Boarders: Why parenting matters
HFC C Sydney 2014

Julie Hodges PhD
Parenting and Family Support Centre
University of Queensland
Overview

- Why study boarders?
- Boarders and developmental outcomes
- The in loco parentis role of staff
- Comparison between staff and boarders’ perceptions of the boarding environment
- Parent training for boarding school staff?
- Questions
Why study boarders?
How many?

Currently around 20,000 young Australians aged 12-17 years live in the in loco parentis care of boarding school staff for 38 weeks each year.
Who boards?

Reasons for boarding

- Geographical isolation
- Parents’ employment
- Family disruption
- Overseas students
- Specialised courses
- Character building
- Other
Boarders’ developmental outcomes – what the literature says
Polarised perspectives

The literature presents polarised perspectives on boarder outcomes. ‘independence’ Vs ‘emotional deprivation’

“Being sent away to boarding school at seven is as great an inspiration as any songwriter could have - to be taken away from one's family and locked away for 10 years. It does create an incredible intensity of emotion.”

(James Blunt)
Independence

- The Association of Boarding Schools (2004)
  - Interviews over 16-month period
  - Satisfied with academic experience
  - Helped develop discipline, independence, maturity
  - Well prepared for college life
  - Advance more quickly in their careers, more philanthropic

  ‘The principles that guide my life are the principles that I learned at boarding school’
Emotional Deprivation

- ‘Boarding School Survivors’
  ‘Even now I cannot act on my feelings...... but I am very efficient at acting on conclusions arrived at by logic’
  ‘I am too well trained to be angry, but I am sad’.

‘The Making of Them’ (Duffell, 2001)
The boarding environment and the role of boarding staff
The parenting role of staff

Sociological research found evidence for a direct comparison between the home and boarding environments (White, 2004).

‘Regardless of their role boarding staff have the vital responsibility for the nurture and welfare of boarders’ (Hawkes, 2001; Holgate, 2007)
In loco parentis

- 'in place of a parent
- 'having or taking on the responsibilities of a parent when dealing with somebody else's child’
The parenting role of staff?

- ‘Working in a Boarding School is like looking after a big family where the staff are the parents’ (Director of Boarding, June 2013)

- ‘Boarding staff are professionals not parents or friends’ (Lawyer, September 2013)
Is the boarding environment influential in boarders’ development?
Home away from home?

Comparison between staff and boarders’ perceptions of the boarding environment

- conflict
- social support
- boarding school climate
- 2 open-ended questions
  - enjoy?
  - difficult or don’t enjoy?
Who participated?

121 staff and 415 boarders from nine boarding schools across South East Queensland, Australia
Demographics – Study 1

**Staff**
- 20 – 60 years $M=33$ years
- 57% parents
- <1 -15 years in boarding

**Boarders**
- 13-17 years $M=15$ years
- <1 – 5 years boarding
Conflict (low scores = less conflict)

- Staff approachable
- Disagreements with...
- Usually listen to what I...
- 3X/week I get angry...
- Don’t follow my...
- Talks with boarders...
- Often seem angry...
- I don’t get on very...
- Never understand...
- Don’t value my opinion

Boarders
Staff
Boarding School Climate
(high scores = more positive climate)

- have a say in decisions
- can express their views
- good discipline at this...
- behaviour is good
- Boarders fight a lot
- attention to feelings
- feel good about...
- Staff show commitment...
- Staff friendly and...

Boarders vs. Staff
Social Support
(high scores = more support)

- Help when I need it
- Praise me
- Answer my questions
- Demonstrate understanding
- Demonstrate care
- Listen to me - mad or upset
- Are fair to me
- Help solve problems
- Make it ok to ask questions
- Staff give good advice

Staff vs. Boarders
“Boarding makes you more independent and free thinking”
“it teaches me to respect others and listen to their opinions”
(White, 2004)
Boarding is equivalent to socially condoned child abuse (Duffell, 2005; Schaverien, 2011)
A ‘parenting program’ for Boarding School Staff
O The importance of the in loco parentis role
O Complex boundaries between staff and boarders
O Consistent application of strategies
### Adapting the strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGY</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>APPLICATION TO THE BOARDING CONTEXT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spending time with boarders</td>
<td>Spending frequent, brief amounts of time when no pressure to get other things done</td>
<td>Opportunities for boarders to enjoy adult contact; to demonstrate an interest in boarders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking to boarders</td>
<td>Having brief conversations about topics that are of interest to them</td>
<td>Promoting opportunity to voice opinions and to discuss issues and interests important to them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showing appropriate affection</td>
<td>Adult-to-teenager displays of affection that don’t cause embarrassment</td>
<td>Demonstrate appropriate ways of showing affection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Evaluating the program

- 9 Queensland boarding schools
  - Schools matched on population and sex of boarders then randomly allocated to condition
- N = 58 staff members participated in the staff training course
## Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Pre-intervention</th>
<th>Post-intervention</th>
<th>Difference score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I</td>
<td>WL</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>78.69</td>
<td>80.96</td>
<td>88.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy and role satisfaction</td>
<td>34.96</td>
<td>40.59</td>
<td>36.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment Stress Anxiety Depression</td>
<td>7.76</td>
<td>9.01</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Competence – further analyses

- Intervention group reported significantly greater increase in 13 of 15 competencies measured

- Greatest improvements in:
  - Establishing positive relationships
  - Promoting boarders’ development
  - Negotiating behaviour contracts to promote self-control
Satisfaction ratings

- Active participation: 6.45
- Overall rating: 6.32
- Course content: 6.2
The Making of Them

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t1GI4L-bNZE
Questions?