can be a 24/7 one, and no two days are the same - sometimes the best thing we can do in boarding is to be available and give the boarders your time.





## WHAT IS THE WORK LIKE?

Once you have the position it is important that you show an empathetic approach if you are to be successful. Whilst you may not have personal experience within a boarding setting many of the 'lived experiences' of our boarders can have been experienced in another context. Time away from home or loved ones, making new friendships, adapting to new environments, the importance of resilience, supporting others, etc. - can all have been experienced by a new staff member, without having necessarily boarded, and these experiences can be used to express empathy and support for boarders in their environment. As a young staff member once astutely observed: "boarders want empathy, not sympathy". All boarding staff need to be mindful of others and their needs in every aspect of their role.

For a new boarding staff member it is imperative to have a concise working knowledge of the operational side of the boarding community you are joining. You do not need to see the bigger picture upon commencement of your new position, however in order to best support the boarders you must be clear of the parameters you must set and enforce with those in their care. This segues neatly into the importance of a new boarding staff member asking questions. Within the importance of our duty of care it is not acceptable to use as an excuse "I did not know" - you will need to make it an early mission to know!!



It is of critical importance that any boarding staff member prioritises their own wellbeing, both when 'on duty' or in their own time. This role is time heavy so it is of such importance to consider your own mental and physical health in order to provide the optimum care for those in our care. Time away from your boarding setting is also an important need to sustain a perspective on your personal life. Developing personal and professional networks of support is very important, and especially ensuring that you include both internal and external support with this. It is very easy to become completely immersed in the job, and allow all aspects of life to be based around the work. Those who aim for longevity in their role, however, ensure they have outside interests and friendships to help keep their life in balance.

We need to always remember that the boarding house is the boarders home during school terms - sometimes we need to change our expectations and to make exceptions, based on the context of the situation and the individual student themselves.

All staff, whether new or experienced, young or old, across the many different settings our boarders experience should aim to role model good behaviours. This can range from interactions between staff, between boarders and staff, in the way we encourage our students to interact with one another to how we present ourselves and wish to be perceived. A boarding school is in many ways a 'gold fish bowl' - things are seen, go unseen and often are seen without realisation - the power to influence therefore, both positively and negatively, can occur when you least expect it, to even when you do not realise it has occurred. This can put a lot of pressure on all within our 'bowl', however it should not be feared but instead seen as something so powerful, unique, even beautiful. This is a boarding education.



## SIX KEY POINTERS

We believe there are six key pointers for all boarding staff: Successful boarding is about building positive relationships - by having a positive relationship with those in your care and with those you work with the 'hard' bits of the work become much easier.

- ① Teenagers are meant to test boundaries - they just need to know where those boundaries are. Your key role is to help provide the boundaries, or at least to let them know where they are, to help them learn that there are always consequences for their actions.
- ① Calmness in most situations is a real virtue. Ensuring you never act in anger is a key trick of the role of being a boarding staff member!
- ① Your presence is the key - being around, helping the boarders to make better choices because you have 'increased the risk', just being there when they need you - all incredibly useful 'tricks of the trade'.
- ① Ensure you keep yourself safe - don't be in one-on-one situations with boarders, make sure you never enter a room without being invited in, etc.
- ① Teamwork is critical - working collaboratively, being consistent - as an individual, as a team, as a community - all very important for a successful boarding program. When staff are not following the same framework, not following the rules set or approaching them in inconsistent ways, everyone suffers - the boarders and the whole staff team.

No matter how young and inexperienced, or old and experienced you are, all boarding school staff become the most important teachers a boarder can have - they teach them about life! It is also good to remember that we should never stop learning and an openness to new ideas and a willingness to learn will hold you in good stead for your future.



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