Boarding .... It’s still all about the experience and the relationships!

As I prepared to write my final contribution to VIM, I found myself looking back at what we have achieved in boarding at All Saints’ over the past three and a half years. The overwhelming theme is that of change. Change to operational structures, change and improvement to the physical boarding house provisions, change to the staffing model and the personnel, and change in the perceptions of the wider community towards All Saints’ College being a vibrant, caring and supportive environment in which students, and boarders particularly, flourishing. It has been wonderful to witness the rise in confidence amongst the wider community in response to our changes for the future.

Change never comes easily and there are always those who will oppose change merely for the sake of it. It is at times like these that it is vital to identify your values and priorities, continuing to strive for what is best for the children in your care and stick to your guns! It has been gratifying to see that over time and through the on-going demonstration of love and care for our residential children and their families, methods that may initially have been misunderstood, or even opposed, have gained support as families have witnessed the significant growth and development of their children.

Demonstrating love and care for children in a residential setting is not an easy task. Boarders are thrown into an environment which is essentially unlike home and it can never be the same as home. They must share their living spaces with non-family members, there are systems and routines which are more rigid than home and there are people caring for them who are not members of their family who do things differently! In this context, love becomes a different manifestation. This love might be referred to as ‘tough love’ rather than one that is built on relationships dating back to birth - those developed between parent and child, or between siblings. These relationships are based on an understanding of the systems in place, the interdependence that each one has on another, strong core values of honesty, trust and integrity and the overriding value that places ‘the whole’ over ‘the one’; ensuring that every boarder experiences the right to be safe and happy. It is when these values are understood and espoused that the relationships between carer and our residential youth can be built. It is also in this environment that lifelong relationships are built between boarders. Relationships built on shared experiences, ordinary and extraordinary life moments and recognising value in others.

“Good relationships make good boarding houses - it’s as simple and as complex as that.” - Mrs Linda Evans (Principal, Fairholme College).

Our boarding supervisors at All Saints’ are interested in the lives of the young people for whom they care. Many hours are spent in conversations that encourage sharing, from both sides, about the mundane and the important, home life and school life, sport, academics, and of course relationships. In building relationships, respect, discipline and trust are paramount, and as adolescents will always push the boundaries, it is the boarding supervisors who encourage, cajole, (basically do the things that parents would normally do) to ensure that expectations and standards of behaviour are upheld. It is a narrow tightrope we walk, this complexity of building relationships! It is, however, the ups and downs, the difficult with the easy, which produces a rich, complex fabric of experience and understanding, creating relationships that are meaningful and robust.

All Saints’ boarders experience a level of care and support that can only be provided in a boarding house where carers seek to know them and where the fundamental importance of being understood, being connected and belonging are held in such esteem.

I have been blessed to experience the wonderful boarding environment that is All Saints’. I have enjoyed supportive and caring relationships with boarders, their families and the staff who seek to provide the very best care and support for the boys and girls. Boarding at All Saints’ is in great shape and is looking to the future for the next generations of students and families who rely on schools like ours, to not only educate, but to provide an environment that is safe and supportive, caring for the individual, aware of where they have come from and where they are going and how we might support them to get there!

Eliot Sanger (Director of Boarding)