



Monday 6th November 2017

Letter from the Gnurad Gundidj Campus
Settled in and travelling well

Dear Parents, Guardians, Families and students.

Welcome again to the Gnurad Gundidj Campus. Here we are after more than two weeks already. Time has flown by and I am really pleased with how things are progressing at our school.

Homesickness is a normal emotion at this time in the program, although it does tend to diminish. If you think that your son or daughter is still unreasonably homesick, do call us and we can compare notes, so to speak. None of us can really predict how this anxiety may manifest itself. Our staff members really do make a priority of ensuring students' wellbeing during these first, more unsettled weeks.

We normally see in our students in their first weeks of living here being very concerned with self. They often ask, "When is dinner?" or "Where do I wash my clothes?" On the inside, we feel students are asking, "Who are my friends and how do I fit? Does she like me or what does he think about me?" They are concerned about "me". This is a very egocentric period. After this normal and possibly "selfish" time, students find themselves comfortable with this day-to-day concern, and tend to identify with their team very strongly: "I belong to 'Doncaster Secondary College' or 'Rainbow P-12 college', or "I am a city/country person". Students tend to be placing themselves in a category so they can find their position in a "new social/school order".

And yet for many of our students, they have also moved on and through this initial stage. Some of you may have heard of Bruce Tuckman's "**forming-norming-storming-performing**" model of group process? To this we add at the start "**mourning**" or "**adjoining**", or the inevitable grieving or separation process, which will also be a feature of the end of the experience here. Some of our students are already "norming & storming", which has a feature of cliques and power struggles, friendships and relationships. It is a wonderful and exciting process to watch. More information on this model can be found at, among many sites <http://www.businessballs.com/tuckmanformingstormingnormingperforming.htm>

For some students letting go of their past and embracing the new is a traumatic period; it is a "rite of passage". This can manifest itself in a whole range of denials and refusals, even to fundamental agreements like phones, chewing gum or hair straighteners! Of course, these refusals create enormous pressures on the individual who, as well as trying to keep their denial secret, often has to deal with others who have guilty knowledge and do not want to possess that knowledge. This creates "wedges" in the community, which further exacerbates the feeling of isolation felt by the individual. These significant impasses for some individuals need to be overcome before they can move forward. And yet, as time passes, we tend to see students developing a strengthening association with the campus as "home". They associate strongly with this place as their own, where they live, and see it as a key part of their identity. This sense of security or anchoring is fundamental to the students' sense of well being and belonging while they are here.

Our educational and care programs reflect this knowledge and understanding of the psycho-social development and needs of young people in a setting such as this, as well as an understanding and appreciation of the group processes and separation issues featuring in the experience. What we do at various stages in the program reflect the needs of our students; we call this a "student centred approach to learning".



I provide this as a way of explaining perhaps why some students behave the way they do, and preparing you for, among other things, a revisit of separation anxiety (*mourning or grieving*) or homesickness when they return home or even at the visiting weekend. This time it may be separation anxiety from here! The homecoming, while apparently a long way off, is worth considering now. You may also find communication may vary at different times and possibly decrease after an initial burst. You may feel you are totally abandoned at times. Please contact us if you would like to discuss this further!

This has been a busy past few weeks with lots of new things, new routines and new students. There have been surprisingly few hiccups for such a complex place and program and the complexities of 45 adolescents living here. This is a credit to our staff team who have worked with the team here at the Gnurad Gundidj Campus.

I mention that some of the curriculum activities include “social awareness”, student leader work, portfolio work, daily reflection time, mountain bikingand yes, they are getting tired and the 9.00pm bed time is really looked forward to by the whole community.

Students have really taken on board forming a new community and the accompanying responsibilities. The kitchen is a both popular and unpopular place here; all students seem to enjoy the food and it is plentiful. Few seem to enjoy the inevitable cleaning-up afterwards (not just the boys, so I encourage you at home to break any gender barriers about boys helping out with housework!), yet all (well, most at least) of the students are getting in and sharing the jobs around in the roster.

Students are currently on or preparing for their first expo. I am sure this will challenge many of them, as it involves long distance bike touring and camping overnight. They have undertaken some terrific team building activities, such as “bridge building” where the team construct a bridge to rescue stranded figurines. I know the students enjoy learning in these practical and hands-on ways. I also note how much the students enjoy using their laptop computers and hope you have received lots of emails (or “real” letters, which I might add are highly valued by our students) and maybe some photos about their life here at Noorat and the surrounding lakes and craters!

Other classes they have undertaken include team work on their Community Learning Project, individual and team thinking and learning profiles, learning about the daily reflection time (DEAR; drop everything and reflect) and lessons about their portfolio. The portfolio is their “report”, and the students develop and build this as they progress their way through the time and experience here.

Sincerely,

Jordan Smith
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