

2015

Leaving home: Investigating transitioning challenges faced by boarding students and their families

Kate Margaret Hadwen
Edith Cowan University

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Leaving home: Investigating transitioning challenges faced by boarding students and their families

Kate Margaret Hadwen

BTeach GradCertEd MEd

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the Child Health Promotion Research Centre,
School of Exercise and Health Sciences
Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science
Edith Cowan University

December, 2014

Abstract

Transitioning to boarding school during the middle years of childhood impacts upon the social, emotional and academic wellbeing of young people (Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991; Earls & Carlson, 2001). Students who live at school as boarders, may experience greater transitional changes in all three components of wellbeing due to the extent of change experienced during this transition. While research addressing transitioning to school has indicated the importance of connectedness to school, bonding, friendships and a sense of autonomy (Eccles et al., 1993), there is limited research addressing the transitioning experiences of boarding students and their families.

This mixed methodology study sought to understand how boarding students experience transitioning into boarding school, its possible association with connectedness to the boarding house, reported levels of staff support, loneliness, homesickness and help-seeking for homesickness. Focus groups and interviews were used to better understand how parents experience the transitioning of their children into boarding school.

This thesis used data collected from a Healthway funded Starter Grant. The research was cross-sectional by design involving a purposeful sample of 267 students, 59% male and 41% female, aged 12 - 15 years, who lived in one of eight metropolitan and regional boarding settings in Western Australia (WA) in 2011, and 37 of their parents. Data for this project were collected from October, 2010 to September, 2011

The first research question used qualitative data to explore the experiences of boarding parents. Findings suggested parents appeared to be more affected by their children leaving home than did the majority of boarding students. The following strategies were suggested as helpful to support positive transitions: preparing both parents and their children effectively for the move; making contact with other boarding parents at least six months prior to the transition; having meaningful connections with the staff caring for their children,

communicating and visiting their children regularly; co-developing with their children communication and visiting plans; and, keeping busy.

Research questions two to five analysed quantitative data collected through a student survey. The following transitioning activities were found to be either very helpful and / or associated with other benefits (as listed above): tour of the boarding house; sleepover with or without parents; separate information targeting students and parents sent or given to boarding families, up to date information on the Internet; Orientation Day; peer mentors; staff telephoning students prior to transition; and, boarding staff meeting with each family individually on or following Orientation Day.

Homesickness was most commonly experienced during the first two weeks of boarding and when students returned after their holidays. Girls, younger students and International students reported experiencing more homesickness. Three factors: psychosomatic symptoms; separation distress; and, grief and loss, best explained how students in this study experienced homesickness.

Help-seeking behaviours comprised the factors contacting parents, keeping busy and conversing with staff and students. A number of activities were associated with reductions in both psychosomatic symptoms and separation distress; however, for those students who experienced grief and loss, going on leave with their parents and knowing when their parents would next be visiting or taking them on leave appeared to be the only activities that reduced students' grief response.

Help-seeking was most evident for students who experienced psychosomatic symptoms or feelings of separation distress. Students who experienced grief and loss were less likely to report seeking help. Girls and younger students reported utilising the most help-seeking strategies.

The findings of this study and the subsequent recommendations will assist families and staff to better understand the experiences of boarding students and their families as students transition into boarding.

Statements

Statement of originality

This thesis is based on data collected as part of the *Boarding the Future Project* conducted in 2010 and 2011 by the author of this thesis whilst a staff member at The Child Health Promotion Research Centre (CHPRC) at Edith Cowan University. This formative study aimed to understand more deeply the experiences of boarding students and their parents when transitioning into a boarding school environment. I (the author of this thesis) conducted the focus groups and interviews, developed the quantitative instrument and collected all the data. I declare the contents of this thesis to be fundamentally different to the main outcomes reported on for the *Boarding the Future Project*. I was singularly responsible for the development of the research questions, designing the theoretical framework, preparing the variables used, analysing the focus group and interview data for this PhD thesis.

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Statement of contribution by others

Professor Donna Cross

Professor Cross was the Director of The Child Health Promotion Research Centre at the time the *Boarding the Future Project* was funded. She reviewed the grant submission for this project and following funding provided advice at each stage of the research project including reviewing the development of the student survey instrument. Professor Cross assisted in the conceptualization of the research questions and in refining the theoretical framework for this PhD thesis. Professor Cross, with her wide-ranging research background and extensive knowledge of both educational research and literature relating to the wellbeing of young people, provided guidance throughout the development of this thesis.

Professor Marilyn Campbell

Doctor Marilyn Campbell is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at The Queensland University of Technology specialising in; counselling, anxiety disorders in children and adolescents, bullying, including cyberbullying. Professor Campbell is an expert in qualitative research and provided advice regarding analysing and understanding the themes evident within the focus group and interview data gathered for the PhD thesis. Furthermore she assisted in the refining the theoretical framework used for this thesis.

Associate Professor Leanne Lester

Associate Professor Leanne Lester is a biostatistician with the Health Promotion Evaluation Unit at the University of Western Australia. Leanne provided guidance regarding the development of the research hypothesis for this study and with the statistical methods applied and the data analysis. She provided feedback on the quantitative findings within this thesis assisting to ensure content was both accurate and presented in a statistically correct manner.



Kate Hadwen

Professor Donna
Cross

Professor Marilyn
Campbell



Associate Professor
Leanne Lester

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This thesis is written for the parents who entrusted me with the care of their children whilst in boarding. To care for someone's child for a night is a significant responsibility; however, to be entrusted with the care of someone's child during their formative years is both an enormous responsibility, and a wonderful privilege. Sharing in the growth and development of the young people in my care over the years has been the most rewarding experience of my career; I've learnt so much from their wisdom.

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My family has throughout this process, as with all my life, continued to be a great source of comfort and encouragement. Thank you to Mum for believing me and for quietly encouraging me to remain focused. To Dad thanks for being so excited for me at every step of the way and for remaining interested in my study. Anna thank you for calling me straight back and listening for hours to me carry on about how I would never get there, your warmth and wonderful sense of humour has been a much needed source of light for me. Jane it has been great for me to have someone around me who has understood how much work is involved, thank you for allowing me to share with you along the way and for being so excited for me as the end of the journey became closer. To my wonderful friend Pippa, who is more family than friend, I've loved talking with you about the process as we have shared this journey together, I'm grateful for your patience, encouragement and superb listening skills, thank you.

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1 Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This mixed methodology study sought to develop an understanding of how boarding students experience transitioning into a boarding house or boarding hostel from their home; its possible association with connectedness to the boarding house, reported levels of staff support, loneliness and homesickness. In addition the thesis explored the reported effectiveness of help-seeking when students experienced homesickness. Qualitative data were collected from 37 boarding parents who took part in focus groups or telephone interviews within the *Boarding, the Future Project*. These data were used to inform the self-report survey instrument administered to students within the project. The survey used a cross-sectional design involving a purposeful sample of 267 students, 41% female, aged 12 - 15 years who lived in one of eight metropolitan and regional boarding settings in Western Australia (WA) in 2011. All issues mentioned in the introduction were explored in this thesis; however, the findings particularly focus on the transitioning experiences of boarding students, homesickness and homesickness help-seeking, and the experiences of their parents.

The *Boarding, the Future Project* was a starter grant funding by Healthway (Project number: 8762 HADWEN). The author was the chief investigator on the project and conducted all the interviews and focus groups with stakeholders, parents and students. She developed and administered the quantitative instrument in all project schools and conducted the required analysis on the findings from both the qualitative and quantitative data.

1.1 Statement of problem

1.1.1 Background

Across Australia approximately 23 000 young people attend 172 government and non-government boarding schools (Jackson, 2011-2012; Stokes, 2012). For the past 153 years the rural and remoteness of many sectors of Western Australia (WA) has meant that many young people have needed to attend

boarding school to access what the Australian government is bound to provide by international law, an education. Currently, there are approximately 2 525 students attending 21 boarding schools across WA. Despite a general awareness of the significant impact attending boarding school may have on young people and their parents, there is a dearth of research to understand the unique challenges, in particular transitioning challenges, faced by boarding students and their families.

1.2 Aims and objectives of the study

1.2.1 Aim

The aim of this PhD research is to investigate the challenges faced by boarding students and their parents when students in Years 7-10 transition into boarding school, and to understand the strategies that appear to be helpful in reducing transitioning challenges, including homesickness.

1.2.2 Research project

Transitioning during the middle years impacts upon the social, emotional and academic wellbeing of young people (Berliner, 1993; Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009; Pereira & Pooley, 2007). Students who live at school, as boarders, may experience greater transitional changes in all three components of wellbeing due to the extent of change experienced during this transition (Duffell, 2005; Lambert, 1968; Schaverien, 2002). While research has addressed transitioning, especially the importance of connectedness to school, bonding, friendships and a sense of autonomy (Eccles et al., 1993; Resnick, Harris, & Blum, 1993), there has been no research identified to date that addressed the transitioning experiences of boarding students and their families.

1.2.3 Research questions

This mixed methods research study sought to address the following research questions:

1. How do parents of boarders experience the transitioning of their child/ren into boarding school and which strategies do they perceive to be most helpful in easing the transition for them as parents, and for their children and in supporting their children when they experience homesickness?
2. Which transitioning activities do boarding students report as helpful in coping with transitioning into boarding school and are these activities associated with connectedness, their feelings of support from staff and loneliness?
3. What underlying constructs appear when measuring homesickness and which demographic variables are associated with students' experiences of homesickness?
4. What underlying factors are associated with how young people seek help for homesickness and which demographic variables, levels of connectedness, loneliness, feelings of staff support and homesickness factors appear to be associated with help-seeking behaviour?
5. How do boarding students seek help when they experience homesickness and which of these help-seeking strategies do they find to be more effective in reducing their homesickness?

1.2.4 Research stages

This research is divided into two closely linked stages:

Stage 1: Qualitative data collected from parents of boarding students

Stage 2: Quantitative data collected from boarding students

1.2.5 Research objectives

1.2.5.1 Stage 1: Qualitative data collected from parents of boarding students

Qualitative data were collected from 37 parents of boarding students who attended one of five independent schools in Western Australia in 2011.

Objectives:

1. To understand the challenges faced by boarding parents when preparing for and sending their children to boarding school.
2. To determine the strategies adopted by parents to support the effective transition of their children into boarding school.
3. To identify the strategies used by parents to support their children when they experience homesickness and the reported effectiveness of these strategies.
4. To better understand the impact on parents and boarding families of sending their children to boarding school; and the strategies parents and families implement to address this impact.

1.2.5.2 Stage 2: Quantitative data collected from boarding students

The quantitative data were collected from a purposeful sample of boarding students involved in the *Boarding the Future Project* (n=267), who lived in one of eight metropolitan and regional boarding settings in Western Australia (WA) in 2011.

Objectives:

1. To explore possible associations between students' demographic variables and connectedness to boarding school, feelings of support from staff and loneliness.
2. To identify which transitioning activities students are most likely to engage in and which of these activities they report as most helpful in alleviating homesickness.
3. To determine if the instruments used to measure homesickness and homesickness help-seeking indicate any factors of note.

4. To understand if any of the students' demographic variables are associated with homesickness or homesickness help-seeking.

1.3 Benefits of the study

Limited research has been undertaken to investigate the experiences of boarding school students and their families, with a paucity of research focusing on the transitioning challenges faced by boarding students and their families. Boarding schools and parents of boarders implement strategies to assist in preparing students for this transition, and in responding to homesickness; however, with such little evidence available it is difficult for all involved to understand how best to support the wellbeing of students during this time. The findings of this thesis will assist those directly and indirectly involved in supporting young people as they leave home and transition into boarding school.

The benefits of this research include a better understanding of:

1. How parents of boarding students experience the transitioning of their children into boarding school.
2. The strategies parents of boarders utilise to prepare their children for boarding and to support themselves, their families and their children during this transition, including when their children experience homesickness.
3. Which transitioning activities are reported as most helpful for boarding students and if any of these activities are associated with connectedness to the boarding house, feeling of staff support, reduced loneliness and reduced homesickness.
4. The homesickness experiences of boarding students including help-seeking behaviour and the reported helpfulness of this.

This study supports the fundamental requirements of state governments in Australia have to provide educational access to young people for both primary and secondary schooling ([UN], 1976; Parkin, Summers, & Woodward, 2010). The large regional and remote populations in Australia; particularly in Western Australia rely in part on boarding houses and hostels to provide young people with an education (Baxter, Hayes, & Gray, 2011; Evans, 2008). These findings

will assist government and education providers to better understand the complexities of young people leaving home to attend a boarding school and provide recommendations regarding how to address the challenges raised by boarding students and their parents.

Published literature regarding the experiences of parents when sending their children to boarding school has focused on their reasons for sending them, rather than how they have experienced this transition (Baker & Andrews, 1991; Morgan & Blackmore, 2013). Limited grey literature has focused on the grief both mothers and fathers experience during the transition of their children into boarding (Dalton, 23 March 2013; Kins, Soenens, & Beyers, 2011; McNeilage, 2013b) and on the support network provided by organisations such as The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (Bryant, 2013; Calderwood, 2013). Through using a phenomenological approach where underlying meanings were explored (Akerlind, 2005) the findings of this thesis draw out strategies that will assist boarding schools and the families of boarding students to better understand how to support young people when transitioning into a boarding environment.

Young people most commonly transition into boarding school during the onset of adolescence, a time when many are experiencing increased social anxiety (Miers, Blote, de Rooij, Bokhorst, & Westenberg, 2013). During this time young people are developing the capacity to think and reason both socially and morally (Krause, Bochner, Duchesne, & McMaugh, 2010). These developments are influenced by peers and may be affected by their physical separation from family (Hart & Carlo, 2005). Moral development has also shown to be influenced by an awareness of the suffering of others and one's own life experiences (Eisenberg, Cumberland, Guthrie, Murphy, & Shepard, 2005; Lawford, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2005; Matsuba & Walker, 2005). By exploring age demographics as a variable when studying the transitioning, homesickness and help-seeking experiences of young people, this thesis will add to the limited literature specifically addressing if age impacts upon transitioning, homesickness and homesickness help-seeking within a boarding context. In addition this study sought to discover if parents witness an impact on their

children's development either socially or morally as a result of them attending boarding school.

Transitioning involves a move from what is known to that which is unknown (Green, 1997); a time where social relationships play a critical role in successful transition (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009), where friendships, fitting in and belonging (Berliner, 1993; Howard & Johnson, August, 2005; Pereira & Pooley, 2007) are important and young people begin to develop a sense of identity (Eccles et al., 1993). Research has explored all of the abovementioned aspects of young people's transition from junior school into senior school during the middle years (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009); however no studies have explored the unique challenges faced by boarding students who move to both a new school environment and a new living environment when they make this transition. This thesis examines how families prepare for the transition of their children into boarding school, how helpful young people report these and other transitioning activities provided by schools to be, and if the transitioning activities appear to be associated with connectedness to the boarding house, feelings of staff support and loneliness.

Connectedness to school has been shown to improve academic outcomes, reduce at risk behavior and lead to better mental health outcomes for young people. Connectedness to school has also been noted as important to boarding students by a number of researchers (Anderman, 2002; Lambert, 1968; Resnick et al., 1993). While mention has been made of the boarding context, no studies have explored possible associations between connectedness and factors of boarding including homesickness, homesickness help-seeking, demographic variables and loneliness. This study will explore associations relating to connectedness to the boarding house and examine links between this and other factors connected with transitioning into a boarding environment. Findings will assist in understanding the impact connectedness has on boarding students and if there appears to be ways to ameliorate connectedness within a boarding context.

Homesickness may come in bouts causing distress (Duffell, 2005) impacting on young people emotionally, cognitively and motivationally (Fisher, Frazer, &

Murray, 1986). The symptoms of homesickness share similarities with adjustment disorder (Allen, Lavalley, Herren, Ruhe, & Schneider, 2010; Casey & Doherty, 2012; Greenberg, Rosenfeld, & Ortega, 1995), the impact of which can be short lived or have lasting effects, with some researchers finding it may lead to disconnection with emotions in later years (Duffell, 2005; Poynting & Donalson, 2005; Schaverien, 2002). One study cited in this thesis conducted preliminary research to develop a valid and reliable measurement tool for homesickness. This thesis builds on these preliminary findings by exploring possible predictors of homesickness and associations between homesickness and demographic variables, connectedness to the boarding house, feelings of staff support and loneliness.

This thesis also explored if young people seek help for homesickness and if they do, which strategies they reported as being the most helpful. Sawyer, Sawyer, and La Greca (2012) identified three steps that lead to help-seeking for depressive disorders; recognising the problem, understanding the nature of the problem and being aware of the benefit of seeking help. Current literature addresses help-seeking for a range of mental illnesses; however, has not addressed how young people support their own wellbeing by seeking help for homesickness. These findings will assist parents and boarding schools better understand the help-seeking behaviour of boarding students, enabling them to make more informed decisions regarding providing support for those students effected by homesickness.

1.4 Definition of terms and list of abbreviations

1.4.1 Terms

Boarding house / Non-government school / Independent school: a boarding establishment attached to an independent school, the students attend only the school attached to the boarding establishment.

Boarding hostel / Government hostel: a boarding establishment founded by the state government to provide accommodation for students from remote and regional Australia. Students may attend any government school; although most boarding hostels service a small number of schools.

Boarding school: interchangeable with either boarding house or boarding hostel.

Boarding school students: students who attend either a boarding house or boarding hostel.

Connectedness: relationships built on trust, security, mutual affection and care (Bonny, Britto, Klostermann, Harnung, & Slap, 2000; Deci et al., 1991; Fredricks, Blumendeld, & Paris, 2004; Goodenow, 1993; Libbey, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Solomon, Watson, Battistich, Schaps, & Delucchi, 1996; Wingspread., 2004).

Help-seeking: in this study help-seeking specifically relates to questions asked of young people regarding help-seeking for homesickness. The help-seeking strategies itemised in the survey were drawn from focus groups with students and parents where questions were asked regarding how they / their children seek help when they are experiencing homesickness.

Homesickness: feelings of missing home or one's home environment; homesickness may embody emotional, cognitive and motivational features (Baier & Welch, 1992; Fisher et al., 1986).

Loneliness: "...both the circumstance of aloneness and the feeling of sadness or some other type of depressed affect." (Cassidy & Asher, 1992, p. 351)

1.4.2 Abbreviations

ABSA: Australian Boarding Schools' Association

AISWA: Association of Independents schools of Western Australia

A&TSI: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

CECWA: Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia

CHPRC: Child Health Promotion Research Centre

CHSHA: Country High Schools Hostel Authority

CSC: Commonwealth Schools Commission

DoE: Department of Education (Western Australia)

ICPA: Isolated Children's Parents' Association

Int'al: International students (only used in tables)

UN: United Nations

WA: Western Australia

1.5 The Boarding, the Future Project

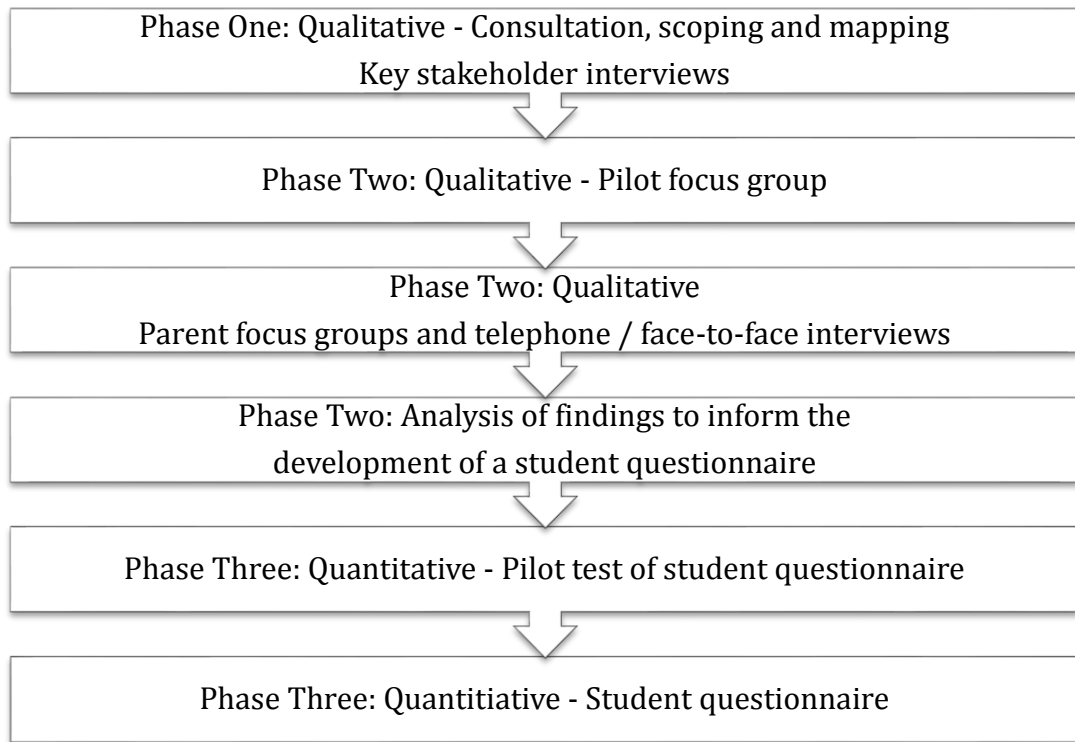
1.5.1 Research Strategy

This thesis used data collected by the candidate as a part of a cross-sectional Healthway funded Starter Grant *Relational Aggression in Boarding Schools: A Formative Study (File number: 19953)*. One of the key outcomes of this PhD study was to explore the transitioning experiences of boarding students. The candidate wrote the grant proposal and was the Chief Investigator for the project. She conducted all of the focus groups and interviews for the project. In addition she developed the online survey instruments with expert validation support from others. The candidate also administered the online student survey in each of the project schools.

The research used a cross-sectional design involving a purposeful sample, of 267 students 41% female, aged 12 - 15 years and their families who lived in one of eight metropolitan and regional boarding settings in Western Australia (WA) in 2011. The schools comprised five independent schools; two all-girls' schools, two all-boys' schools and one co-educational school, and three co-educational government hostels. Data collection for this project was conducted at the following time points: stakeholders' interviews from October to December, 2010; parent focus groups and interviews between January and June, 2011 and Student Survey from July to September, 2011. Stakeholders involved in the project included representatives from the Australian Boarding Schools' Association, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, the Australian Heads of Independent Schools, the Western Australian Boarding Hostels Authority and Boarding Australia.

The study involved three key phases, shown in Figure 1. The data, measures and data analysis for each phase are described separately.

Figure 1. Three key phases in the Boarding, the Future project



1.5.2 Phase One: Consultation, scoping and mapping

Phase one data

The aim of Phase One was to work with key stakeholders to better understand the underlying contextual issues associated with the challenges faced by boarding students in Australia, and in particular in Western Australia. With their consent, telephone interviews were conducted with Heads of Boarding and representatives from; the Australian Boarding Schools' Association, the Australian Heads of Independent Schools, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, Boarding Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. Upon completion of the data analyses, a summary report (Hadwen, 2012) was prepared and this information was synthesised with the available literature in the field, the results of which were used to inform the design of the questions asked in the focus groups and interviews.

Phase one measures

Semi-structured telephone interviews were conducted with stakeholders and used to determine pertinent issues relating to this area of research and to strengthen knowledge and understanding of the key research gaps; and the challenges faced by boarding school students in WA to better inform the design of the formative research study. This phase of the formative study used a multi-method narrative approach to systematically integrate multifaceted evidence (Mays, Pope, & Popay, 2005; Thomas et al., 2004). The approach involved triangulating data from available literature, data collected in telephone interviews and unpublished data made available to the researcher from the interview participants. This analysis was used to help ascertain directions and patterns in findings, and to develop new explanations to advise best practice interventions, based on the available evidence, while acknowledging the evidence base was still far from perfect (Bryman, 2012; Mays et al., 2005). The approach involved: on-going scoping of the available literature and collection and hand searching of multi-layered data and grey literature from experts and practitioners in the field. Obtaining qualitative data to determine participants' understanding of the transitioning experiences of boarding school students, parents and staff provided a narrative synthesis of findings including identification of patterns, examination of relationships and synthesis of results in terms of best practice solutions.

Phase one data analysis

The interviews were transcribed, reviewed and analysed. The interview data were reduced subjectively using an organising, shaping and explanation process. This subjective reduction involved the interpretation of interview data for recurring words, themes, topologies and causal chains (Bertrand, Brown, & Ward, 1992). Responses were tagged with a set of pre-established codes. These codes were consequently used for perceptual mapping analyses and content analysis.

1.5.3 Phase Two: Qualitative research

Focus group studies and interviews with boarding parents

Findings from the analysis of the phase one data were used to inform the qualitative focus group guide. Minor changes were made to this guide following pilot testing and feedback from participants. The focus groups were conducted with the parents of boarding students to discuss the challenges they face, such as: the transitioning of their children into a boarding house environment including; what helped; to what extent their children suffered from homesickness and how long it lasted; its effect on their child's ability to concentrate in class; what strategies assisted them and did they or their children seek help and if so, from whom. Parents were advised their participation was voluntary and reminded of the anonymity of their responses.

Given the long distance many boarding families lived from the recruited schools, it was difficult for many parents to attend the focus groups. Of the 37 parents of boarding students who participated in this stage of the research, 13 took part in focus groups and 24 were interviewed.

Phase two measures

The semi-structured focus groups and interviews were designed to collect formative data. As such, the design used an explorative approach to follow the direction of needs expressed by participants. This approach involved raising key issues (as listed above) to be discussed and allowing participants an opportunity to share their stories and for all participants to discuss and / or comment on other's responses.

Phase two data analysis

Basic data analysis was performed on interview and focus group transcripts and the notes taken during the data collection session. These data were used to guide the development of questions for inclusion in the students' quantitative questionnaire.

NVivo (10 for Mac Bata) software was used to analyse the data. Transcripts and notes were entered into the software package. The transcribed data were analysed for common themes. Constant comparative analysis was used to compare similarities and differences within the data (Charzman, 2006). The analyses process began with coding the longest most complex parent focus

group. The themes that emerged from the data were entered as tree nodes. Subsequent transcriptions were constantly compared with emergent codes and entered as tree nodes from the original transcript (Harding, 2013). As new categories emerged they were coded appropriately. Exploration was conducted to determine if free nodes could be connected with existing tree nodes. Saturation (Glaser, 1992) was sought to discover central tree nodes that emerged from the data. The data were further explored by reflecting on the naïve associations and their relationship with the research question and relevant literature (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

1.5.4 Phase Three: Development and implementation of student cross-sectional online survey

Phase three data

The third phase of this research involved the synthesis of the phase two findings, to inform and develop an online cross-sectional survey for students. This instrument was pilot tested for face validity and reliability. Changes were made to the instrument in accordance with the feedback. Two hundred and sixty-seven boarding students from eight boarding settings completed the final version of the survey.

Phase three measures

Since 1999, senior staff members from The Child Health Promotion Research Centre (CHPRC), where the candidate was a staff member, have developed and refined surveys for school staff, students and their parents to investigate the nature and prevalence of the major types of relational aggression experienced by students. These surveys have been used across five large longitudinal research projects with over 12,000 primary and secondary school students, their teachers and parents. The adapted items used in previous studies were tested for reliability by the CHPRC ($n \approx 140$) this analysis revealed moderate levels of reliability (being bullied $Kw = .54$ and bullying others $Kw = .45$) (Cohen, 1988). Consistent with previous research, response choices referred to a specific time period (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). These previously developed items provided a framework for which the qualitative data collected through the focus groups and interviews was synthesised to produce surveys

specifically designed to investigate the needs of boarding students and their families. Unique survey links were created with school identification numbers. As the surveys were anonymous and cross sectional (no individual student identification codes were used). It was necessary to include demographic questions within the survey; for example, identifying the students' year groups so that school-level clustering could be accounted for in the data analyses.

Students: As part of the standardised protocol students were advised their participation was voluntary and were assured of the anonymity of their responses. Strategies were implemented to ensure support for young people was available if the sensitive issues raised as a result of completing the online questionnaire caused them concern or distress. Prior to the survey administration, all young people were informed of the Kids Help Line service (a 24 hour confidential and anonymous telephone and online counselling service for children and young people) and were provided contact details for the Helpline following completion of the survey. Boarding school staff were asked to remind the students of the service contact details in the week following the survey administration.

Consent: For all boarding students in non-government schools involved in this phase of the project active / passive parental consent was sought (Shaw & Cross, 2012). Active / passive consent involved seeking active consent via a mail out to parents and then for those parents who did not respond to the mail-out, a passive consent email was sent to the parents from the school with the information letter and consent form attached. This email indicated that parent consent for their child/ren to participate in the study would be assumed if no response was received from them. For all boarding students in government hostels active consent was required and sought. In government hostels only, students where both parents and students actively consented into the project completed the online survey, this process is required by the Western Australian Department of Education for all research in government schools.

Method overview: Students' surveys were completed during a homework session in the evening on a week-night. The author of this thesis, who was also the chief investigator for the project, administered the student surveys. Students

were given information about the project and reminded their participation was voluntary, in doing so students were asked to again give their consent to participate. Students completed the survey on either, their personal computer using the link provided, or using one of the CHPRC's notebook computers.

Phase three data analysis

Analysis for the *Boarding the Future Project* included frequencies and basic analysis. This study involved analysis of the findings from the cross-sectional surveys completed by boarding students and parents. Multi-level regression models with random effects was used to determine the association between transitioning activities and reported connectedness to boarding and to determine whether intra-personal and interpersonal characteristics of students have an association with homesickness, in particular emotionally induced symptoms, connection to family and personal distress. Similar analyses were conducted to determine which help-seeking strategies appear to be associated with higher connectedness and reduced reported levels of homesickness. The findings aimed to determine new ways to support boarding students, assist in informing effective policy and practice in schools as well as aid in the development of an intervention to assist students and their families to develop the necessary skills to manage the unique challenges within this context.

The sample size of 267 secondary students is sufficiently large to detect a medium effect size. Using Cohen (1988) guidelines an α – level of .05, a sample of 783 is required for a small effect size and 83 participants for a medium effect size. Shaw and Cross (2012) recommend a secondary sample size of 244 for a 0.5 effect size.

1.6 Thesis organisation

Chapters for this thesis are presented in the following manner. As this study used a mixed method approach the results chapters are separated into quantitative and qualitative results, with the findings from these combined in the discussion and recommendations.

Chapter One: Introduction – states the problem, aims and objectives of the study. It discusses the need for and benefit of the study along with the definition of key terms, a summary of the Boarding, the Future project and details the organisation of the thesis. Information regarding the research project including research questions and stages are also included in the introduction.

Chapter Two: Literature Review – presents relevant literature applied to boarding students within the context of Urie Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological theory of human development. The literature review offers a critical discussion of the literature as it applies to boarding students' macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem and microsystem.

Chapter Three: Methods – describes the qualitative and quantitative methods used in this thesis.

Chapter Four: Qualitative results: transitioning – presents key themes described by parents regarding the transitioning of their children into boarding school and the transitioning programs implemented by boarding schools.

Chapter Five: Qualitative results: homesickness – presents key themes described by parents regarding the homesickness their children experienced and the help-seeking strategies they witnessed their children employing.

Chapter Six: Qualitative results: separation distress – presents key themes described by parents regarding the experiences of their children transitioning into boarding school, the distress they experienced and the strategies used to overcome this.

Chapter Seven: Quantitative results – uses SPSS (Version 21) and STATA / IC (Version 13.1 for Mac) to analyse findings and present results.

Chapter Eight: Discussion – draws on the qualitative and quantitative findings from the study and provides a discussion of the key findings regarding how

boarding students and their parents experienced transitioning into the boarding house, including homesickness and homesickness help-seeking.

Chapter Nine: Recommendations – Bronfenbrenner’s social ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) is used as a framework through which the recommendations for schools caring for boarding students and for parents of boarding students have been organised.

Appendices: Included in the appendices are copies of the student questionnaire and the qualitative focus groups and interview questions. Administrative forms such as the study participant information letters and consent forms are included. A summary of the data nodes used in the analysis of the qualitative data is also provided.

2 Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This thesis explored the experiences of boarding parents and their children as boarding students prepare for, and make the transition from their homes and local schools into their new living environments and school communities. From a parental perspective the study aimed to gain a thick and rich phenomenological understanding of the common themes regarding the experiences of boarding parents. Mixed methods have been employed to

explore transitioning experiences from a student perspective. The questions in the thesis take a chronological approach seeking to understand preparing for, and experiencing transitioning into boarding, homesickness, strategies to reduce homesickness and the help-seeking behaviour of boarding students when they experience homesickness.

Boarding schools provide an education alternative for families living in regional and remote parts of Australia. For families living in these remote parts of Australia distance education may be the only other way in which their child can access an education. Isolation is the primary reason why young people board in Australia according to the Independent Schools Council survey in 2008 where 51% of the 3100 respondents cited a lack of educational opportunities locally as the reason for boarding their children (Evans, 2008). This finding supported the larger more comprehensive study conducted by the Commonwealth Schools Commission twenty-five years earlier in 1982 ([CSC], 1982). Despite boarding school being considered essential for some geographically isolated families, many studies have found parents believed the decision was necessary for their children to access a better quality education, where they perceived teaching staff are more committed, academic standards were higher and their children had more flexibility with regard to course offerings that aligned with future tertiary education options (Baker & Andrews, 1991; Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Dalton, 23 March 2013; Evans, 2008; Fisher et al., 1984; McGibbon, 2011; Research., 1995; Stevens, 1995). Alston and Kent's survey of 134 parents of boarding students revealed 87% of parents felt their children would need to leave their local town to find employment when they completed high school (Alston & Kent, 2003). Given this finding, it is not surprising that James, Wyn, Baldwin, Hepworth, and McInnis (1999) in the commissioned report into rural and isolated school students found 90% of parents from these areas placed great value on higher education, encouraging their children to further their studies beyond high school. Kirstein's (2004) study on the North West Queensland community of Richmond revealed similar findings to Dearden et al. (2010), with the addition of a cultural expectation that young people attend boarding school. Furthermore, the study revealed parents viewed attending boarding school as a pivotal step in the transition from a rural community, where options for tertiary education were non-existent, into a boarding school in an

urban environment where students could continue from high school to access tertiary education (Kirstein & Bandranaike, 2004).

More recently boarding has become an increasingly popular option for parents who do not reside in geographically isolated parts of Australia. As the Australian workforce increases in its mobility, families who are transferred interstate or internationally are viewing boarding as a feasible option for their children to continue their education without the disruption this relocation would cause (Cree, 2000). In addition, changes in family circumstances such as separation, divorce and parental re-marriage accounted for 9.9% of boarding enrolments in 1982 ([CSC], 1982). Individual parental factors may also account for the decision to enroll their children in boarding school. Regression analysis was used to investigate the variables that predicted parents sending their children to boarding schools in the United Kingdom and Australia. This study found that parents who went to boarding schools themselves, were self-employed, had obtained either formal vocational qualifications or university qualifications and had increased financial capacity were more likely to send their children to boarding school (Dearden et al., 2010).

Given the vastness of Australia and the need for educational access, a better understanding of transitioning into boarding school and associated homesickness is a valuable addition to literature in this field for students, parents and schools. This study provides insight into the experiences of boarding students and their families to inform recommendations to ease the transition process and assist schools to better understand how to measure homesickness and support young people who experience homesickness during and following the initial transition.

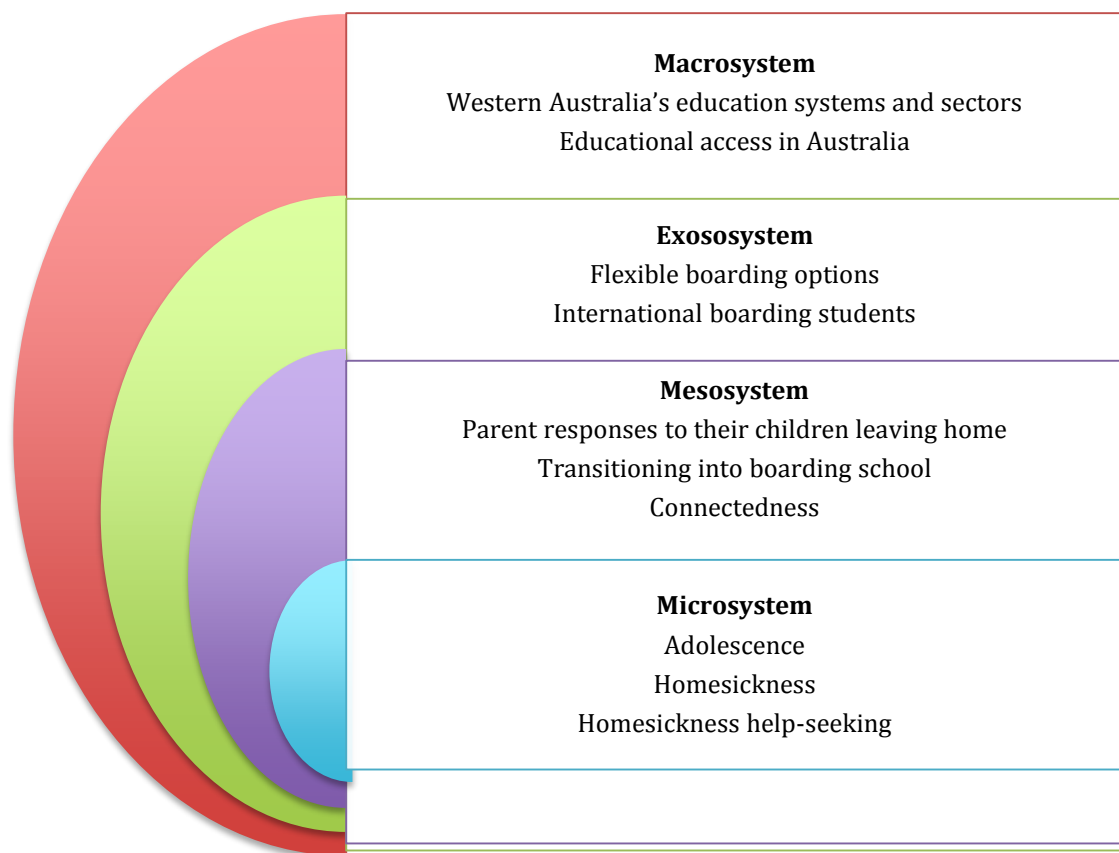
Literature regarding the experiences of boarding students is limited with most studies having either small samples sizes or having samples drawn from only one or two boarding schools. More recently Martin, Papworth, Ginns, and Arief D.Liem (2014) have begun publishing the findings of a large-scale longitudinal quantitative study which sought to better understand the contribution being a boarder or day student makes in predicting academic and non-academic outcomes. Due in part to the limited literature, in particular into transitioning,

homesickness and homesickness help-seeking, and the range of variables explored in this research, Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological framework (1979) will be used as the model through which both the literature and final recommendations from this thesis will be presented. This model focuses on the interaction between the individual and the environment; recognising different elements that impact in more or less direct ways on individuals. Literature has been presented according to the four systems as they relate to the social-ecological model. An outline of the headings covered within each of the systems can be seen in Figure 2.

2.1 The Social Ecological Theory of Human Development

Urie Bronfenbrenner, seen as the father of the ecological theory of human development drew on Kurt Lewin's (1951) theories of personality and principles of topological psychology when developing this theory. Both Lewin and Bronfenbrenner's work recognises the importance of the dynamic relationships existent between humans and their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Lewin, 1951). Bronfenbrenner's model comprises four nested structures (Figure 2) that focus on how individuals perceive their environment, the surrounding environment and the interaction between environment and individual (Reifsnider, Gallagher, & Forgione, 2005). Each of these structures will be described in detail beginning with the macrosystem broader contextual factors impacting on boarding students through to the individual or microsystem considerations.

Figure 2. Literature as it relates to the social-ecological model



2.2 **Macrosystem: belief systems or contextual patterns**

The outer structure, or *macrosystem*, represents belief systems or contextual patterns within the society being studied. This may include the economic conditions, cultural norms, language, legal, educational and political system (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Leonard, 2011; Reifsnider et al., 2005). Given the vastness of Australia, educational access is an important issue for politicians and families living in remote and regional parts of Australia. Western Australian is the largest state of Australia and has within it families who are more geographically remote than any other part of the country. Various education systems and sectors have worked to address the needs of remote and regional families by offering their own unique style of boarding. In a country where for many families boarding school is the only means by which young people can gain an education, understanding these options, and improving them where possible, is of critical importance. Policy decisions regarding education systems'

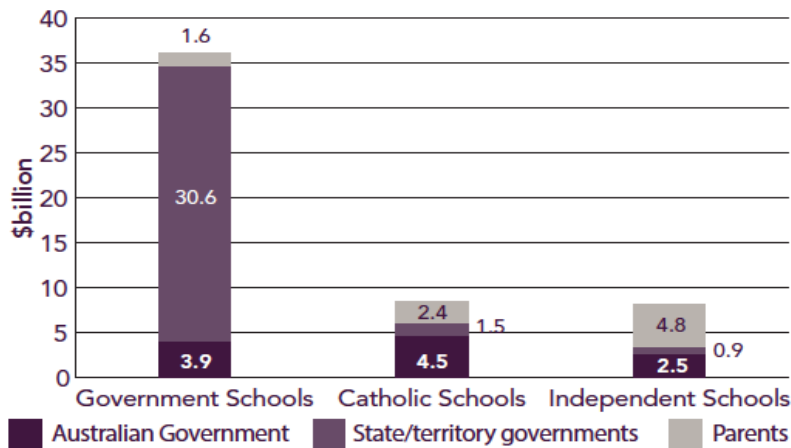
and sectors' impact upon factors such as the affordability and quality of boarding options for families living in these parts of Australia. While some policy decisions impact upon all students, others impact more on geographically marginalised families for whom sending their children to boarding school is more of a necessity than a choice. This thesis explored possible differences between the experiences of students' whose families live on farms in remote or regional parts of Australia, and those whose families live in regional towns or cities. This information will assist schools when structuring transitioning programs as they potentially look to develop specialised programs for students from remote and regional Australia, for whom the experience of transitioning from isolated areas into urbanised settings may be significantly different from their peers.

2.2.1 Educational access in Australia

Australia prides itself on being one of the founding members of the United Nations in 1945. As such it is bound by international law to address the conventions and covenants of which it is a member. Further, in 1990 Australia became a member of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (article 28) which '...establishes the child's right to education. This must be achieved "on the basis of equal opportunity", reflecting the fact that a significant number of children suffer discrimination in access to education, particularly girls, children with disabilities, minorities and children from rural communities' (Hodgkin & Newell, 2007, p. 407). In addition, Australia is bound by its union to the International Covenant on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights (article 13), this document speaks of the right of every child to access both primary and secondary education ([UN], 1976).

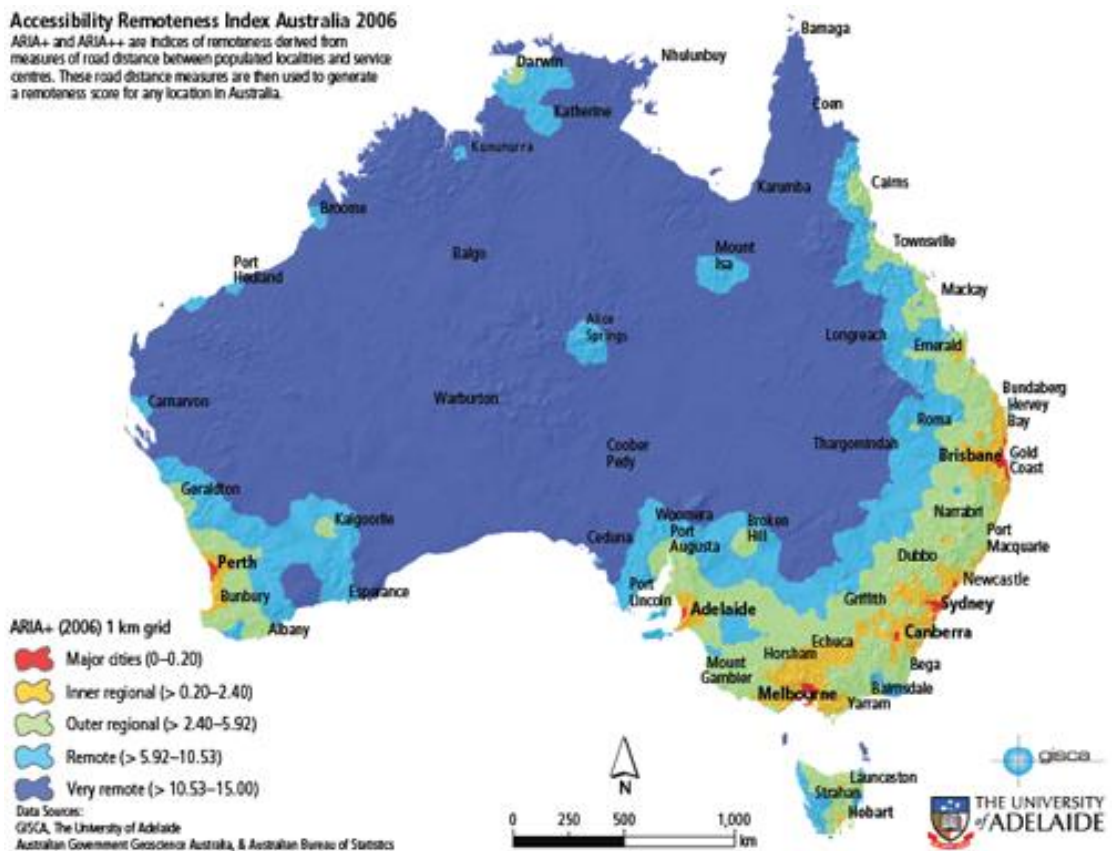
Legal responsibility for the delivery and administration of education is the duty of State Governments as decreed by the Australian Constitution (Parkin et al., 2010). In the 2010 – 2011 financial year the State Government sector spent 33 billion dollars on education while the Federal Government invested 10.9 billion dollars and parents spent a further 8.8 billion dollars educating their children (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Recurrent funding for school education 2010-11 (Daniels, 2012, p. 7)



Despite Australia being one of the most urbanised countries in the world 5.4 million people live in regional areas and an additional 498 000 people live in either remote or very remote areas of Australia (Figure 4) (Baxter et al., 2011).

Figure 4. Accessibility Remoteness Index Australia 2006 (Baxter et al., 2011, p. 2).



Of all the states Western Australia (WA) has the highest number of people living in either regional or remote Australia. Perth, WA's capital city is closer geographically to Singapore and Jakarta than Canberra, Australia's national capital city. Given Australia's vastness, access to education, particularly secondary education, is a major concern to both government and families living in regional and remote Australia.

In 2000 the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission contracted the Equal Access: National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education to investigate educational opportunities available to young people living in rural and remote parts of Australia. Recommendations in the final report addressed the following key areas; transport, students with disabilities, distance education, indigenous homelands, vocational education and training, language and culture, school term hostels, information technology and access to secondary schools. The report identified boarding schools as a means by which young people could access education (Balsamo, 2000). Following on from this inquiry Ministerial decisions have provided some support, albeit limited, to the families of boarders and to institute programs allowing for greater access to boarding schools by Indigenous students ("Education legislation amendment bill 2008", 2008).

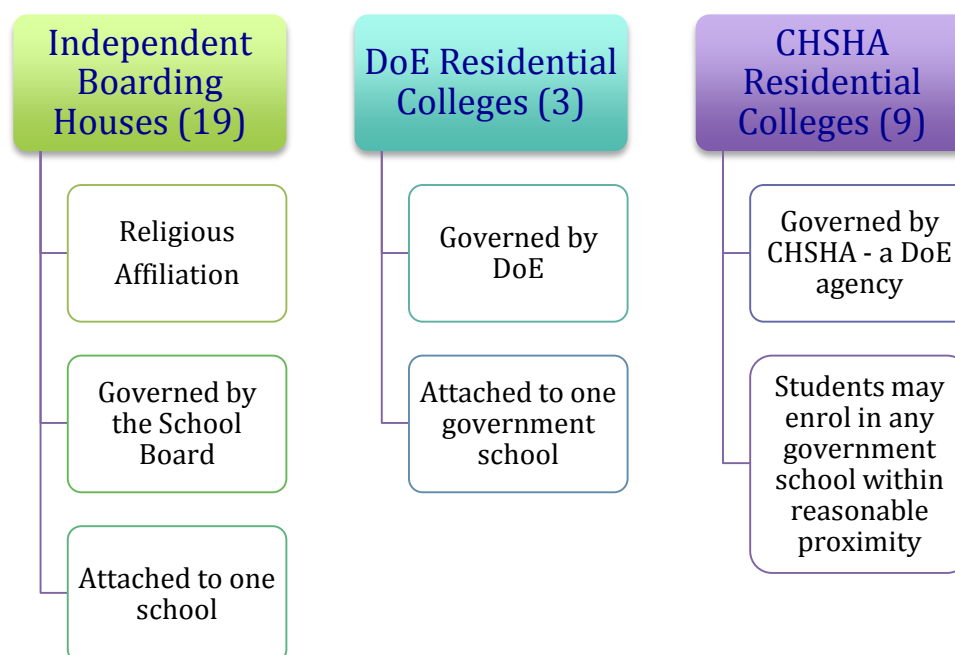
Isolation remains the strongest predictor as to why young people attend boarding school in Australia ([CSC], 1982; Evans, 2008). Given the opportunity boarding provides for young people to continue their schooling, this study critically supports national and international law, conventions and covenants by seeking to understanding the experiences of boarders and their parents to support high quality educational opportunities for geographically isolated students. Connectedness, levels of homesickness, help-seeking behaviour and the reported helpfulness of transitioning activities have been considered in this analysis, comparing students from regional and remote Australia with other boarding students.

2.2.2 Western Australia's education systems and sectors

The provision of education in Australia is divided into two dominant systems, Government and Independent (including Catholic Schools). The independent

system has seen rapid growth since its 4% market share in the 1970's to securing 16% of Australian school enrolments in 2012 (Daniels, 2012). In Western Australia education is delivered through the three abovementioned sectors being; the Department of Education in Western Australia (DoE), Catholic Schools (governed by the Catholic Education Commission of Western Australia (CECWA)) and Independent Schools (supported by the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (AISWA)). Thirty-one facilities offer boarding as an option for secondary school students in Western Australia. Facilities commonly termed, as 'boarding houses' are those with housing attached to a school and governed by the school to which it is attached, all schools operating through any sector, other than DoE are termed boarding houses. Housing for boarding students managed through DoE are commonly known as residential hostels or boarding hostels. There are two distinct types of boarding hostels; those principally governed by Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training (DoE) and those governed by The Country High School Hostels Authority (Department of Education, Western Australia) (CHSHA). The former are attached to a single government school while the latter have allegiances with particular government schools however, students may attend any government school of their choice within reasonable proximity to the boarding facility (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Western Australian boarding systems and sectors



In Western Australia the 31 boarding facilities are governed by, or affiliated with, either the DoE (12) or the following religious associations; Catholic (5), Anglican (7), Adventist (1), Christian – non denominational (1), Methodist (1), Uniting (2) and Presbyterian (2) (Figure 6) ("Aboriginal independent community schools," 2009; "Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (Inc)," 2013; Jackson, 2011-2012).

Figure 6. Boarding schools and residential hostels in Western Australia listed according to governing body or affiliation

SCHOOL	GENDER	SECTOR	LOCATION	KM FROM PERTH
Carmel Adventist College	Co-ed	Adventist	Carmel	8
Great Southern Grammar	Co-ed	Christian (non-denominational)	Lower Kalgan	425
Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School	Co-ed	Anglican	Bunbury	186
Hale School	Boys	Anglican	Wembley Downs	12
Guildford Grammar School	Boys	Anglican	Guildford	16
Perth College	Girls	Anglican	Mt Lawley	3
Christ Church Grammar School	Boys	Anglican	Claremont	9
St Hilda's Anglican School for Girls Inc.	Girls	Anglican	Mosman Park	13

St Mary's Anglican Girls' School	Girls	Anglican	Karrinyup	15
Methodist Ladies' College	Girls	Methodist	Claremont	9
Penrhos College	Girls	Uniting	Como	9
Wesley College	Boys	Uniting	South Perth	5
Presbyterian Ladies' College	Girls	Presbyterian	Peppermint Grove	11
Scotch College	Boys	Presbyterian	Swanbourne	10
Iona Presentation College	Girls	Catholic	Mosman Park	13
Santa Maria College	Girls	Catholic	Attadale	15
Mazenod College	Boys	Catholic	Lesmurdie	25
St Brigid's College	Girls	Catholic	Lesmurdie	30
Aquinas College	Boys	Catholic	Salter Point	8
CAPS Coolgardie	Co-ed	DEET ^a	Coolgardie	555
CAPS Wongutha	Co-ed	DEET ^a	Gibson	738
Karlundi Aboriginal Education Centre	Co-ed	DEET ^a	Meekatharra	822
City Beach Residential College	Co-ed	CHSHA ^b	City Beach	12
Broome Residential College	Co-ed	CHSHA ^b	Broome	2229
Esperance Residential College	Co-ed	CHSHA ^b	Esperance	782
Geraldton Residential College	Co-ed	CHSHA ^b	Geraldton	432
Merredin Residential College	Co-ed	CHSHA ^b	Merredin	261
St James' Residential College	Co-ed	CHSHA ^b	Moora	200
Narrogin Residential College	Co-ed	CHSHA ^b	Narrogin	199
Northam Residential College	Co-ed	CHSHA ^b	Northam	97
Albany Residential College	Co-ed	CHSHA ^b	Albany	416

^aCommonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Training

^bThe Country High School Hostels Authority (Department of Education, Western Australia)

Amended table from the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia ("Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (Inc)," 2013)

A distinguishing feature between the different systems and sectors is the fee structure of these educational choices. Within this study the participating independent boarding houses have an average annual combined tuition and boarding fee of approximately \$44000 per student. The government boarding hostels in the study charge \$17550 per student for boarding fees with tuition fees being minimal given these students attend government schools attached to these hostels ("Cost of boarding - 2014," 2013). In 1973 the Australian Government introduced the Student Assistance Act ("Students Assistance Act 1973," 1973) offering financial assistance for families who fulfilled certain criteria which deemed them to live in isolated parts of Australia. In 2014 this allowance offers eligible families \$7667 towards education costs. In addition other means tested allowances are available along with allowances for unique situations, such as students identified as gifted and talented. While allowances such as these provide much needed financial support for families, the difference in fees between the two education sectors will, for some families, dictate the choice they make regarding accessing education for their child.

Research into boarding schools in Australia has focused on independent boarding houses rather than government boarding hostels with no studies to the author's knowledge simultaneously gathering data from both sectors of boarding. This thesis research draws on students in both sectors and sought to understand differences between students within each sector and associations with reported rates of homesickness, help-seeking, and connectedness. The research also explored transitioning experiences across the sectors.

2.3 Exosystem: External influences

The *exosystem* does not contain the participants (boarding students); however, it does have a direct impact on them (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The exosystem explores a range of influences, for example the community from which the boarder lived, their boarding house environment and the school attached to the boarding house. These exosystem influences also include but are not limited to factors such as mass media (print, television and online) and governance matters (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Leonard, 2011; Reifsnider et al., 2005). Within a school either a School Council or Board, together with the Principal, oversees

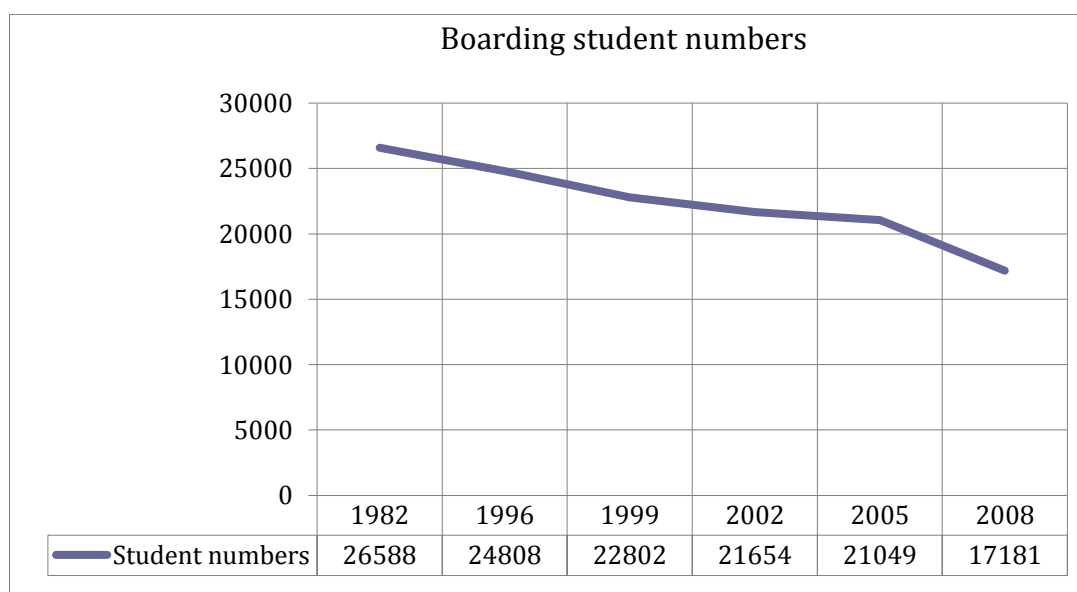
governance matters. These decisions directly impact the environment in which boarding students reside. Traditionally boarding schools offered only full-time boarding; however, as boarding numbers have declined schools have looked to fill places with weekly boarders and have begun to actively recruit international students. Both of these governance decisions have the capacity to impact on a student's experience of boarding in a number of ways.

This thesis explored student enrolment type; albeit full-time, weekly or international. Through this question comparisons have been drawn between students' experiences of transitioning activities, connectedness, homesickness and homesickness help-seeking. This information will assist schools when considering related governance decisions or in the implementation of targeted transitioning programs once these decisions have been made.

2.3.1 Flexible boarding options

Boarding in Australian schools has been steadily declining since data were first formally recorded in 1982 (Figure 7) (Hodges, Sheffield, & Ralph, 2013). Anderson noted the number of schools offering only full-time boarding in Australia is also declining (Anderson, 2005). Financial pressure placed on schools due to this decline has resulted in some schools looking for alternatives to increase their market share.

Figure 7. Australian boarding student numbers 1982-2008



A number of prominent boarding schools now offer flexible boarding options where students can board for only the number of nights they require as opposed to being 'full-time' (living on campus both during the week and on weekends) or 'weekly' boarders (living on campus during the week and going home on the weekends) (Hawkes, 2010). Families with work responsibilities that take them away from the family home are utilising flexible boarding options now available in a number of prominent boarding schools across Australia.

This diversity in enrolment type may influence the structure and conduct of a boarding house. Historically all students were on campus for the vast majority of the term, however, now the combination of boarding enrolments means some students may be on campus for the majority of the term, while others may rarely if ever be there on the weekends. There has been no research to the author's knowledge to understand the implications, if any, of these changes to enrolment on students' experiences. This research explores differences between students who 'weekly' board and students who are 'full-time' boarders. The analysis determines differences between how connected these groups are to the school and the boarding staff, levels of homesickness and homesickness help-seeking behaviour.

2.3.2 International boarding students

In addition to flexible boarding options schools have actively sought to enroll international full-fee paying students. International students assist in ensuring enrolments are full, further protecting boarding houses from operating at a loss. The number of international students accessing high school, particularly from Asia, has increased over the past decade. Parents of international students view attending high school in Australia as advantageous to being accepted into a University in Australia. As universities have historically been cheaper in Australia than the United States or the United Kingdom, Australia has been attractive to international students. Better understanding the experiences of international students has the capacity to assist schools address the needs of these students and further build global partnerships of benefit to all.

In 2010 there were 10 124 international students attending independent schools in Australia, however, the number of these students who were boarding is unknown (Dearden et al., 2010). In the 2010-2011 financial year education as an export industry contributed \$16.3 billion into the Australian economy (*Australian social trends, Dec 2011. International students*, 2011). Education as an international commodity is significant in a number of ways: while full fee paying students contribute to the healthy ledger of schools, these students and their families bring a wealth of knowledge and richness of culture to schools. In October of 2013 the number of international students studying in Australia was 504 544, while the majority of these enrolments were accounted for the University sector, schools held a 3.5% market share (*Monthly summary of international student enrolment data - Australia - YTD October 2013*, 2013). In real figures this equates to approximately 17 659 international students attending Australian schools. A number of accommodation options are available to students attending high school, with two of the more popular being homestay and boarding. Data regarding the exact number of international students boarding in Australia has not been collected. While markets have fluctuated China (76 000 in 2013), Malaysia (13 500) and India (11 500) (*Australian Education International*, 2013) consistently account for the largest cohorts of international students.

Australian student visa applications (students studying full-time with a registered institution) peaked in 2008-2009 and have been declining thereafter with media reports of harm to students significantly impacting upon Australia being viewed as a safe country (*Australian social trends, Dec 2011. International students*, 2011). Prompted by a declining market the Council of Australian Government implemented a four-pronged international student strategy, focusing on student wellbeing, quality of education, consumer protection and better information in an attempt to address concerns voiced by international students (*Fact Sheet: International students strategy for Australia*, 2010). While full-time student visa applications may be declining, over the past decade increase for higher education as an export product has doubled (*Australian Education International*, 2013).

Limited research has been conducted to investigate how international students view their experiences of boarding in Australian schools. There is consensus in the available literature about the positive contribution international students make to developing acceptance of and an appreciation for multiculturalism (White, 2004; Yeo, 2010). Yeo, who spent a year living in a Western Australian boarding school, provides a unique insight into the sociology of the residential community. Through his observations and interviews Yeo's paper 'Belonging to Chinatown' (Yeo, 2010) documented the struggles of international students beginning with their unhappiness and anxiety at leaving family and friends to the ongoing struggles of fitting into friendship groups. This work supports Oyserman and Sakamoto's research into Asian Americans and explores how individualism and collectivism play a significant factor in ethnic identity (Oyserman & Sakamoto, 1997). There may be links with this research and the theory of 'othering' as described by Canales where inclusionary or exclusionary behaviours impact upon the experiences of people in closed communities, such as boarding school (Canales, 2000).

Understanding both the experiences of international boarding students and the ways in which adding international students to an already complex environment will assist schools to more effectively transition students into their new environment. This thesis explored responses from a small number of international students attending boarding school and reports on statistically significant differences between these students and local students' experiences of transitioning, connectedness, homesickness and homesickness help-seeking.

2.4 Mesosystem: Relationship between the person and the setting

The *mesosystem* comprises a system of microsystems. Whenever a participant, for example the boarding student, moves into a new environment, in this case the boarding house, a new microsystem is created within the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Leonard, 2011; Reifsnider et al., 2005). The mesosystem houses those people closest to the boarding student, the ones with whom relationships directly impact upon their capacity to thrive. The way in

which parents of boarding students respond to their children leaving home directly impacts upon the child. This thesis draws on data gathered through interviews and focus groups to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of boarding parents. This deep understanding reveals important strategies identified by parents as supportive for both them and their children when assisting their children in making the transition to boarding school. Additionally, a student's capacity to engage in transitioning activities and make connections through these programs, to staff and fellow students may impact on their successful transition into their new environment.

Engagement in, and the reported helpfulness of transitioning activities have been explored for associations with connectedness to staff, the boarding house and reported homesickness. Boarding staff take on the special responsibility of loco parentis of students once they move into their new environment. Connectedness to boarding staff and the boarding house may be a critical to a student's experience of homesickness or their capacity to seek help for their homesickness. This thesis investigated the experiences of boarder parents, exploring how they react to, and cope with being separated from their children. In preparation for, and immediately after students leave their home environments schools offer a series of transitioning activities. This research explored which, if any, of these activities appear to be helpful and if there is any association between these activities and levels of connectedness with boarding staff and the boarding house and homesickness.

2.4.1 Transitioning into boarding school

The degree to which young people at boarding school access and benefit from the opportunities presented to them at their new school may depend on how well they transition into their new environment. Transitioning from junior school into middle school or senior school during what Ganeson and Ehrich (2009) call the 'middle years' (10 – 15 years old) is addressed in a wealth of literature internationally. In contrast there is a lack of literature relating specifically to boarding school students who transition into a new school and home environment during their middle years both in Australia and internationally.

Socially, school transition for boarders involves leaving their family environment and their home community to attend a school where the cohort of their year level alone may greatly exceed the total population of the school from which they have come. The stark contrast in school context between a boarding student's junior school and their new high school may impact upon their successful transition. Furthermore, given the context is a closed one, where students have little or no control over who they live with, the positive or negative implications of either exclusionary or inclusionary 'othering', as described by Canales (2000), may be intensified.

Transitioning has been described by Green (1997) as moving from known to unknown where social dynamics and peer relationships are acknowledged as important in the success or otherwise of the transitioning process (Ganeson & Ehrich, 2009, p. 60). Transitioning for boarding students involves moving from what is known to unknown in a number of different forms: they will begin life at a new school, live geographically in a different place and with people they have not met before. Many boarding students will no longer have the opportunity to engage in activities within their local communities. Social relationships, finding friends, fitting in and creating a sense of belonging, all key concepts associated with transitioning (Berliner, 1993; Howard & Johnson, 2005; Pereira & Pooley, 2007), become critically important in the transitioning process for boarding students as these students live, work and play with their peers.

Howard and Johnson (2005) speak of parents and students responding to transitioning into secondary school as a 'welcome rite of passage'. Similarly, many families in rural and remote Australia view boarding school, as a positive means of accessing education. Given the isolation of many young people, especially those being home schooled, coupled with the onset of puberty may mean boarding school addresses the needs of adolescents for greater autonomy, increased opportunity to focus on peers and to create a sense of identity (Eccles, Wigfield, Medgley, Reuman, Iver, & Feldauer, 1993). In a small-scale study Bramston and Patrick (2007) suggest boarding schools may provide positive academic and non-academic outcomes for these young people. These findings are supported by those of Martin et al. (2014) whose analysis revealed small positive effects in a number of both the academic and non-

academic measures, additionally boarding students reported having more positive relations with parents than did day students.

Theorists agree the social context surrounding adolescence can impact positively or negatively upon the development of self (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci et al., 1991; Earls & Carlson, 2001). Boarding school students, who attend and reside at school and who therefore exist within a complex social structure, may experience an increase in the impact of this social context. For example, if a boarder was to be the target of face to face bullying by another boarding student, this behaviour may occur at school during the day and at night in the boarding house. In Australia boarding schools offer a variety of pre, during and post-transitioning activities to assist young people to prepare for and settle into their new environment. This thesis used data to better understand how young people experience these activities and which they consider to be most helpful. This information will assist schools to implement more targeted and effective transitioning activities for students during this time.

2.4.2 Connectedness

School connectedness matters. It has been associated with higher academic outcomes, less at risk behaviour and is a predictor of future mental health outcomes (Anderman, 1997; Resnick et al., 1993). Despite the importance of school connectedness being well documented for regular school students, limited research has been conducted into boarding students' connectedness to either their school or their boarding house. An ability to relate well to both their peers, and the staff who will form a part of their new family, may be critical to their successful transition and the feelings of connectedness boarding students have to their new environment (Lambert, 1968).

Building relationships founded on trust, security and mutual affection with adults who care about them, is recognised as important to building school connectedness (Bonny et al., 2000; Deci et al., 1991; Fredricks et al., 2004; Goodenow, 1993; Libbley, 2004; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Soloman et al., 1996; Wingspread, 2004). These factors may significantly impact on boarding

students feeling connected or like they belong in the school and the boarding environment.

Generally psychologists recognise the need for all humans to feel a sense of autonomy, competency and relatedness in their lives (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci et al., 1991; Maslow, 1968). For boarding school students these basic needs may be juxtaposed. By nature boarders will become more autonomous as they no longer have their family readily available to call upon to assist with day-to-day tasks or decision-making. There will be a need to become competent at tasks which may be considered age inappropriate, for example, at the age of twelve they may be expected to do their own washing, scheduling, homework tasks, without additional support, and effectively manage their time. At the same time boarders will need to quickly and effectively make positive connections with the staff caring for them, as these staff members will form a critical part of the student's new boarding family and assist them as they learn to undertake tasks unfamiliar to them.

This study used an instrument developed to explore the connectedness of day school students to both teaching staff and the school they attend (McNeely, Nonnemaker, & Blum, 2002). By utilising this instrument and applying it to a boarding school setting this research explored the levels of connectedness students feel towards boarding staff and the boarding house. These levels were further compared against students' reported levels of homesickness and their willingness to seek help for homesickness. Through understanding the impact connectedness appears to have on homesickness and help-seeking, recommendations can be made to schools regarding the importance of connectedness.

2.5 Microsystem: Immediately involving the person or environment

The *microsystem* represents individual factors along with those factors immediately impacting upon the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In this system participants play particular roles and undertake activities, for example the student in the boarding house or the parent in his or her role in the family

home (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Leonard, 2011; Reifsnider et al., 2005). Transitioning into boarding school coincides with adolescence, a period of rapid growth impacting upon a young person's sexual, cognitive, identity, psychosocial and moral development. During adolescence peers and family members play a significant role in shaping the thoughts and feelings of adolescents as they seek to explore their place in the world. Boarding students, who live away from their families, spend significantly more time with their peers changing the balance of these influences. While the balance of influences may impact upon students, leaving home also significantly impacts upon families. How parents respond to this change in their home environment may impact upon a young person's ability to successfully transition from home into a boarding environment. This thesis sought to better understand the experiences of parents whose children leave home during a time of significant change and growth. During this time most young people move through stages of adolescent development at similar periods, making it possible to broadly categorise development. This thesis explored statistically significant associations between the entry age of boarding students (and their reported rates of homesickness and homesickness help-seeking) against generalised categories of adolescent development. This research will help to understand if there appears to be an age at which boarding students better cope with this transition.

2.5.1 Changes and challenges during adolescence

Young people most commonly transition into boarding school between the ages of 11 to 13 when primary school ends and high school begins, coinciding with the onset of adolescence. Adolescence is often thought of as a social construct, usually associated with the cognitive and social development occurring in the teen years between childhood and adulthood. Traditionally adolescence was thought to be between 13 to 19 years; however, more recently in Western societies it is now considered to be between 11 to 21 years (Krause et al., 2010).

Adolescent behaviour and projected health outcomes in young adulthood has been the motivation for considerable research, and while many variables have been explored regarding adolescence, there is scant research into adolescence

and boarding students. During this period of rapid physical development young people are simultaneously evolving cognitively, psychologically and morally along with gaining a sense of their identity. All of these factors are normal developmental stages for all adolescents; what is different however for boarding students is the changed relationships with the adults and peers in their microsystem. Boarding students are removed from their parents for extended periods of time and are placed in an environment where the ratio of adults to children is likely to be significantly reduced and where peers may play a much greater role in modeling expected behaviours.

This research sought to understand if there are statistically significant differences in the transitioning and homesickness experiences of young people who move into boarding at different ages, and therefore different developmental stages. Parents of boarding students, when deciding the age at which their children will begin their boarding experience need to evaluate a number of factors, for example the cost of sending their children away, the educational opportunities their children may miss should they delay the move, and whether they feel their child is emotionally ready to make the transition into boarding. A better understanding of any significant differences between the entry age of boarding students, and variables such as loneliness, connectedness, homesickness and homesickness help-seeking will provide parents with valuable information to assist in deciding when to send their children to boarding school. Current literature regarding adolescence does provide useful information for consideration regarding why this is an important factor for parents and schools to explore when designing transition programs for boarding students.

The majority of boarding students do not have their immediate family available on a daily basis to support them through the changes they experience during puberty. Physical changes, in particular, may be difficult for students to discuss with people outside of their immediate family, adding to the social anxiety experienced (Miers, Blote, de Rooij, Bokhorst, & Westenberg, 2013; Sumter, Bokhorst, & Westenberg, 2009). For example, the onset of menstruation may have little or no warning and could be an awkward experience for boarding students, particularly for those students who do not know where or how to

access necessary sanitary requirements. Such anxiety could be overcome with this topic being discussed as girls transition into boarding so they understand the procedures in place and feel more comfortable in accessing the support they require. Additionally, students who begin their boarding experience later such as in year ten rather than year seven or eight, are likely not to be faced with this particular challenge. Rapid physical changes may also shock parents of boarding students who are geographically isolated or live in other countries and may not see their children for weeks and in some cases months at a time. Educating parents, as a part of the transitioning process, about the changes occurring during puberty may help prepare them for what could be significant physical changes to their child's appearance between each visit. For both boys and girls, understanding how young people seek help within a boarding school and from whom they access support, may provide vital information for boarding house staff as they work with young people to reduce the level of anxiety they may experience as their bodies change and develop.

Cognitively young people are also further developing their capacity to remember the world around them and to understand, think and reason (Krause et al., 2010). Theorists have studied the psychology of cognitive development from numerous perspectives, with Piaget's stages of development used as an effective means by which to understand and explain this process of maturation. Many theorists share common key concepts when exploring cognitive development including: problem solving, thinking and reasoning. When boarding students' transition into their new complex environment most will need to engage in problem solving, thinking and reasoning at a higher level than in their home environment. There is capacity for this change of environment to possibly hasten cognitive development, accelerating the movement from Piaget's concrete to formal operations developmental stages. Even more significant cognitive gains may occur when considering the experiences of boarding students through the lens of Seigler's overlapping waves model that advocates strategies employed to situations through experiential learning leads to cognitive development (Krause et al., 2010).

The complex nature of social systems and contacts evident in boarding communities could additionally influence the rate of moral development in these

students. Hart and Carlo (2005) in their review of research into moral development, note the many influencing factors including social institutions, peers, cultural practices, parents and psychological processes. Boarding school communities are social institutions that develop their own cultural practices that are understood and respected by the members of the community. The influences of peers and the changed relationship with parents brought about by physical separation are likely to be significant influential factors, according to the work of Hart and Carlo (2005).

While many characteristics of moral development show specific patterns of change, the development of sympathy and helping, which impact upon moral reasoning (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Eisenberg et al., 1987), appear to be related more to life experiences than age (Eisenberg et al., 2005). An awareness of the suffering of others and early exposure to the needs of others, additionally was found to facilitate a helping disposition and lead to a greater likelihood of developing generative tendencies in adulthood (Matsuba & Walker, 2005). The life experiences of boarding students when transitioning into boarding is significantly different from that of other students who continue to live with their families for the duration of their schooling.

Understanding how boarders of different ages cope with witnessing the suffering of their peers who experience high levels of homesickness and how they exhibit sympathy or seek help when they are feeling homesick may provide important information in preparing students for the transition into boarding school. Perhaps most relevant of all is Lawford's (2005) work on the relationship between community involvement and generative concern. This longitudinal study followed 198 adolescents for three data collection points over a six-year period. The study collected information on personal adjustment, community involvement and parenting style, with the findings indicating community involvement was a stronger link to prosocial moral concern in adulthood than was parenting style (Lawford et al., 2005). As all boarding students must live as members of a shared community, celebrating the long-term benefits this community involvement may have, could assist in supporting parents of boarding students who often struggle with the decision of sending their child to boarding school. While this work indicates positive outcomes for many young

people from their boarding experience, for others the psychological difficulties they face during this transition may require them to choose between healthy or unhealthy crisis resolution strategies.

Healthy or unhealthy conflict resolution is significant in identity development and is representative of how a number of theorists view this period of development during adolescence (Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Krause et al., 2010). Marcia explains adolescence as both the time immediately preceding early adulthood and any time in an adult's life when faced with 'important life-alternatives' (Marcia, 2002, p. 199). Marcia's work is important to consider in a boarding context as both the students and their parents experience significant life changes during this transitioning time, meaning there is capacity for parents and children to be simultaneously experiencing 'adolescence' and exploring their own identity. Positive crisis resolution is critical to a boarding student's capacity to successfully transition into their new environment. The fact that this transition coincides with the time when young people are developing a sense of their identity may lead them to reach identity foreclosure sooner than other students who are not faced with such dramatic changes during this period of development (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010). Understanding how identity development can be affected from a student and parent perspective may assist in drawing conclusions from the phenomenological analysis of the parent focus groups and interviews.

2.5.2 Parent responses to their children leaving home

Research regarding boarding school experiences has predominantly focused on young people who attend boarding school rather than the experiences of their parents. Many young people leave home to attend boarding school at the age of 11 or 12. This unnatural separation may cause mental and emotional difficulties for parents of boarders as they struggle to cope with the significant change to their parenting role. There is some basis for the concern expressed by boarder parents regarding this separation. Findings from the American National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health ("National longitudinal study of adolescent health," 2008) revealed young people are less at risk of poor health if they are in secure families who are actively engaged in their education

(Hoffnung, Hoffnung, Seifert, Burton Smith, & Hine, 2010). Geographically remote families are clearly more challenged to be actively engaged in their child's education. The manner in which parents cope with their children transitioning into boarding school has an immediate impact on their children's capacity to transition effectively into their new environment. In most cases parents form a part of their children's microsystem, whether they are physically close or far away from where their children attend boarding school.

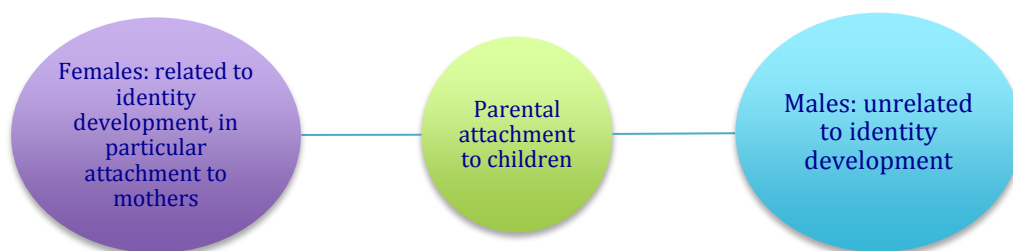
Prior research predominantly focuses on *why* parents send their children to boarding school rather than their experiences of this occurring (Baker & Andrews, 1991; Morgan & Blackmore, 2013; Research., 1995). Grey literature in the form of newspaper articles describe the experience of parents as somewhat traumatic with many expressing grief when sending their child/ren to boarding school (Dalton, 23 March 2013; McNeilage, 2013b).

"I would just go and stand in her empty bedroom and feel absolutely devastated...you know you are responsible for your child and you have to give that up and that's a very primal thing. You have to entrust your child to other people who are probably strangers to you"
(Dalton, 23 March 2013).

The research available on parental responses to sending their children to boarding school uses studies exploring first year University students, who leave home to live on campus. These studies reveal the level of separation anxiety experienced by parents' impacts on their adolescent child's capacity to achieve identity foreclosure. Mothers who provided a secure base for adolescents to return was positively correlated with identity formation in both males and females, while fathers who exhibited elevated levels of anxiety were productive to their daughter's identity development and destructive to their son's identity development (Bartle-Haring, Brucker, & Hock, 2002). In a consequent study of 232 adolescents who left home for a variety of reasons it was found both mothers and fathers experienced very similar levels of separation anxiety when their child left home; however, this anxiety was correlated in both genders with positive impacts on identity foreclosure for the children (Kins et al., 2011). Other studies have focused on attachment rather than anxiety. Research conducted with 100 first year college students in America found female students' identity

development was related to their attachment to both parents, in particular their mothers, while males identity development was unrelated to their attachment to either parent (Figure 8) (Samuolis, Layburn, & Schiaffino, 2001).

Figure 8. Impact of parental attachment on adolescent identity development



While such studies may provide some insight into possible associations between young people leaving home and identity development, none explored the impact of the age when boarding students leave home, to differentiate between, for example, students attending their first year at University. These studies also do not appear to address possible impacts of parental separation anxiety on their own sense of identity and wellbeing. Australian families living in isolated parts of Australia have established support networks through organisations such as The Isolated Children's Parents' Association (ICPA) to assist one another with this shared experience.

The ICPA was established in Bourke, New South Wales in April of 1971. From its origins this organisation's principal objective has been a "voluntary, non-profit, apolitical parent body dedicated to ensuring that all rural and remote students have equity of access to a continuing and appropriate education" ("Welcome to the ICPA," 2013). The organisation principally lobbies government for funding to support educational access for rural and remote students. While its primary goal is unrelated to the emotional support of its 4500 members, the organisation has been cited in grey literature as providing a support network through which parents can connect and share their common experiences (Bryant, 2013; Calderwood, 2013). This organisation provides a platform for parents to connect and discuss the difficulties they face as parents of boarders and the strategies they could implement to assist in supporting their

children as they leave home and transition into boarding school. National and state leaders of this organisation were interviewed as stakeholders in this study and many of the parents who took part in other focus groups and interviews were active members of this organisation. Through a better understanding of the experiences of the parents of boarding students, recommendations could be distributed through groups, such as the ICPA, to assist parents make the transition into boarding a more supportive and positive experience for both them and their children.

Using phenomenological research methodology this research sought to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of parents who send their children to boarding school. The questions posed to parents in the study explored not only how they support their children during this time but additionally how they supported themselves. These questions explored their own personal responses to this situation, support strategies they have implemented to cope with their sense of loss and the change to their families' home environment or microsystem.

2.5.3 Homesickness

The capacity of students to transition effectively will be impacted by their experiences of homesickness. This personal response to transitioning may be insignificant for some students and debilitating for others. Schools have worked to implement programs to address homesickness; however, there is little evidence as to which strategies appear to be most effective in supporting boarding students and their families as they settle into their new home and school environment.

Fisher et al. (1986) in their paper 'Homesickness and health in boarding school children' define homesickness as embodying emotional, cognitive and motivational features (p. 45). Homesickness has been a topic of research for decades with studies focussing on a variety of issues including but not limited to: young children and loneliness (Cassidy & Asher, 1992), overseas students (Han, Jamieson, & Young, 2000a; Yeo, 2010), definitional matters (Archer, Ireland, Amos, Broad, & Currid, 1998; Baier & Welch, 1992; Fisher, Elder, &

Peacock, 1990; Fisher et al., 1984, 1986; Hodges et al., 2013), correspondence with families (Itskowitz et al., 1990), association with panic disorder (Van Der Molen, Van Der Hout, Van Dieren, & Griez, 1989), association with metabolic syndrome (Alciati, Gesuele, Casazza, & Doschi, 2011) and perceived control and coping styles (Thurber & Weisz, 1997).

Assimilating into boarding is a challenging time for young people who may be frequently plagued by bouts of homesickness and distress at becoming disconnected from their families (Duffell, 2005; La Fontaine, 1991; Lambert, 1968; Schaverien, 2002). While there are many benefits to boarding, the transitioning and ongoing challenges faced by boarders in these closed environments are different from those faced by day students and may be short-lived or could have long lasting affects (Duffell, 2005; La Fontaine, 1991; Lambert, 1968; Poynting & Donaldson, 2005).

Baier and Welch (1992) provide a concept analysis of homesickness distinguishing it from other concepts such as relocation effects, school phobia, translocation syndrome and separation anxiety. The authors' findings indicate homesickness happens to people of all ages when away from home and identified key criteria including somatic complaints and feelings of sadness. They found both children and adults often feel a sense of embarrassment leading to denial resulting in homesickness frequently not being acknowledged and therefore processed intrapersonally (p. 56). These feelings could also lead to a lack of willingness to seek help for homesickness.

Homesickness, while not officially recognised as a mental illness shares a number of the symptoms associated with adjustment disorder. This disorder transpires when emotional or behavioural symptoms become evident in response to a stressful situation or event. Limited literature has been published on the symptoms of adjustment disorder; however diagnosis has included symptoms such as: marked distress in excess of what is expected (a non-normal response to a situation), loss of social and or academic functioning, mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct and a high rate of morbidity (Casey & Doherty, 2012; Greenberg et al., 1995; "Mental Health and Adjustment Disorder," 2013; Patra & Sarkar, 2013). It is common for onset of the disorder to

begin within two weeks of the traumatic event, one such event could be leaving home to move to a boarding school, and in most cases ends within six months ("Mental Health and Adjustment Disorder," 2013). Casey and Doherty (2012) note if the stressor continues so may the symptoms, which could explain the ongoing homesickness symptoms experienced by some boarding students. In one of the few studies focused on adjustment disorder, Greenberg et al. (1995) discovered adolescent patients with adjustment disorder admitted into a country hospital in America, presented with associated suicide ideation upon hospitalisation. While this research did not explore association with suicide ideation and homesickness, the importance of accurately measuring homesickness given the possible links with adjustment disorder will assist in appropriately understanding and treating young people who experience chronic homesickness.

There are contrasting views as to the long-term mental health implications caused by this separation and its subsequent impact on attachment. Duffel who co-founded 'Boarding Concern' (Foucar & Duffell, 2001), a United Kingdom based association dedicated to counselling boarders, believes many students exit boarding with what he terms 'Strategic Survival Personality' (Duffell, 2005). These concerns are shared by Schaverin (2002) who through her work with past boarders believes leaving home at a young age results in many adults, who attended boarding school, being disconnected with their emotions and unable to settle as they continue into adulthood, due to the yearning for their childhood home (Schaverien, 2002).

While important in their own right, these studies have drawn on smaller samples, the largest study comprised 117 boarding school students at the age of transition attending two schools in close geographic proximity (Fisher et al., 1986). This thesis draws on previous work and applies this to a broader sample size across more schools to explore effective measures of homesickness and considering which transitioning activities appear to ameliorate homesickness. By providing schools with an effective tool to measure homesickness and strategies that may reduce the harm caused by homesickness, schools can begin to address the needs of its boarding students in a more empirical manner.

2.5.4 Homesickness help-seeking

The impact of homesickness on a young person's ability to successfully transition into their new environment could be moderated by their individual ability to seek help when they are suffering from homesickness. Literature regarding the help-seeking behaviour of adolescents and young adults has principally focused on young people, with early symptoms or diagnosed mental health illness and associated help-seeking behaviour. While a number of universal to clinical intervention approaches exist, this research sought to understand boarding students' responses to homesickness, the helpfulness of their self-motivated help-seeking behaviour and the associated barriers and facilitators to help-seeking.

Sawyer et al. (2012) describe the steps involved in young people seeking help as being threefold; firstly young people need to recognise there is a problem and understand the nature of their problem and potential benefits of seeking help. Recognising help is needed must then lead to a willingness of young people to seek help. Finally, young people need to have the capacity to locate appropriate support services, make appointments and attend the appointment or have the ability to ask others to do this for them. Barriers and facilitators have been found to exist for each of these three stages to help-seeking.

A lack of emotional literacy makes it difficult for some young people to understand and label the feelings they are experiencing (Wilson, Bushness, & Caputi, 2011), which can lead to challenges in adequately recognising the symptoms and severity of mental health related issues. Personal determinants such as emotional competence, act as additional barriers to young people's capacity to appropriately recognise mental health related symptoms (Gulliver, Griffiths, & Christensen, 2010; McLaughlin, Rothi, & Leavey, 2006). In many cases parents also lack knowledge of the symptoms relating to mental illness, for those who are emotionally literate there is related difficulty in diagnosing symptoms when evident in their adolescent children (Wu et al., 1999). Research suggests the improved education of young people, teachers and health related services may facilitate help-seeking in young people.

A South Australian study compared findings from a group of teachers who received 'Mental Health First Aid' training with those who were wait listed. The findings indicated changes in knowledge, beliefs, attitudes and some behaviours of the teachers who received the training. In addition, young people reported an increase in indirect information regarding mental health (Jorm, Kitchener, Sawyer, Scales, & Cvetkovski, 2010). This training is readily available in Australia and given the close and personal contact boarding staff have with boarding students, training all boarding staff in mental health first aid, may lead to an increase in the help-seeking behaviour of students in their care. Other researchers encourage a more holistic approach where doctors, health practitioners, parents, teachers and young people receive parallel training to assist in recognising symptoms of mental illness in young people (McLaughlin et al., 2006; Sawyer et al., 2012). Parallel training has potential to support help-seeking in a boarding community as students live in a relatively closed community where teachers, boarding staff and school based health practitioners all have regular contact with students. Given that young people most often seek help from friends (Rickwood, 1995; Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996), the training of students may help them to have an increased capacity to recognise symptoms of severe homesickness or other mental health related issues they and/or their friends exhibit and seek help.

The stigma surrounding mental illness continues to be the most significant barrier to young people accessing help (Gulliver et al., 2010; McLaughlin et al., 2006; Phillopson, Jones, & Wiese, 2009; Sawyer et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2011; Yap, Wright, & Jorm, 2011). Particularly in a school setting, young people worry about the confidentiality of their information along with concerns regarding the effectiveness of accessing help (Gulliver et al., 2010; Sawyer et al., 2012). In addition to living in a school setting, limiting the willingness to access help, young people from rural and regional towns are less likely to seek help due to concerns regarding the information being shared amongst the members of their community (Sawyer et al., 2012).

Encouraging online help-seeking may provide young people with emotional literacy and a greater level of comfort to access offline support. This could be particularly important for boarding students who may use online services to

explore other help-seeking sources and to assist them in finding health care professionals. A study into the online services offered by ReachOut discovered 76.3% of users cited trustworthiness as one of the reasons for accessing support online (Collin et al., 2011). In addition young people who visited ReachOut when they were 'going through a tough time' reported being either likely or very likely to seek help from online services or friends as opposed to health services, web counseling or teachers (Collin et al., 2011).

Locating, arranging and attending appointments may be significantly more complicated for boarding students than other students who live at home. While boarding schools have structures in place for this to occur, it means a further reliance on a school based service that would require the boarding student a greater level of disclosure regarding their illness than other students. Wilson et al. (2011) suggest supporting early access to health practitioners through rehearsing accessing help. This strategy could be implemented in a boarding school therefore encouraging a level of confidence and the building of collaborative relationships to support and encourage active engagement in the help-seeking process. In addition to the current body of research into adolescent help-seeking this research seeks to explore not only barriers and facilitators to boarding students seeking help for homesickness but also seeks to understand the reported helpfulness of the help-seeking strategies employed.

While all of these suggestions regarding encouraging young people to seek help for homesickness are important, questions still remain regarding how to effectively measure homesickness and determining what variables may moderate or mediate help-seeking for homesickness. This thesis asked young people about their homesickness help-seeking choices and compared this with their reported levels of connectedness and loneliness along with exploring possible moderating demographic variables. Through this analysis a better understanding has been gained regarding which students are more or less likely to seek help and of those that do seek help, where they go for help, whether their help seeking assisted in alleviating their experience of homesickness.

2.6 Summary

This chapter presents literature relevant to the study, structured using the social-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Due to limited, targeted literature in the field, issues have been explored that may impact upon a young person's boarding environment, through the systems within the social-ecological model. Each of these issues relate to the research questions in this thesis that seek to better understand the transitioning of young people into their new boarding environment, starting with transitioning activities and moving onto related experiences such as homesickness and homesickness help-seeking. Each of these research questions sought to explore associations with the key concepts and other related moderating and mediating variables such as connectedness, loneliness, entry age of students, enrolment type and family home location. In addition, the phenomenological analysis of the experiences of parents of boarding students aims to assist schools to better understand the common themes that appear impact upon the successful transitioning of young people into boarding school.

3 Method

3.0 Introduction

This research has drawn from available literature to understand the challenges faced by young people as they transitioned into boarding school and the factors that impacted on this experience. Transitioning from one learning environment to another can be a challenging experience for young people (Berliner, 1993; Howard & Johnson, August, 2005; Pereira & Pooley, 2007). Mixed method analytical perspectives were used to better understand the factors impacting on the transition of boarding students from both a student and parent perspective. The research questions also sought to better understand how parents experience their children leaving home to attend boarding school. In addition the study sought to explore, from a boarding student perspective, the transitioning experience, homesickness and the measurement of homesickness along with strategies implemented by students to reduce homesickness, including help-seeking strategies.

Research questions explored in this thesis include:

1. How do parents of boarders experience the transitioning of their child/ren into boarding school and which strategies do they perceive to be most helpful in easing the transition for them as parents, and for their children and in supporting their children when they experience homesickness?
2. Which transitioning activities do boarding students report as helpful in coping with transitioning into boarding school and are these activities associated with connectedness, their feelings of support from staff and loneliness?
3. What underlying constructs appear when measuring homesickness and which demographic variables are associated with students' experiences of homesickness?
4. What underlying factors are associated with how young people seek help for homesickness and which demographic variables, levels of

connectedness, loneliness, feelings of staff support and homesickness factors appear to be associated with help-seeking behaviour?

5. How do boarding students seek help when they experience homesickness and which of these help-seeking strategies do they find to be more effective in reducing their homesickness?

The data used in this study were taken from the *Boarding the Future Project* conducted in Western Australia (WA) by the author in 2011. This formative study aimed to understand more deeply the experiences of boarding students and their parents when transitioning into a boarding school environment. The author of this thesis, who developed the qualitative instruments, conducted the focus groups and interviews and developed and administered the quantitative instruments.

Ethics approval for this project was provided by the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project Code: 21795, Project Title: Relational aggression in boarding schools: A formative study). Ethics approval was also provided by the WA Department of Education's Evaluation and Accountability department to conduct quantitative research in Department of Education school sites. Ethics approval was provided for both quantitative and qualitative research by the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia.

3.1 Use of mixed methods

This study employed a mixed methods approach combining both qualitative and quantitative data (Table 1). The multi-strategy approach combined the qualitative responses, used to better understand the phenomenon of transitioning, with quantitative data, the findings from which explored statistically significant relationships. Bryman (1988) suggests combining qualitative and quantitative methods compensates for potential weaknesses evident in each methodological approach. The use of mixed methods in this thesis responds to O'Leary's (2010) suggestion that by using a 'question-driven' perspective the

strategies needed to best answer the research questions will guide the methodological framework used of the study.

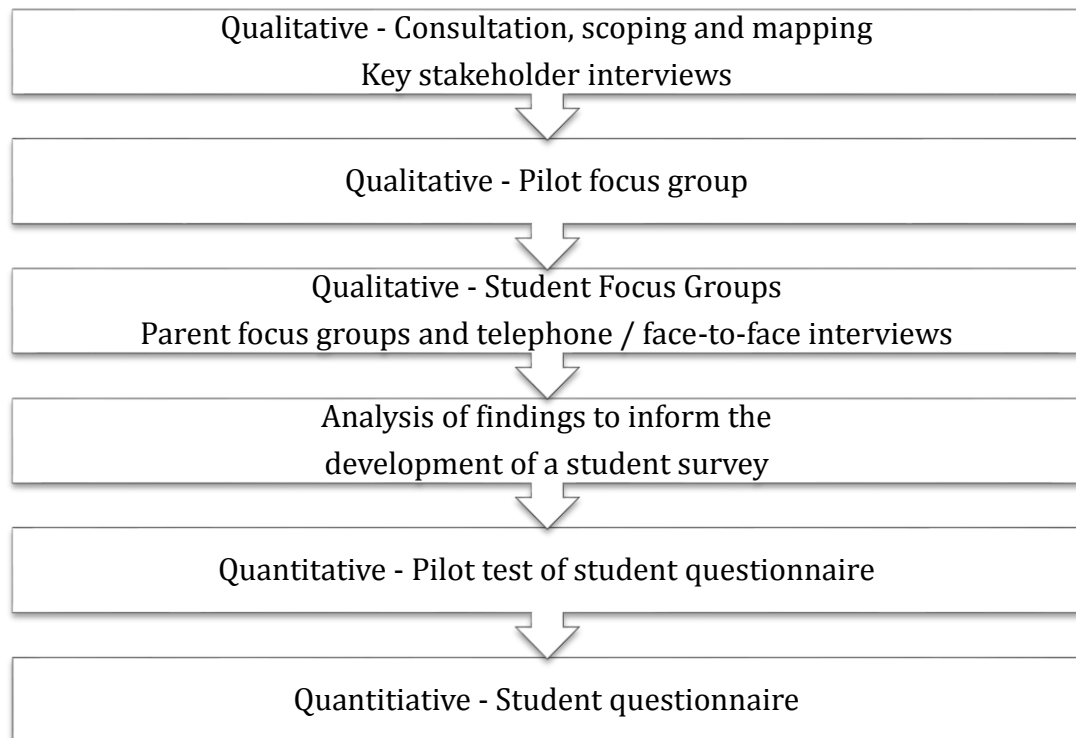
Due to the limited research relating to the experiences of boarding parents and their children, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate way to gain a meaningful understanding of the experiences of participants (Creswell, 1994). Qualitative research seeks to explore the unique circumstances within a particular experience or phenomena. It combines a number of methodological data collection and analytic tools and a range of epistemological and ontological approaches to ensure a deep understanding is achieved (Creswell, 2011; Darbyshire, Macdugall, & Schiller, 2005; Davidsen, 2013; Mander, 2012; Smith, Flower, & Larking, 2009).

A mixed methods approach assists in establishing the consistency between the qualitative and quantitative findings by using more than one way of measuring a concept (Webb et al., 1996). Findings from the qualitative data were used to assist in the development of the quantitative instrument enhancing the capacity for the data to be more robust (Silvia and Wright, 2008:3). Interviews with key stakeholders, parents and students provided a set of inferences that could subsequently be tested using quantitative means. This allowed initial findings to be confirmed or rejected, further strengthening findings (Bryman, 2012).

The mixed method approach allowed for exploration of intervening variables to better understand relationships between variables. The conceptual model for analysis of the quantitative data explored a number of variables identified through the qualitative data that served as both dependant and mediating. The qualitative data collected in the stakeholder interviews, the student and parent focus groups and the parent telephone and face-to-face interviews elicited a rich understanding of the experiences of boarding parents and students. This understanding was used to inform the development of the quantitative student instrument used to enhance the external validity or generalisability of the data (Creswell, 1994). By collecting qualitative data first a set of inferences was developed that were subsequently tested using quantitative means. This process allowed the initial findings to either be confirmed or rejected. Bryman (2012) refers to a number or large scale studies that adopted this approach

such as the British national survey (Wellings et al. 1994). The mixed method approach enabled the exploration of intervening variables to better understand the relationships between variables (Bryman, 2012; Darbyshire et al., 2005). The analysis model (Table 1) depicts how the dependent, moderating and mediating variables were combined to explore associations.

Table 1. Boarding the Future Project study design



3.2 Qualitative data

3.2.1 Participants

3.2.1.1 Stakeholder participants

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to ascertain the current status of knowledge regarding the experiences of young people transitioning into boarding school. This knowledge was used to guide stakeholder interviews. The author conducted telephone interviews with experts in the field of boarding. The stakeholders (boarding experts) included the President of the Australian Boarding Schools' Association, the President of the Western Australian branch of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, the Executive Officer of the

Australian Heads of Independent Schools, the manager of the Western Australian Boarding Hostels Authority and the President of Boarding Australia.

The telephone interviews with stakeholders, conducted by the author, were exploratory and investigated what the stakeholders believed were the primary transitioning challenges faced by boarding school students and their families. The data from the stakeholders' interviews were transcribed and these data were examined using content analysis as described by Graneheim and Lundman (2003). This involved analysing the transcripts for both content and meaning within the text; codes were established and each of the transcripts subsequent from the first were compared against the original. New codes were formed or information was then added to the original code.

The coding of these interviews revealed a number of key areas for inclusion in the interview guide. The codes that appeared to be most important included communication, homesickness, homesickness help-seeking, staffing structures, parents strategies, mobile phones and other technologies and transitioning activities. Once the interviews were coded there was a high degree of correlation between the coding of the stakeholder interviews and the coding of the parent interviews (see Appendix 3). The qualitative interview guide and focus group guide were developed for parents with reference to the coding evident in the transcripts (see Appendix 4). Questions relating to the codes identified from the stakeholder interview were asked of parents, examples of these include: 'How do you use technology to communicate with your child and the boarding house staff?' and 'Has your child experienced homesickness? If so what strategies were used and were these effective?'

3.2.1.2 Boarding house school sample

The *Boarding the Future Project* schools were purposefully selected; the following criteria were used to select these schools:

- a) Aboriginal and International boarding students enrolled as boarders;
- b) The major transition year is Year 7 or 8;
- c) Boarders in Year 7 to Year 12 live in the boarding house;
- d) A minimum of two all-boys' schools;

- e) A minimum of two all-girls' schools;
- f) A minimum of one co-educational boarding school; and,
- g) A mix of metropolitan and regional boarding schools.

As there are no co-educational boarding schools in the Perth metropolitan area, it was not possible to include this comparison. In regional and remote Western Australia all boarding houses are co-educational, as such the regional school in the study and the pilot school were both co-educational.

Principals of independent schools were contacted via telephone in February 2011 and invited to participate in the study. The invitation detailed both the qualitative and quantitative data collection components of the study. The *Boarding the Future* formative study, funded by Healthway, required five boarding houses to be recruited; the selected boarding houses provided the required number to meet this objective. One all-boys' school declined the offer to participate due to a change of boarding management staff. One all-girls' school also declined to participate due to concerns about the amount of staff time that may be required to participate in the study. Additional schools, one all-girls' and one all-boys' school, were invited to participate and accepted the invitation.

After the Principal verbally agreed to participate in the study, an information letter detailing the project was emailed to him/her. Accompanying the letter was a confirmation of participation form to be signed by the school Principal. The Principal was also asked to provide the name of a boarding house staff member who would act as the School Co-ordinator for the project (Appendix 1).

3.2.1.3 Student participants

Boarding students in Years 7, 8 and 10 were selected for the *Boarding the Future Project*, as these are the most common years for students to transition into boarding schools. Consent was requested from the 315 parents of all students in Years 7, 8 and 10. Information letters were posted directly to parents by the school with a reply-paid envelope enclosed for parents to return

the consent forms provided. The information letter sent to parents has been included as Appendix 5.

Consent to participate in the focus groups was received from 37 (12%) boarding students' families (Table 2). The author contacted each of the five participating schools to arrange a mutually convenient time to conduct the focus groups. Students were provided with information letters and consent forms via the School Co-ordinator, these were either posted from the School to the University or collected immediately prior to the focus group being held.

All participation was voluntary. Of the 37 students with active consent, 30 students (81%) participated in a focus group. The students who were recruited into the study but did not participate, were either absent on the evening the focus group was held or decided on the day not to participate. Year 10 students represented the majority of participating students (n=15), followed by Year 8 (n=9), and Year 7 (n=6). As shown in Table 3, the majority of participants were from male boarding houses (n=16), followed by female boarding houses (n=9), and co-ed boarding houses (n=5).

Table 2. Student focus group response rates by Year level

Year	Total students sent consent forms	Total students with consent	Participated in focus group	Response rate %
Year 7	29	6	6	21
Year 8	95	12	9	9
Year 10	119	19	15	13
Total	243	37	30	12

Table 3. Student focus group response rates by gender

Gender	Total students sent consent forms	Total students with consent	Participated in focus group	Response rate %
Male	131	20	16	12
Female	68	11	9	13
Co-ed	44	6	5	11
Total	243	37	30	12

The preliminary analysis as described in 3.2.2 of the focus group data, collected in Term 2, 2011, was used to assist in the development of the quantitative instrument, which was administered in Term 3, 2011.

3.2.1.4 Parent sample

3.2.1.4.1 Pilot focus group

The Executive of the Isolated Children's Parents' Association (Western Australia) was invited to take part in a pilot focus group to validate the qualitative interview guide. One female student who had recently finished Year 12 and three parents took part in the pilot focus group conducted in December 2010. On completion of the focus group, participants were invited to comment on the interview guide. The original interview guide listed prescriptive questions relating to topics being explored, in addition to a series of prompts (Appendix 4). It was found in this focus group that each question was too prescriptive and there was not sufficient time to address all of the prompts for each question, as this level of detail restricted the flow of the conversation. As a result the focus group questions and interview guides were modified to list the issues to be covered and single word or phrase prompts were provided for each of the topics to serve as a reminder of possible areas for exploration (Appendix 6).

3.2.1.4.2 Qualitative focus group and interview guides

As the *Boarding the Future Project* was a formative study the focus groups and interviews were exploratory in nature. The instruments used were predominately based on post-positivism critical realism philosophy (Marton &

Booth, 1997), designed to better understand the phenomenon of transitioning as retold by boarding students and their parents. Given this framework basic questions were raised in the interview guide and follow up prompts were asked to elicit the underlying meanings, and to better understand the experience being retold by students and parents (Akerlind, 2005). The initial questions aimed to explore the challenges experienced by both parents and students when transitioning into the boarding house, transitioning activities offered and the helpfulness of these, homesickness, homesickness help-seeking, staffing and communication. Topics are listed in Appendix 6, an example of a question thread is as follows: 'Has your child experienced homesickness?' 'What were some of the strategies you tried when your child was homesick?' 'How did the boarding staff respond to homesickness and how helpful was this?' 'Did your child's homesickness impact on their capacity to learn at school?'. Questions were also asked about bullying and cyberbullying, making friends and the physical layout of the boarding house. An opportunity was provided for students and parents to discuss any topics not covered in the focus group / interview that they felt were relevant and useful to the development of the survey.

3.2.1.4.3 Parent focus group and interview participants

Parents of boarding students in Years 7, 8 and 10 from the non-government study schools were invited to participate in focus groups or interviews (either face-to-face or telephone). Telephone interviews were arranged for those parents not able to attend the focus groups or an interview. In the first round of recruitment parents were posted an information letter through their child's school. The second round request was sent as an email from their child's school with the information letter attached. In total, 43 (14%) parents who were contacted agreed to participate in a focus group or to be interviewed.

Given the long distance many families lived from the study schools, it was often difficult for parents to attend focus groups. Focus group dates were scheduled in collaboration with Heads of Boarding to maximise participant availability. Limited numbers were able to attend the focus groups, which resulted in only two of the five eligible boarding houses participating in parent focus groups. All parents who provided consent to participate in the focus group were offered an

interview if they were not able to attend the focus group. Parents from 11 (n=13 included a mother and father in attendance on two occasions) families participated in a focus group and parents from 24 families were interviewed, representing 93% of families who provided consent to participate (Table 4). Parents who provided consent and were not interviewed either did not respond to email or the telephone contact from the author to confirm an interview date.

Table 4. Parent focus group response and participation rates

	Total parents sent consent forms	Total parents with consent	Participated in focus group	Participated in interview	Response rate (focus group and interview) %
Total	315	43	13	24	13

3.2.2 Procedure

Qualitative research practice recommends the same person conduct all interviews and focus groups within the one study. The author conducted all of the interviews and focus groups for this study. The author is an experienced school-teacher and has formerly been a boarding school student, boarding supervisor and a Head of Boarding. This expertise enriched the interviewer's capacity to conduct the interviews and focus groups with a deeper theoretical and practical sensitivity, and may have reduced interviewer bias while allowing for deeper meaning to be explored and revealed (Windsor, Baranowski, Clark, & Cutter, 1994). Previous researchers have similarly noted the benefit of qualitative interviewers having experience in working with young people (Darbyshire et al., 2005).

While there are benefits to this level of understanding, there is also a risk this knowledge could hinder evolving conversation and emergent data. The author was cognisant of this limitation and took action by engaging an independent researcher to act as note-taker and to assist in the management of the data analysis. Two independent researchers analysed the transcriptions to determine

categories, after the author had categorised the data. Through utilising multiple coding, inter-rater reliability between each researcher was explored. Although a high degree of congruence was evident through this process, the value lay particularly in the rich discussion between researchers. These discussions led to further insight into the data and the refinement of the coding framework, this process as described by Barbour (2001) allowed for the framework to support the credibility of the data analysis.

Focus groups were conducted on each study school's premises at a time that suited both the school and the participants. A research assistant attended all focus groups to take notes and to allow the author to be immersed in the group conversation. The focus groups were recorded with participants' permission and the notes taken by the research assistant were added to the end of each transcription. The parent focus groups were conducted for approximately 75 minutes, and the student focus groups averaged 60 minutes.

All of the transcripts were read and the information was used to inform the development of the scales, which in turn were used to measure transitioning activities and homesickness help-seeking as no previously developed scales were found in the literature. Lists of transitioning activities were made along with descriptions of ways in which young people sought help or coping mechanisms described by parents during the focus groups and interviews when discussing the transitioning activities their children participated in, and how their children experienced and responded to homesickness.

NVivo (10 for Mac Bata) software package was used to further analyse the focus group and interview data. Transcripts and notes were added to the software package. The transcribed data were analysed for common themes. Constant comparative analysis was used to compare similarities and differences within the data (Charzman, 2006). The coding process began with the coding of the longest most complex parent focus group. The themes that emerged from the data were entered as tree nodes. Subsequent transcriptions were constantly compared with emergent codes and entered as tree nodes from the original transcript (Harding, 2013). New categories emerged and were coded appropriately. Sixty-two tree nodes and 23 free nodes were coded. The

majority of the free nodes were later connected with existing tree nodes, three free nodes that did not achieve saturation remained uncoded. Saturation (Glaser, 1992) was achieved for eight of the central tree nodes that emerged from the data including separation, communication, policies and procedures, staffing, environmental changes, socio-emotional factors, academic and financial factors. The data were further explored by reflecting on the naïve associations and their relationship with the research question and relevant literature (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

3.2.3 Presenting the data

All quantitative and qualitative participants were assigned a code. The code began with the school project number between one and five, followed by either 'P' or 'S' meaning parent or student. As participants were recruited into the project they were assigned an identification (ID) number, this number ranged between 1 and 500, the next part of the code contained this ID number. Those who participated in a focus group were identified with (FG). Participants who were interviewed in venues that precluded recording the conversation were identified with (N) meaning notes. Finally the code included the gender of the participant being 'M' for male or 'F' for female. All quotes used in this thesis are followed by a code, as described above. A sample of possible codes used in this study can be seen below:

(1P214FGM) – (1) School number one; (P) parent; (214) ID number; (FG) focus group participant; (M) male.

(4S344FGF) – (4) School number four; (S) student; (344) ID number; (FG) focus group; (F) female.

(3P234IF) – (3) School number three; (P) parent; (234) ID number; (N) notes; (F) female.

The analysis for these qualitative data used a phenomenological approach that searched for categories of similar experiences (Fenice Marton & Booth, 2013). Similar experiences are represented in the study using words such as 'the majority', 'many', 'consistently' and 'some', these words are used representatively to describe emerging findings in the data as these were categorised. The data were used as a means of explaining experience, consistent with other qualitative research methods (Bryman, 2012).

3.2.4 Data reliability and validity

The internal and external validity or extent to which the research analysis provides accurate conclusions regarding what happened and why (Jupp, 2006) was assessed. External validity, or the extent to which the findings can be generalised was somewhat supported through findings from the quantitative data collected for this study. Internal validity was enhanced in the study through the researcher's close association with the context of the study. This is also listed as a limitation as it may have constrained the development of new ideas; the author's relationship with the environment may have allowed for closer associations to be drawn between observations and theoretical ideas (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982).

The author and a project research assistant conducted the focus groups, while the author conducted the interviews. The research assistant and author discussed the notes taken during the focus groups and developed a exemplar for how to record notes during the interview, this assisted with intra-observer consistency, therefore enhancing the internal reliability of data (Bryman, 2012). However, given the small and unrepresentative sample it is unlikely these findings can be generalised to another context (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Headings were made that matched each of the topics and the note-taker made notes against each of the headings, these notes were then transcribed under headings (Appendix 7).

3.2.5 Trustworthiness

Bryman (2012) classifies the trustworthiness of data into four criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Using phenomenology as the approach for analysis has enabled rich and detailed accounts of respondents' transitioning experiences resulting in thick descriptions, and enhancing the transferability of the findings.

Rigorous data management systems were employed through the use of programs such as Excel, Access, SPSS, STATA, Word and NVivo that

heightened the dependability of the data. The author consciously sought to remain objective throughout the interview and focus group process to ensure conformability was assured, and as mentioned earlier, two independent raters, in addition to the author, coded a selection of transcriptions to assist in this process. In addition, discussions were held with the research assistant who attended all focus groups and the interviewer to ascertain if any 'overtly personal values or theoretical inclinations' (Bryman, 2012, p. 392) were present.

3.2.6 Qualitative data analysis - a phenomenological approach

A phenomenological approach was adopted for the collection, analysis and presentation of the data for the qualitative components of the study. The semi-structured focus groups and interviews were designed to collect formative information. As such, the design emphasised an explorative approach to follow the direction of needs expressed by participants. The 2:1 ratio of interview participants to focus group participants allowed the data collection process to "...understand the other person's constructions of reality...and to ask them in such a way that they can tell us in their terms and in a depth which addresses the rich context that is the substance of their meaning" (Jones, 1985, p. 46).

This approach involved raising key topics to be discussed and allowing participants an opportunity to share their stories and for other participants to discuss and or comment on these. The objective was to "elicit underlying meanings and intentional attitudes towards the phenomenon" (Akerlind, 2005, p. 65). General questions were asked initially such as; what were the greatest challenges you and your child experienced when your child transitioned into the boarding house?; was there anything that made the transition easier?; if you were to pass on your experience to other families whose children were transitioning into boarding what would be your advice to them? "The follow-up prompts in a phenomenographic interview are often more important to elicit underlying meaning than the primary question" (Akerlind, 2005, p. 65); such was the case in the interviews conducted in this study where the experience of transitioning was so deeply personal many participants became emotional when retelling their unique experience of their children transitioning into boarding school.

3.3 Quantitative data

3.3.1 Participants

Focus groups conducted with students and parents indicated that a significant number of students who consented to participate in this study transitioned into boarding in Year 9. Hence Year 9 students were included in the quantitative component of the study.

Pilot data were collected from 23 students in Years 7, 8, 9 or 10 in one regional co-educational boarding house as described previously. These data were used to refine the quantitative instrument prior to it being administered to the study participants. Two hundred and sixty-seven boarding students who resided in boarding houses or boarding hostels in Western Australia completed the survey in 2011.

This section describes the sample, consent processes, measurement development and the data collection techniques employed.

3.3.2 Recruitment procedures

3.3.2.1 Boarding houses / hostels

The schools recruited into the qualitative component of the study also participated in the quantitative data collection. In addition, three government boarding hostels self-selected to participate in the student survey (see 3.3.2.4).

3.3.2.2 Pilot boarding house

The procedure for recruiting the pilot school to complete the student survey followed that outlined in 3.3.2.3 '*Boarding houses*'. The first boarding house invited to participate declined citing a lack of time to participate in the data collection. A further boarding house fitting the selection criteria was invited and accepted the offer.

3.3.2.3 Boarding houses

The same boarding houses that participated in the qualitative section of this study also participated in the quantitative part of the study as described in 3.2.1.2. Two all-girls' metropolitan boarding schools, two all-boys' metropolitan boarding schools and one co-educational regional boarding school participated in the quantitative component of the study.

3.3.2.4 Boarding hostels

Following a boarding hostels conference presentation given by the author of this thesis in April 2011, the Western Australian government boarding house sector expressed a strong interest in participating in the *Boarding the Future Project*. Due to project time constraints it was decided to allow schools interested in participating to be involved in the quantitative component of the study only. Amendments were made to the Edith Cowan University ethics application to allow the participation of boarding hostels from the government sector. In addition ethics approval was sought through the Department of Education (WA) to commence the study. Government boarding hostels self-selected into the formative study. Four hostels participated in the study, comprising one metropolitan boarding hostel and four regional co-educational boarding hostels. Following agreement to participate in the study one of the co-educational regional hostels withdrew from the study, leaving three participating boarding hostels.

3.3.3 Recruiting participants

3.3.3.1 Students attending boarding houses

Data were collected from students attending boarding houses that formed part of independent schools. Passive consent procedure, where participants actively opt out of participating in the study, was used for all students in non-government boarding houses (Shaw & Cross, 2012). Parents of all students in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10 were contacted to seek consent for their child to participate in the quantitative research. Information letters were mailed by the participating schools directly to parents. Reply-paid envelopes were included so parents could return the consent forms to the University. Approximately a half (52%) of

all students invited to participate completed a questionnaire. Year 8 students provided the lowest proportion of responses (44%), followed by Year 7 (52%), then Year 9 (54%), and Year 10 (55%). Female boarding students residing in independent boarding houses completed the highest number of questionnaires (84%), followed by males in independent boarding houses (63%) and students in co-educational boarding houses (34%; includes government students).

3.3.3.2 Students attending boarding hostels

Data were collected from students in three government boarding hostels. In all government hostels active consent, where a consent form must be signed by a parent / guardian before a student can participate, was required for students to complete the survey. Parents were posted consent forms directly by the boarding hostel. Reply paid envelopes were included to encourage parents to mail the consent forms back to the University (Shaw & Cross, 2012).

3.3.3.3 Participant demographics

Of the 267 students who completed the questionnaire, 158 (59%) were male and 109 (41%) were female, 22 (8%) of the students indicated they were international students and 20 (8%) identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Of the students who participated in the study 14 were in Year 7, 64 students were in Year 8, 57 students were in Year 9 and 117 students were in Year 10. Three students began boarding before Year 7, 32 began in Year 7, 137 students began boarding in Year 8, 23 in Year 9 and 51 in Year 10.

3.3.4 Quantitative instrument

Limited research has been published regarding which variables moderate or mediate the transitioning experience of boarding school students. Chapter Two outlines a range of possible variables for consideration, the research published (where available) and their association with boarding students' transitioning experiences. Due to the limited evidence surrounding the experiences of boarding students, mediating and dependent variables were determined a priori to explore possible associations (Table 5).

In this section the development of the pilot instrument will be discussed followed by an explanation of each of the scales used within the instrument. Information regarding each scale will include how the scale was sourced, why the scale was included, a description of the items within the scale, any changes made to the scale following the pilot test and why these changes were necessary.

3.3.4.1 Relating the research questions to the quantitative instrument

The development of the instrument is presented in accordance with research questions two through to five of this thesis as they relate to the quantitative findings. Research questions 2-5 were designed to better understand the experiences of young people as they transition from home to boarding school. They explored transitioning activities and their reported helpfulness, measuring homesickness, strategies associated with ameliorating homesickness and boarding student help-seeking behaviour when experiencing homesickness. More detail is provided about each of these variables in Table 5, and the survey instrument can be found in Appendix 2.

Table 5. Strategy used for data analysis for research questions 2 to 5

Question Two	Question Three	Question Four	Question Five
<p>Dependent variable: What transitioning activities do boarding students undertake and are these helpful? (Q13)</p>	<p>Dependent variable: Does the homesickness scale used appear to measure homesickness with validity and reliability? (Q15)</p>	<p>Dependent variable: Do the strategies adopted by boarding students to reduce homesickness appear to be effective? (Q16)</p>	<p>Dependent variable: What factors appear to be associated with boarding students' homesickness help-seeking behaviour? (Q16)</p>
<p>Moderating variables: Gender (Q2) Year started boarding (Q3) Current year level (Q5) Enrolment status (Q6) Aboriginal (Q7) International (Q8) Family location (Q10)</p>	<p>Are there any underlying constructs?</p> <p>How well does the scale correlate with the single homesickness question? (Q14)</p>	<p>Moderating variables: Gender (Q2) Year started boarding (Q3) Current year level (Q5) Enrolment status (Q6) Aboriginal (Q7) International (Q8) Family location (Q10)</p>	<p>Moderating variables: Gender (Q2) Year started boarding (Q3) Current year level (Q5) Enrolment status (Q6) Aboriginal (Q7) International (Q8) Family location (Q10)</p>
<p>Mediating variables: Boarding house connectedness (Q37) Boarding staff connectedness (Q39) Loneliness (Q40)</p>	<p>Moderating variables: Gender (Q2) Year started boarding (Q3) Current year level (Q5) Enrolment status (Q6) Aboriginal (Q7) International (Q8) Family location (Q10)</p>	<p>Mediating variables: Boarding house connectedness (Q37) Boarding staff connectedness (Q39) Loneliness (Q40)</p>	<p>Mediating variables: Boarding house connectedness (Q37) Boarding staff connectedness (Q39) Loneliness (Q40)</p>

Research question two explored transitioning activities and their reported helpfulness when transitioning into boarding school. The dependent variable (Q 13) related to transitioning activities, asking students whether they participated in any of the listed activities and how helpful they found these activities. Moderating (or demographic) variables included gender, year started boarding, current year, Aboriginality, whether they were an international student, family location, enrolment status, school setting (single sex or co-educational). The mediating variables explored associations between transitioning activities and connectedness to staff and boarding house and loneliness.

Research question three investigated the process of measuring homesickness and the factors associated with homesickness. An adapted version of Fisher's homesickness scale (Q15) (Fisher et al., 1990) and the question asking students 'How often did you feel homesick' were used to test the concurrent validity of the instruments and to better understand measuring homesickness and the underlying constructs presented within these data. The demographic variables as listed for question two, were used as moderating variables.

Research question four sought to understand the strategies adopted by students to reduce homesickness and their reported helpfulness. The dependent variable used was the homesickness scale (Q16). The mediating variables included transitioning activities, homesickness help-seeking, connectedness to staff and boarding house and loneliness. Moderating variables explored were gender, year started boarding, current year level, Aboriginality, International or domestic student and family location.

Research question five aimed to better understand boarding students and their help-seeking and coping behaviour when they experience homesickness. The dependent variable was the question relating to help-seeking behaviour and its reported helpfulness (Q16). Mediating variables included the homesickness scale, connectedness scales and loneliness scale. Moderating variables included gender, year started boarding, current year level, Aboriginality, international or domestic student and family location.

3.3.4.2 Instrument development

Interviews and focus groups conducted with key stakeholders, students and parents as a part of the *Boarding the Future Project* assisted in identifying the issues of importance to be explored in the development of the student questionnaire. Feedback from the focus groups was also used to develop the variables used within scales, where no scale previously existed. These included the transitioning activities scale and the homesickness help-seeking scale. Items within the instrument included measures for demographic data, transitioning activities, homesickness, help-seeking, loneliness and connectedness to school and staff.

Of the abovementioned scales a number had been previously validated and were based on those used in the Cyber Friendly Schools' Project and the Supportive Schools Project (Cross et al., 2009; Shaw & Cross, 2012). A scale of homesickness indicators (Fisher et al., 1990; Resnick et al., 1997), a school connectedness scale (McNeely et al., 2002), a staff connectedness scale (Hanson & Kim, 2007; McNeely et al., 2002; Resnick et al., 1997) and a scale of loneliness (Cassidy & Asher, 1992) were included. The items and scales from the student instrument selected for analysis in this thesis are summarised and detailed in Table 6. Cronbach's alpha for each of these scales has also been presented in this table.

Table 6. Summary of items and scales used in the student instrument for this thesis

Part of Questionnaire	Concept measured
Q1	Age
Q2	Gender
Q3	Year started boarding
Q5	Current year level
Q6	Enrolment status
Q7	Aboriginal
Q8	International
Q10	Family location

Part of Questionnaire	Concept measured	α (n)
Q13	Transitioning activities (descriptors of 10 transitioning activities)	0.678 (260)
Q14	Homesickness (How often have you felt homesick?)	Single item scale no α (263)
Q15	Fisher's Homesickness scale including 15 descriptors adapted from Fisher et al. (1990)	0.835 (260)
Q16	Homesickness help-seeking (17 descriptors)	0.823 (260)
Q37	Boarding house Connectedness with four adapted descriptors (McNeely et al., 2002; Resnick et al., 1997)	0.763 (253)
Q39	Connectedness to boarding staff including six descriptors (Hanson & Kim, 2007)	0.890 (267)
Q40	Loneliness including nine descriptors adapted from Cassidy and Asher (1992)	0.722 (253)

3.3.4.2.1 Student demographic data

This study used exploratory findings from the qualitative data to guide the selection of demographic variables included in the student instrument. The study asked students about their gender, their current Year level (and the Year level they began boarding) and whether they were international boarding students. These variables have been previously identified as potentially impacting upon the transitioning experience of a boarding student (Fisher et al., 1990; Han et al., 2000a). Students were asked to indicate the location of their family's primary residence. This question was included as stakeholder interviews indicated this as a possible predictor of successful (or otherwise) transition into boarding. Students were asked to select between 'My family lives in a city' (1), 'My family lives in a community outside of a town' (2), 'My family lives on a farm' (3) and 'My family lives in a country town' (4).

3.3.4.2.2 Transitioning activities

Information gathered and analysed from the qualitative interviews and focus groups was collated into a list of possible transitioning activities undertaken by boarding students. This list was developed into statements including the following activities; mentoring program, tour of the school, sleep over before school started (with or without parents), written information sent home, orientation day, information on the Internet, starting school a day early, another

student telephoning and a staff member telephoning. A rating scale was developed to measure the helpfulness of these activities, this included 'Very helpful' (1), 'Somewhat helpful' (2), 'Not at all helpful' (3) and 'I did not take part in this' (4). The Cronbach's Alpha of this scale was $\alpha = 0.678$.

Table 7. Reported helpfulness of transitioning activities

Transitioning activities	Valid n	Very helpful n(%)	Somewhat helpful n(%)	Not at all helpful n(%)	I did not take part in this n(%)
Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	260	32(12)	51(19)	16(6)	161(60)
Tour of the school and boarding house	264	89(33)	138(52)	12(5)	24(9)
Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	262	82(30)	55(21)	17(6)	108(40)
Sleepover WITH parents before school started	260	23(9)	32(12)	22(8)	183(69)
Written information sent to you or given to you	263	70(26)	119(45)	35(13)	39(15)
Orientation day	264	146(55)	82(31)	14(5)	22(8)
Information provided over the Internet	262	39(15)	100(38)	39(15)	84(32)
Starting school a day earlier than the other students	264	55(21)	72(27)	19(7)	118(44)
Another student telephoning before you started	261	29(11)	46(17)	17(6)	169(63)
A staff member telephoning before you started	260	8(3)	34(13)	19(7)	199(75)

3.3.4.2.3 Measuring homesickness

The homesickness scale was informed by relevant literature and further developed from information obtained through focus groups and interviews with stakeholders, students and families. Items in the scale were drawn from Fisher's work with young people in defining homesickness (Fisher et al., 1990) including: missing family, missing home environment, need to return home, missing friends, feeling a loss of ways of life, crying, lost and lonely, feeling unhappy, feeling depressed, regret for the decision, hating new place, feeling ill, feeling disoriented and no confidence. From this list the decision was made to leave out the categories missing friends, regret for the decision and feeling disoriented as the qualitative data from this thesis' focus groups did not support the inclusion of these categories. However, student focus group data supported the inclusion of the following additional statements; 'Wanting to avoid school because I felt so homesick', 'Was not able to concentrate in class because I was missing my family', 'Worried about my family' and 'Had trouble getting to sleep because of homesickness.' A five-point Likert-type scale was used to measure frequency levels from 'This has never happened to me' (1), 'Once or twice' (2), 'Every few weeks' (3), 'About once a week' (4) to 'Most days' (5). The variables, means and Eigenvalues of the factors after rotation and Cronbach's Alpha are shown in Table 8 and Table 9.

An item was included in the student instrument to strengthen the homesickness data and to assess the correlation between the single item and the multiple response question. This item asked students the question 'How often did you feel homesick?' The descriptors in this instrument were generated using the information obtained from the qualitative component of the study. Students selected from seven descriptors, which were assigned values of between 1-7 'I have not felt homesick' (1), 'I felt homesick when I first started boarding, but it got better within a few weeks' (2), 'I felt homesick when I first started boarding and it took a while for me to feel better' (3), 'I felt homesick when I first started boarding and it took a long time for me to feel better' (4), 'I feel homesick every time I come back to school from home' (5), 'I feel homesick almost all of the time' (6) and 'I feel homesick all of the time' (7). Data collected from this scale had few responses to values 6 and 7, hence these responses were combined and labelled 'Almost always homesick'. Pearson's correlation was used to

examine the correlation between the direct question 'How often have you felt homesick' and the 15 specific categories of homesickness. Fair to moderate correlation was found between 13 of the 15 variables $r = 0.319 - r = 0.538$, with the two variables not displaying a significant relationship with the direct question being 'Felt I hate the boarding house' $r = 0.183$ and 'Felt sad about having to be a boarder' $r = 0.271$.

A post hoc factor analysis was conducted on the homesickness scale using an Eigenvalue cut off of 1.00 to determine if there were underlying constructs or themes in the data. The data were subjected to maximum likelihood and rotated to optimise the factor structure using Varimax with Kaiser normalisation. Three factors emerged with the variance once rotated being 22.1% (Factor 1), 18.2% (Factor 2) and 16.3% (Factor 3) (Table 3.9), this equates to explaining 56.7% of variation in the data, which Field (2009) describes as acceptable for the sample size of the study. The largest factors for each variable were grouped and labelled: Psychosomatic, Separation distress and Grief and Loss. Psychosomatic (Factor 1) included statements 'Got upset / cried because I felt homesick', 'Felt physically sick (sore / upset tummy, headache, tight chest) because I was so homesick', 'Felt a lack of confidence', 'Wanting to avoid school because I felt so homesick', 'Was not able to concentrate in class because I was missing my family' and 'Had trouble getting to sleep because of homesickness'. Separation distress (Factor 2) included statements 'Missed my family', 'Missed my family environment', 'Felt like I needed to go home' and 'Worried about my family. Grief and loss (Factor 3) included statements 'Feeling like I have lost my normal way of life', 'Felt lost / lonely', 'Felt unhappy', 'Felt sad about being a boarder' and 'Felt I hate the boarding house'. Cronbach's alpha for factor 1 was $\alpha = 0.878$ for factor 2 it was $\alpha = 0.833$ and for factor 3 the alpha was $\alpha = 0.795$.

Table 8. Eigenvalues and variance of factors after rotation - homesickness

Factor	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.32	22.12	22.12
2	2.73	18.20	40.32
3	2.45	16.35	56.67

Table 9. Rotated Factor Matrix - homesickness

Homesickness variables	Factor		
	Psychosomatic	Separation distress	Grief and Loss
Missed my family	.227	.859	.109
Missed my family environment / home	.179	.756	.208
Felt like I needed to go home	.307	.499	.415
Worried about my family	.401	.540	.204
Feeling like I have lost my normal way of life	.244	.263	.455
Felt lost / lonely	.397	.373	.494
Felt unhappy	.227	.377	.627
Felt sad about having to be a boarder	.213	.143	.683
Felt I hate the boarding house	.138	.020	.689
Got upset / cried because I felt homesick	.573	.419	.223
Felt physically sick (sore / upset tummy, headache, tight chest) because I was so homesick	.704	.107	.196
Felt a lack of confidence	.478	.350	.354
Wanting to avoid school because I felt so homesick	.768	.155	.340
Was not able to concentrate in class because I was missing my family	.704	.329	.177
Had trouble getting to sleep because of homesickness	.714	.259	.196

3.3.4.2.4 Homesickness help-seeking

During the qualitative interviews and focus groups parents and students described the strategies they felt were and were not helpful when young people experienced homesickness. These data were used to develop a scale to measure the helpfulness of strategies employed by students when they felt homesick. The item asked students 'When you felt homesick, did you find any of the following helpful?' Included in the item were sixteen statements (Table 11) (not including 'other') with response options including 'Very helpful' (1), 'Somewhat helpful' (2), 'Not at all helpful' (3) and 'I did not do this' (4) (See Appendix 2). Following the pilot test of the instrument the statement 'Listening to music or talking books' was changed to become two separate statements: 'Listening to music' and 'Listening to talking books'. The change was in response to focus group feedback following the pilot survey where many students reported listening to music but not listening to talking books; hence the categories were separated. The variables, means and Eigenvalues of the factors after rotation and Cronbach's Alpha are shown in Table 10 and Table 11.

A post hoc factor analysis was conducted on the homesickness scale using an Eigenvalue cut off point of 1.00 to determine if there were underlying constructs or themes in the data. The data were subjected to maximum likelihood and rotated to optimise the factor structure using Varimax with Kaiser normalisation. Three factors emerged with the variance once rotated being 19.2% (Factor 1), 17.4% (Factor 2) and 14.6% (Factor 3) (Table 10), the combined factors accounted for 51.3% of variance which Field (2009) describes as acceptable for a data set of this size. The largest factors for each variable were grouped and labelled: 'Parental contact', 'Keeping busy' and 'Conversing with staff/students'. One variable 'Talking with friends' was found to be cross loading on Factors 2 (.428) and 3 (.482). This variable was included in both of these factors as it was deemed to be of equal relevance to both keeping busy and conversing with staff and students. 'Parental contact' (Factor 1) included the statements 'Talking to my parents on the phone', 'Text messaging my parents', 'Going out on leave with my parents', 'Going on leave with someone other than my parents', 'Emailing my parents' and 'Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave'. 'Keeping busy' (Factor 2) included the statements

'Talking to friends', 'Keeping busy', 'Trying to have a positive attitude', 'Listening to music', 'Reading books/magazines', 'Exercising or playing sport' and 'Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own'. 'Conversing with staff/students' (Factor 3) included the statements 'Talking to friends', 'Listening to talking books' 'Talking to a boarding house staff member' and 'Talking to older boarding students'. Field (2009) recommends making sense of the factors by exploring their themes and taking this into consideration when accepting values less than 0.4. With this in mind the cut off for this analysis was set at 0.392 and above for inclusion into the factor. Cronbach's alpha for Factor 1 was $\alpha = 0.847$ for Factor 2 was $\alpha = 0.747$ and for Factor 3 was found to be $\alpha = 0.876$.

Table 10. Eigenvalues and variance of after rotation – homesickness help-seeking

Factor	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.07	19.19	19.19
2	2.79	17.43	36.62
3	2.34	14.63	51.25

Table 11. Rotated Factor Matrix – homesickness help seeking

Homesickness help-seeking variables	Factor		
	Parental Contact	Keeping Busy	Conversing with staff/students
Talking to my parents on the phone	.601	.372	.228
Text messaging my parents	.544	.241	.345
Going out on leave with my parents	.745	.203	.125
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	.514	.271	.225
Knowing when my parents	.798	.270	.136

would next be visiting me or taking me on leave			
Emailing my parents	.424	.190	.362
Talking to a boarding house staff member	.291	.192	.590
Listening to talking books	.069	.211	.426
Talking to an older boarding student	.180	.246	.739
Talking to friends	.301	.428	.482
Keeping busy	.373	.655	.309
Trying to have a positive attitude	.356	.788	.230
Listening to music	.293	.597	.301
Reading books/magazines	.189	.470	.376
Exercising or playing sport	.280	.512	.431
Being able to find a quiet, private place where I could spend time on my own	.294	.392	.284

Homesickness help-seeking statements were recoded, responses 'Very helpful' and 'Somewhat helpful' were scored as (1) and 'Not at all helpful' and 'I did not do this' were scored as (0).

3.3.4.2.5 Connectedness to boarding house

The measure used to quantify connectedness to the boarding house was an adapted version of the school connectedness scale developed by Resnick et al. (1997) and later used by McNeely et al. (2002) for the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health. Perceived school connectedness was found to be protective against every health risk behaviour measured (Resnick et al., 1997). The original scale was altered so that 'school' became 'boarding house', the statement 'I feel safe in my school' was removed, as question 38 (not used in this thesis) of the instrument is a scale used to determine perceptions of safety. The item used four descriptors being 'I feel close to people in this boarding house', 'I feel like I am part of this boarding house', 'I am happy to be at this

boarding house' and 'I am treated fairly by staff in this boarding house'. A five-point Likert-type scale was used to measure responses ranging from 'Never', 'Sometimes', 'Usually' to 'Always', including a response option for 'Unsure'. A post hoc factor analysis was conducted on the homesickness scale using an Eigenvalue cut off point of 1.00 to determine if there were underlying constructs or themes in the data. The data were subjected to maximum likelihood and rotated to optimise the factor structure using Varimax with Kaiser normalisation, only one underlying theme emerged from the data. The measure produced a mean of $\bar{x} = 3.12$ (where a higher score represented greater perceived connectedness), a standard deviation of $sd = 0.693$ and internal validity $\alpha = 0.763$ for this sample was obtained.

3.3.4.2.6 Connectedness to boarding staff

Positive health and well-being outcomes for young people have found to be associated with their perceived school connectedness, relatedness and centrality to school staff, in particular teachers (Lohmeier & Lee, 2011; McNeely & Falci, 2004; Rosenfeld, Richman, & Bowen, 2000). The six-item scale, measuring environmental resilience, was taken from an analysis of the findings from the biennial Californian Healthy Kids Survey. Hanson and Kim (2007) analysed the instrument and recommended combining questions in the subcategories of 'Caring relationships at school' and 'High expectations at school', these subcategories originally each had six statements. By combining the categories the reliability increased to $\alpha = 0.90$. Since this study the scale has been further validated by Furlong, O'Brennan, and You (2011). The qualifying statement was altered to better suit the boarding context by changing 'At my school, there is a teacher or some other adult who...' to 'In my boarding house, there is a staff member or some other adult who...'. Response options included: 'Really cares about me', 'Tells me when I do a good job', 'Would notice when I am not there', 'Wants me to do my best', 'Listens to me when I have something to say' and 'Believes that I will succeed'. The statements were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale including 'Never' (1), 'Sometimes' (2), 'Usually' (3) and 'Always' (4) and including 'Unsure' (5). A post hoc factor analysis was conducted on the homesickness scale using an Eigenvalue cut off point of 1.00 to determine if there were underlying constructs or themes in the

data. The data were subjected to maximum likelihood and rotated to optimise the factor structure using Varimax with Kaiser normalisation, only one underlying theme emerged from the data. A mean score was calculated as $\bar{x} = 2.93$, higher scores represented greater perceived connectedness. The coefficient alpha of the scale was $\alpha = 0.890$ (Table 6) for this sample.

3.3.4.2.7 Loneliness

Loneliness was explored as a variable impacting upon transitioning into boarding. The scale used to measure this variable was an adapted version of Cassidy and Asher's 23 item Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction questionnaire which was found to be a psychometrically sound, reliable measure of loneliness in young children (Cassidy & Asher, 1992). The items focusing on hobbies and interests were removed from the scale. The remaining items were compared against information gathered in the focus groups and interviews. 'School' was replaced with 'Boarding house', simple present tense was maintained, however the beginning of the sentence was changed from 'Do you' to 'I' in all cases where this appeared in the original survey. Of the nine statements seven were positively keyed, the remaining two were negatively keyed with reverse scoring being applied to the negative measures. The statements selected included 'I feel alone in my boarding house', 'I have lots of friends to talk to in my boarding house', 'I have nobody to talk to in my boarding house', 'I don't have anyone to spend time with in my boarding house', 'I'm lonely in my boarding house', 'I feel left out of things in my boarding house', 'There are areas of my boarding house that make me feel scared' and 'I feel there are areas of the boarding house that are safe'. Response options included 'Never' (1), 'Sometimes' (2), 'Usually' (3) and 'Always' (4).

A post hoc factor analysis was conducted on the homesickness scale using an Eigenvalue cut off point of 1.00 to determine if there were underlying constructs or themes in the data. The data were subjected to maximum likelihood and rotated to optimise the factor structure using Varimax with Kaiser normalisation. Two factors emerged with the variance once rotated being 27.5% (Factor 1), 23.8% (Factor 2) (Table 12), the combined factors accounted for 51.2% of variance which Field (2009) describes as acceptable for a data set of this size. The largest factors for each variable were grouped and labelled: 'Being alone' –

referring to isolation or having no one around and 'Feeling lonely' – the emotional response to being alone. One variable 'It's hard for me to make friends in my boarding house' was found to be cross loading on Factors 1 (.494) and 2 (.504), this variable was included in both of these factors as the statement included words that relate to the theme evident in both factors. As with the homesickness help-seeking scale factors above .425 were included as a factor. Cronbach's alpha for Factor 1 was $\alpha = 0.855$ for Factor 2 was $\alpha = 0.826$.

Table 12. Eigenvalues and variance of factors after rotation – Loneliness

Factor	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2.47	27.46	27.47
2	2.14	23.77	51.23

Table 13. Rotated Factor Matrix – Loneliness

Loneliness variables	Factors	
	1 Being alone	2 Feeling lonely
I feel alone in my boarding house	.307	.732
I'm lonely in my boarding house	.562	.693
I feel left out of things in my boarding house	.499	.536
It's hard for me to make friends in my boarding house	.494	.504
I have nobody to talk to in my boarding house	.723	.440
I don't have anyone to spend time with in my boarding house	.886	.263
There are areas of my boarding house that make me feel scared	.321	.350
I feel there are areas of the boarding house that are safe	.033	.099
I have lots of friends to talk to in my boarding house	.396	.433

3.3.4.3 Validity and reliability of student instrument

A variety of measures were employed to assess the validity and reliability of the student instrument. The questions used in the instrument were reviewed for face and content validity by a panel of experts including health promotion professionals, biostatisticians, experienced boarding personnel, epidemiologists and teachers (n = 9). A number of iterations of the instrument were circulated to the panel for comment prior to the pilot and the final instrument being developed by (Portney & Watkins, 1993; Windsor et al., 1994). Once a final draft was developed the key stakeholders were asked to make comment on the face validity, or the extent to which each question appeared to measure the construct it was intended to measure, for example did the homesickness help-seeking question appear to measure help-seeking strategies employed by boarding students. This group was also asked to consider each question for content validity, the extent to which each statement and rating scale addressed the relevant thoughts, feelings and behaviours associated with the construct being explored. Finally the questions were examined by the author to assess the breadth and depth of content evident in the instrument (Bryman, 2012; Portney & Watkins, 1993; Windsor et al., 1994). Cronbach's alpha was assessed for each of the scales using SPSS Statistics for Macintosh, 64-bit edition, version 21 ("IBM SPSS statistics," 2012), these calculations are included in Chapter 7 and in Table 6 in Section 3.3.4.2.

3.3.4.4 Pilot testing the instrument

The pilot school in this study is described in 3.1.1 and involved 23 students in Year 7, 8, 9 or 10 in one regional co-educational boarding house. The author administered the self-report questionnaire through the hosting website (www.surveymonkey.com.au) ("Survey monkey," 2010) in the pilot boarding house in Term 3, 2011. The procedure used for administration is the same as is outlined 3.4.4.5. The survey instrument used in *The Boarding the Future Project* included questions, which were not analysed for the purpose of this thesis, as such some wording changes and the removal of questions did not relate to this thesis. Only two of the questions used for analysis in this thesis were altered

after the pilot test, as seen in Table 14. The pilot test took on average 45 minutes to one hour to complete. Students indicated this was too long and they disengaged towards the end of the survey as a result questions 11,12,13,30,32,37,39,49 and 51 were removed from the pilot version. Changes to wording occurred in questions 14,15,28,29,33,35,36,40,42,43 and 44, however these questions were not used for this thesis.

Table 14. Changes to survey following pilot testing

Question number	Original question	Altered question	Comment
Q5	What year level are you in at school?	What year level are you in at school (NOW)?	Clarification
Q16	Listening to music or talking books.	Listening to music. Listening to talking books.	Clarification

3.3.4.5 Procedure

3.3.4.5.1 Data collection

The author administered the self-report questionnaires in all boarding houses and hostels. Administration of the survey occurred during Term 3, 2011. The procedure used for pilot testing the instrument was the same procedure adopted for the study schools. The questionnaire was administered through a survey hosting website (www.surveymonkey.com.au) ("Survey monkey", 2010). Once the questions were developed these were loaded onto the website. Three experienced researchers pilot tested the survey to determine approximately how long the survey would take the students to complete. Glitches were amended and the number of questions per page was reduced following the online testing of the instrument. In addition a further two staff members at the CHPRC tested the online instrument. Once the final corrections had been made unique links were created for each of the boarding houses/hostels taking part in the study.

Class lists were obtained from participating boarding houses and hostels. Consent lists were generated indicating for each boarding house/hostel those students from whom active consent had been obtained, students for whom active/passive consent had been obtained, and students whose parents had indicated they did not wish their child to take part in the study.

3.3.4.5.2 Administering the questionnaire

Boarding students with consent completed all questionnaires during a homework session in the evening on a weeknight. The administrator read the information statement provided on the entry page of the questionnaire, invited questions and reminded students their participation was voluntary. The survey was administered using a link to a professional survey-hosting website (www.surveymonkey.com). The administrator provided each of the students who provided consent, an information card providing details of the unique web link they needed to type into their browser to access the survey. Students completed the questionnaire on either their own personal computer or using a notebook computer provided by the researcher. The administrator checked each of the students participating were able to access the questionnaire and stayed in a central location so students could access support if they so wished. Participants in the study took 30 – 45 minutes on average to complete the survey. Upon completion of the survey the administrator thanked students for their participation and provided them with a list of Australian support agencies, a small token of appreciation (e.g. ruler, pencil etc.) and a Kids Helpline information card. The manager of the boarding house/hostel was provided with information regarding how to administer the questionnaire to students who were absent and an information sheet for those students to assist them in completing the questionnaire at a later date.

3.3.4.6 Analysis of the student data

Analysis of the quantitative data was conducted in accordance with the data analysis plan as described in Table 3.5 '*Relating the research questions to the quantitative instrument*'.

3.3.4.6.1 Sample size

The sample size was limited to the eight boarding houses / hostels in the study; retrospective power calculations were conducted to ensure the sample size was sufficient to answer the quantitative research questions. Power calculations were based on power as a function of significance criterion (α), sample size (n)

and effect size $|p|$ (Cohen, 1988). This study included both one-tailed (directional) analysis and two-tailed (non-directional) analysis. Directional analysis included cases to measure possible associations according to the direction of the findings, for example 'does the number of activities undertaken by boarding students reduce homesickness related psychosomatic symptoms'. For these calculations, given the number of students in the study was 267, Fisher's criterion (Field, 2009) was used to set α at 0.05 and the effect size of $r = 0.18$ (demonstrating a small to medium effect), with a confidence interval of 95%, the power was ascertained at 91% (Faul, Erdfelder, Georg Lang, & Buchner, 2009). Two tailed (non-directional) analysis with the same parameters as the one tailed test results in a power calculation of 85%. Hence, there was sufficient power to conduct the quantitative analysis to measure small to medium effects (Faul et al., 2009).

3.3.4.6.2 Data cleaning

The initial analysis of the independent boarding house data was conducted using the analysis function in the hosting website for the questionnaire (www.surveymonkey.com) ("Survey monkey," 2010). Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were harvested and stored for each of the boarding houses/hostels who completed the questionnaire. Data were then exported into SPSS and STATA. Individual schools were saved as unique files and then combined to form a merged data file that housed all student questionnaire data. Student data were then analysed using the software package SPSS Statistics for Macintosh, 64-bit edition, version 21 ("IBM SPSS statistics," 2012) multi-level models with random effects were conducted in STATA / IC (Version 13.1 for Mac).

3.3.4.6.3 Univariate analysis

An exploration of the data through analysis of each variable was conducted. Measures of central tendency, dispersion and distribution were analysed, these were assessed using normal probability, box plots and histograms.

3.3.4.6.4 Bivariate analysis

Bivariate analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between two variables, for example, is the number of transitioning activities undertaken associated with reductions in reported homesickness. The relationship between dependent variables, moderating and mediating variables was explored using Pearson's Chi-square test where data were nominal, and the Mann-Whitney to compare two ordinal groups and the Kruskal-Wallis (non-parametric version of one-way independent ANOVA) to compare three or more ordinal groups. The strength of relationships was tested using Lambda and Goodman and Kruskal's (λ) measures. Moderately significant differences were represented by a p-value of $p < 0.05$ and highly significant differences were represented by $p < 0.01$.

3.3.4.6.5 Multivariate analysis

Relationships between three or more variables were analysed using multi-level regression models with random effects to explore a number of independent variables and their possible relationship with a dependent variable, for example, is homesickness associated with loneliness and being connected to school. A factor analysis was conducted on the adapted Fisher homesickness scale (Fisher et al., 1990), the homesickness help-seeking scale, Cassidy and Asher's adapted loneliness scale (Cassidy & Asher, 1992), Hanson's connectedness to staff scale (Hanson & Kim, 2007) and the connectedness to the boarding house scale (McNeely et al., 2002; Resnick et al., 1997) to explore underlying themes within the data.

3.4. Summary

Data were collected for this study, through the *Boarding the Future Project*. A mixed methods approach was adopted for this thesis with qualitative data examined using a phenomenological approach with the intent of providing thick and rich descriptions (Smith et al., 2009) from parents, which in turn informed the quantitative instrument development. Focus groups were conducted with boarding students and parents of boarders along with face-to-face and telephone interviews with boarding parents and key stakeholders. This information was used to inform the development of a student questionnaire.

These relationships explored the transitioning challenges experienced by boarding students with a particular focus on understanding how to measure homesickness, strategies associated with reducing homesickness and exploring the help-seeking behaviour of boarding students who experienced homesickness. Two hundred and sixty-seven boarding students in Years 7-10 from eight boarding houses/hostels in Western Australia completed the questionnaire. Univariate, bivariate and multivariate quantitative analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between the moderating, mediating and dependent variables.

4 Qualitative results: Transitioning to boarding school and transitioning strategies

4.0. Introduction

The qualitative results and discussion from data gathered during the parent focus groups and interviews will be described according to the dominant themes in three chapters focusing on transitioning, homesickness and separation distress. The time of transition into boarding school is for many families the culmination of years of planning. For others moving into boarding school is a more hasty decision. Either way the majority of families reported finding transitioning to boarding school an overwhelming experience. Families often began preparing their children well in advance of the transition date. While families prepared so too did schools, offering a variety of transitioning activities, beginning in some cases almost a year prior to students' point of entry. Immediately after their children moved into boarding school, parents noticed their children grieved for the freedom they had in their home environment, in addition to their children reporting initially having some difficulty organizing themselves without their family's support. Many parents celebrated their child's growth in maturity and felt the coping strategies and other life skills their children gained were in many ways a direct result of their child's boarding experiences.

4.1. Describing the qualitative sample

As described in Chapter Three, the schools participating in the qualitative section of this research were purposefully sampled. Stakeholders comprised of one representative from each of the following organisations; the Australian Boarding Schools' Association, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, the Australian Heads of Independent Schools, the Western Australian Boarding Hostels Authority and Boarding Australia. It was suggested the most common year groups for students to transition into boarding were Years 7, 8 and 10. Parents who participated in focus groups and interviews self-selected as they responded to the invitations to participate sent to all parents of students in Years 7, 8 and 10 in the project schools. Seven schools were approached to participate in the qualitative research; one all-girls independent school declined the offer due to concerns over time constraints, one all-boys independent

school declined to participate due to staff changes. Five schools participated in the qualitative research with 43 (13.7%) consenting parents (Table 15). As explained in Chapter Three, it was difficult for parents to come together for focus groups given their distance from Perth, as such for most cases telephone interviews or face-to-face interviews were arranged with participants. Thirteen parents participated in two focus groups, 18 parents participated in telephone interviews and six parents participated in face-to-face interviews at a time and location convenient to the participant. Six parents gave permission to participate but didn't respond when contacted to arrange a time for an interview.

Table 15. Parent focus group response and participation rates

	Total parents sent consent forms	Total parents with consent	Participated in focus group	Participated in interview	Response rate (focus group and interview) %
Total	315	43	13	24	11.7

Of the parents who participated in focus groups 62% (n=8) were mothers of boarders, while 38% (n=5) were fathers of boarding students. Three of the 24 parents who participated in the interviews were fathers.

4.2. Educational access, financial considerations and flexibility

Parents were not directly asked their reasons for sending their children to boarding school, nor were they asked to discuss the financial impact this decision had on their family; however parents consistently raised both of these topics.

4.1.1 Quality of education

Consistent with the findings of the 2008 Independent Schools Council survey, parents expressed concerns about the quality of education available to their children in their local areas.

“What she needs from the education system is not going to be met in this rural area.” (5P263F) [Node: Educational access]

To access what parents' felt was a better quality education for their children, many felt a sense of obligation regarding sending their children to boarding school. Despite cognitively recognising the sound reasons for boarding their children, many still struggled with the decision.

"I was concerned about sending him to boarding school but it was something that I felt we had to do." (5P285F) [Node: Educational access]

Similarly, as identified in the National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education (Balsamo, 2000), parents expressed frustration at the lack of government assistance available for families from remote and rural Australia to access what parents considered was a quality education for their children. Parents viewed boarding school as one of the few options available to educate their children.

"...just because we live in rural areas we are disadvantaged so that's a big pet peeve of ours, my husband and I, because education is probably the most important gift you can give a child yet it's very difficult." (3P253FGF) [Node: Financial issues]

4.1.2 Cost

Sending children to boarding school placed financial burden on families with a number of parents commenting on the savings plans they had in place for many years to enable them to send their children to boarding school. Parents in focus group 3PFG explained:

"As a farming family we don't have a choice, we have to send our children away and the last couple of years have been pretty tough." (3P253FGM) [Node: Financial issues];

"...most of us as parents are struggling." (3P250FGF) [Node: Financial issues]

For some families the cost of accessing education impacted on the timing of when their children began boarding with one father commenting:

"I've got four kids, that's 20 years (of paying boarding fees), 24 (years of paying) if I send (each of) them (one year earlier than originally planned) to pay for." (3P247FGF) [Node: Flexibility of entry age]

Dearden and colleagues found parents who had greater financial capacity to pay boarding fees were more likely to send their children to boarding school; this also appeared to impact on the age at which children began their boarding (Dearden et al., 2010). Parents were critical of schools that did not allow for flexibility regarding the age of entry into the school, given the financial burden this decision created for the family.

“If you won’t be flexible on that point as a boarder, we’re not interested.”
(3P253FGF) [Node: Flexibility of entry age]

4.2.2. Age of Entry

The decision to send children away to boarding in Year 7 as opposed to Year 8 was difficult for most families who felt torn between the opportunities this provided for their children and the extent to which they felt their children were ready for boarding.

“So I think for us making a decision to send them away the year earlier than is the norm was a hard thing I guess. What decided for us was the fact we are quite a small town with limited resources, only two to three children of their age group in their class. So you know coming to that decision was probably the first challenge we had to get over.” (1P157F)
[Node: Flexibility of entry age]

4.3. Preparing children

The planning by families prior to sending children to boarding school varied amongst respondents with some preparing their children for the move from birth. One mother commented “...we brought them up from the minute they could talk knowing they are going. It’s not negotiable” (1P157F) [Node: Preparing children]. For other families the decision was made due to a variety of considerations, meaning students had comparatively little time to prepare for the move.

In preparing children parents spent time talking with them about the move with the goal to prepare them emotionally for the changes ahead. A central theme amongst parents was talking in positive terms about the upcoming transition into boarding school.

“We probably spent the last three years, particularly the last year of (name) schooling here talking about it all the time and explaining to him that it was going to be okay if he felt upset, trying to give him all the positives of why we are sending him away to school, but also letting him know that it was still okay for him to feel upset, and home is always home.” (1P167F) [Node: Preparing children]

Other parents used humour as a means by which to discuss boarding in positive ways with their children.

“When my son got a bit nervous about going to (school), in just the few weeks before he left, we started making jokes about ‘Oh how am I going to survive, you’ll be down there having all this great fun and Mum will be here crying and crying without you’ and I said ‘I might miss you so much I will have to set a tent up on the (school) oval, and come and give you a kiss in the morning.’ Just being really silly about it, making him laugh and think ‘Oh God Mum, you are so embarrassing’ and that kind of took his mind off the worry of himself.” (1P157F) [Node: Preparing children]

In combination with positive conversations, parents spent time on the practical preparatory activities necessary to ensure their child’s smooth transition into boarding. These activities included: organising bank accounts, teaching their children how to wash and iron their own clothes and ensuring all the necessary items required by the school were purchased well in advance.

Parents recognised the need for their children to spend time away from them to prepare them for boarding, encouraging their children to go on camps and stay overnight with friends when they were invited. In addition, many felt visiting the boarding school a number of times prior to the move helped in the transitioning process:

“I think it’s important to make sure they go to the school a number of times.” (2P293F) [Node: Preparing children]

4.4. Transitioning

4.4.1. Understanding the parent perspective

Parents described the moment of first separation, when children left home for boarding school, as excruciatingly difficult.

“Oh, it’s extremely hard. Having children is like taking your heart out, giving it legs and watching it walk around.” (1P218F) [Node: Understanding parent perspective]

Parents reported needing an opportunity for the first separation at boarding school to be informal and flexible. Many suggested the transition activities needed to be more like family events with past parents there for support, and where their children had an opportunity to unpack and settle in with their buddies on hand; safe in the knowledge their parents were on campus. This allowed for this first separation to occur at a time when the child and parent were most prepared. Transitioning programs where the time of transition was abrupt were more likely to be received with condemnation.

“It was just turn up on Sunday night, drop the girls off and leave. I can say they did it really poorly. I was really distressed as I dropped our daughter off because all of a sudden, it was; ‘That’s it ladies, you had dinner, it’s time for the girls to go.’ I was like, ‘What?’ I wasn’t quite ready for that.” (2P285F) [Node: Understanding parent perspective]

4.4.2. Big change from country school to boarding school

Transitioning from a small country school / community into a boarding house attached to a large school was described by parents as daunting for their children.

“I think for him, being from a small private school in a country town, and suddenly you’re surrounded by...you know, it’s the challenges of high school where they’re suddenly one of 100, instead of one of 20.” (2P329M) [Node: Overwhelming]

The challenges associated with students being able to navigate a large campus added to the fear parents described they witnessed in their children as they approached transitioning into the new school environment.

“I think she missed her old school friends...she was used to a very small country school and she was freaking out about getting lost.” (5P287F) [Node: Homesickness]

Many families approached this by acknowledging the enormity of the change and remaining positive about the capacity their child had to overcome these challenges and settle into boarding school. Parents innately understood what researchers have discovered; that adolescents need greater autonomy and opportunities to focus on peers to create a sense of identity (Eccles et al., 1993). Either a positive or negative affect was described by those parents who had attended boarding school themselves, with some remembering their terrible experiences of loneliness and others describing how boarding school assisted them become independent and resilient.

“I think parents have to acknowledge that it is a massive change for them, particularly when they have come from such a small school and small town. I think learning to navigate around the school, what you have to remember to take from which class to which, having to organise yourself in the boarding school, they have been thrown in at the deep end. But I do think that they come out the other side better off.” (1P157)
[Node: Overwhelming]

4.5. Transitioning activities

4.5.1. School sleepover

The fear of the unknown that young people experienced, as mentioned by their parents, was addressed in part by offering a school sleepover transitioning activity. Parents overwhelmingly supported this activity with many speaking of the opportunity it allowed for their children to familiarise themselves with their new environment.

“What it did was remove that fear of what it is going to be like so they knew what the rooms were like, they knew the breakfast routine; they just had a feel for this utterly and completely strange place.” (2P299F) [Node: Transitioning activities]

Predominantly parents were pleased with the sleepover program offered; however, others had suggestions regarding how to ensure their children had the best opportunity to have a meaningful experience during the sleepover.

“I think offer a few more activities to get to know one another. They sort of followed the routine which really didn’t allow them to get to know each other...They had a school tour and that sort of thing but they didn’t really

do much as a group, or things that helped to break the ice between them.” (2P302F) [Node: Activities offered]

4.5.2. Orientation

The transitioning activity most commonly discussed by parents was the Orientation Day offered by schools. Parents appreciated the efforts of the whole school community to welcome them and their children.

“I thought that it was really great, the orientation and the friendliness of the students, the teacher, the whole community. The school community was involved in it (which was great), welcoming new parents.” (2P299F) [Node: Orientation day]

For most parents Orientation Day was also perhaps the most memorable transitioning activity, as for most it was the day when their plans of sending their children to boarding school became a reality in their minds.

“Orientation is at the end of fourth term, you turn up for a day and you are bombarded with all this information which is really overwhelming.” (1P218F) [Node: Orientation day]

The feeling of being totally overwhelmed was one shared by many parents.

“Although it’s fantastic, it’s so overwhelming, not just for the parents, but also for the child.” (1P176F) [Node: Overwhelming]

4.5.3. Mentoring programs

Mentoring programs received mixed reviews by parents who reported their children either had a wonderful mentor; or, one who had no impact on their child’s successful transition.

“Ah, when my first went it was absolutely useless, his peer support leader was bloody hopeless. But they have improved and when my youngest went, his peer support (leader) was brilliant, he was fantastic.” (1P218F) [Node: Mentoring programs]

Beneficial activities associated with the mentors that parents agreed on were: phone calls from mentors in the January before their child began boarding,

mentors showing their children where to go (including in the day school), and having someone else to talk to when there were problems.

“I know (name) has a Year 12 that is his buddy, and I know once that when something was happening he wouldn't go and see (name of staff member) and I said ‘Well why don't you go and see your buddy?’ and I think he did do that, so you know that system is good.” (1P157F) [Node: Mentoring programs]

Vertical groupings of students, whether it be in the day school, or in the boarding house, where active and / or passive mentoring opportunities were provided was viewed positively by parents who found comfort in the knowledge that older students were supporting their children.

“I think it's quite good having them all mixed in houses because I think the older boys support the younger boys and the younger boys look up to them.” (2P341F) [Node: Rooming structure]

In addition to the benefits described by parents of younger students, Matsuba and Walker (2005) found young people who were exposed to the suffering of others were more likely to demonstrate concern and care for future generations who suffer from similar circumstances in adulthood. Parents reported their older children, especially those who had significantly suffered from homesickness, developed a keen interest in supporting younger students when they experienced homesickness. Parents reported their children grew in maturity, had an opportunity to experience a big brother / sister relationship that they may not have had at home, developed their personal sense of responsibility, became good role models for younger students and improved their self-esteem and confidence.

“He has sort of been like a big brother to some of the little Year 7 and 8's so he has had that brother relationship that he would not have had at home.” (2P299F) [Node: Mentoring programs]

“And the buddies organise secret friends and that sort of thing, they also do things that take courage; the girls all look out for each other.” (5P287F) [Node: Mentoring programs]

Most parents also felt it was important to integrate all year levels within the one boarding house, while allowing for age-based rooming arrangements; they felt this made for a more home like atmosphere along with additional mentoring benefits.

“We need to promote it as a family environment, so that the older kids are looking after the younger kids, so they are all looking after each other. ‘Cause what we found with our kids coming into boarding, they develop strong bonds with their boarding mates, even those of different ages.” (1P61FGF) [Node: Homely environment]

4.5.4. Parent contact

Opportunities to connect with other boarding families gave parents a sense of security and allowed them to share common experiences.

“After that first orientation weekend where all the boys went off to a table and left the parents to get to know the other parents, probably from then on I was really comfortable.” (3P247FGM) [Node: Parent strategies]

Some schools offered opportunities for new boarder parents to meet with boarder parents whose children had been boarding for some time or who had finished school, with one mother commenting:

“All the boarding parents were there together, we had some boarding parents that were past boarder parents that you know, had other children boarding there as well. They were able to help us new parents by answering questions, relieving us, giving us a glass of wine or whatever it may be, take us up to one of the rooms that their girls have been in...that was brilliant.” (2P263F) [Node: Parent strategies]

Providing parents with nametags at functions was appreciated with a mother explaining: “...everybody wears them on campus, which is great because they know who you are.” (5P285F) [Node: Parent strategies]

4.6. Organisation and life skills

Transitioning into a new environment brought with it many challenges, as retold by parents. One of the most commonly discussed challenges was the difficulties boarding students experienced in organising themselves and their time, with parents commenting about their children struggled to keep their room tidy, remember the correct books, pack their sports uniform and other daily tasks.

“I think that it is a struggle, particularly organisation, not having Mum to say ‘Did you remember...don’t leave your shoes there you won’t be able to find them in the morning.’ Or reminding them about things, they struggle in their first term with that kind of thing.” (1P157F) [Node: Organisation]

While parents recognised the challenges, they also relished in the opportunity for personal growth this provided their children.

“I find it does build their independence and their ability to problem solve and self-esteem in itself because they’re doing it themselves.” (2P302F) [Node: Development of life skills]

Many parents reported these opportunities allowed their children to develop a sense of autonomy, competency and readiness in their lives; all attributes that are essential for human development (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci et al., 1991; Maslow, 1968).

Finding a balance between overwhelming students with daily tasks and educating them regarding essential life skills proved to be a challenge; many parents worried about their child’s capacity to organize themselves or felt their children left boarding school totally unprepared for life outside the institution of boarding.

“Our son finished Year 12 last year, and he is living on his own in Perth, ‘cause he got an apprenticeship. Some girls’ schools, girls do their own washing and stuff. I think it’s great that the boys are looked after as far as that’s concerned and the food. But sometimes I don’t know whether that’s part of the activity or they do a rotation around kitchen, they don’t do it everyday, participate in the kitchen, help with the cooks,

prepare the food, two or three boys are doing it one day or a few days this week. Fair dinkum he was useless when he left here. Washing and ironing your clothes, how to switch an iron on, how to adjust it, how to turn it off! I think they need some exposure to that.” (1P30FGM) [Node: Development of life skills]

4.7. Transitioning into a new environment

Overcoming the transition into boarding school was made more difficult for young people by the vast change in environment that most reported they experienced. The yearning for space, and for a place where they could go to be on their own heightened the feelings of distress that parents witnessed in their children.

“His space, because we are from a farm, he is so used to being able to jump into a vehicle and you know, go for a drive or go up to the shed and start making something. The restriction to space and being able to do whatever he likes to do I guess, because he is a very hands on child, that is what he has probably found the hardest to adapt to I would say.” (1P176F) [Node: Lack of freedom]

Comments were made regarding the difference in rules between boys’ schools and girls’ schools, this was exacerbated when parents had children at both schools as parents were placed under extreme pressure; in particular from their daughters, to ask for them to have permission to do things their siblings in other schools were allowed to do: “She gets tired of all the rules...we have one boy at (school name) and the boys have so much more freedom.” (3P54F) [Node: Need for freedom]

For students the transition into the boarding house meant a shift from living with their nuclear family to living with many young people in confined spaces. While this did provide an opportunity for young people to focus more on peers and create a sense of identity, seen as important by researchers in this field (Eccles et al., 1993), it provided other challenges for boarding students. Many of the parents interviewed commented on their children adjusting to the lack of privacy within the boarding house.

“He never really had any privacy to have a cry” (1P157) [Node: Homesickness]; “Sometimes I can tell that he is homesick, but he won’t cry or won’t really say that much because he has got other people around” (1P157) [Node: Homesickness]; “They need time out...to get away from all the noise, voices, buzz” (3P192FGF) [Node: Homesickness strategies]; “They’re just growing up and they sort of want their own privacy and there’s not a lot of privacy in boarding.” (2P341F) [Node: Importance of own space]

“Both of my kids are quite self-sufficient, they like to be around other people but they both like their own space and they both like to retreat into their own corners for time out. And they found that really, really difficult to adjust to at (school). Especially in the lower years, there is just nowhere to hide.” (1P218F) [Node: Importance of own space]

4.8. Transitioning into a new academic environment

Parents were not only concerned about how their children would settle into boarding, but additionally they recognised the move represented significant changes in academic expectations, including a move from what was often a very small school to a much larger school.

“(Child’s name) looks at the scales they give him at the end of term report on where his place is, and he has gone through the state-wide testing and he was consistently in the top ten percentile in each area, he comes to (school name) and he’s either in the middle or just under it. Sometimes he’s just over it. He felt really depressed over it for the first couple of years.” (3P253FGM) [Node: Academic pressure]

Comments were made regarding academic pressure being linked to homesickness, one parent explaining, “School commitment over-load triggered homesickness” (3P25FN). Parents’ concerns regarding their children being overwhelmed academically, was shared by many. One mother who attended a boarder parent support meeting at her daughter’s school retold one discussion held during a meeting of this group.

“Last year with (name) she really struggled with the homework, like really struggled. Coming from a little country town where she basically had to

read a book and do your tables to suddenly having all these assignments, and I was worried it was just her. But then we went to a meeting and nearly everyone was saying ‘Oh my goodness my child is really not coping with this’. It was good because then the school realised it needed to put in place some strategies to help these children.” (1P157F) [Node: Academic support]

Parents encouraged schools to consider testing and streaming students from before their arrival, as being moved soon after their arrival to other classes to better meet their needs, meant another social and academic change for their children.

“I think even though there’s no testing to get into this school I think they need to have some sort of assessment level...because our problem has been (name) is going to have to change classes so make a whole load of new friends to be able to get into the maths support...even though they had a psych report so they had a six month lead knowing he was weak at maths, that is another transition he is going to have to make.” (3P254FGM) [Node: Academic support]

“...perhaps there could be more support from the outset...just to bring them up to level because with maths and english if you have flaky foundations then you will always struggle even though you might be gliding on the surface.” (3P250FGM) [Node: Academic support]

Effective communication between the day school and the boarding house, and boarding families was seen as critical by boarding parents who reported there were clear links between their child’s happiness at school and their happiness in the boarding house.

4.9. Boarding environment and structure

Creating a homely environment within the boarding house was viewed by parents as particularly important. While part of this recommendation related to the staff, structural recommendations were also made. These recommendations were seen as being important considerations to help make a positive transition into the boarding house.

“I want a home for my sons at school” (1PFG30F) [Node: Homely environment];

“I want the boys to live in a house, a home, where it’s friendly, there’s laughter, I want to see kids lying around in their pyjamas on the couch” (1PFG61F) [Node: Homely environment]; and,

“I want to have loud music going on when I come in. I look in there and I think ‘Oh God, it’s dark, it’s boring’, I want to hear laughter and noise and TV and football, I want it all go.” (1P43FGF) [Node: Homely environment]

Comments were made about the facilities available in boarding houses, with parents discussing where air-conditioning was needed and refurbishment was anticipated. While parents did not expect glamorous conditions for their children they did expect facilities to be maintained and at a similar level to that of the rest of the school.

4.9.1. Activities

Activities offered by boarding houses emerged as a theme of importance to parents, a number of whom felt not enough activities were offered for their children and that school facilities were under utilised by boarding staff. Parents recognised the importance of their child’s ability to keep busy to prevent them from feeling homesick and to assist with their smooth transition into the boarding house.

“I just think that whole pool is sitting there for the whole weekend and here those kids are roasting in the boarding house... I would’ve liked in first term for more social stuff to be done. I just thought those kids are all new and... most people left on the weekends, there’d only be 20 in the boarding house left and they just sit around for the weekend.” (1P240F) [Node: Activities offered]

Many parents felt activities should be made compulsory with comments such as “Younger kids need structure” (2P335MN) [Node: Activities offered] and “I really think it needs to be compulsory to do sport...you can say ‘Come on let’s go for a walk’” (3P4F) [Node: Activities offered]. There was a sense that peer pressure

impacted on decisions young people made regarding attending activities, with one mother commenting:

“The thing is there are a lot of activities that are put up that are great, but the boys won’t go...like in Year 8 and even now, if their mates aren’t going.” (1P43FGF) [Node: Activities offered]

Parents wanted to support their child’s school’s endeavour to encourage boarders to participate in activities, particularly on the weekends; however, they felt this was difficult if they did not know in advance what was on offer for their children.

“In the first term...we are all trying to make boarding a positive experience for our daughters. Trying to get them really excited on Wednesday when they are sad, and we don’t know there is ice-skating on Friday or Saturday. We could not even make it sound positive because we did not know what the activities were.” (5P263F) [Node: Not knowing what is going on]

4.10. Staffing boarding houses

4.10.1. Care and compassion

Dalton (23 March 2013) and McNeilage (2013b) described the expressions of grief that parents of boarding school students reported experiencing. In this study every participant in either the focus groups or interviews spoke of the distress they experienced when their children transitioned into boarding school.

Parents were very aware of the importance of their children being able to relate well with both staff and students in their new environment (Lambert, 1968) and suggestions were made regarding how boarding house staff could assist in facilitating an environment that helped parents feel confident about their decision to send their children to boarding school. The importance of the house mother within the boarding environment was highlighted by participants with many expressing their gratitude towards the warmth and friendliness they brought to the environment.

“I think it is fantastic having her there all the time just for the kids to sit down and chat with her at afternoon tea times...” (1P176F) [Node: Friendliness of staff]; and, “She poked her head in the door and she is

saying goodnight. I just think that's home. It was so beautiful there I wanted to move in!" (1P61FGF) [Node: Friendliness of staff]

Parents commented on the need for staff to understand their perspective, and about their concerns regarding staff taking over the role of parent, without taking into consideration that boarders still have parents who are very actively involved in their children's lives.

"I think maybe the line between where parenting begins and ends, parenting from the parent's end and the school takes over, I think sometimes that line becomes very blurred and very deep. And sometimes the school may be gets a little bit confused about what their role is." (1P249F) [Node: Understanding parent perspective]

"I think they just need to have a bit more open communication. I think sometimes they fail to remember that they're actually our children that we are leaving with them." (1P218F) [Node: Communicating with parents]

Others remarked about the lack of understanding staff demonstrated regarding the needs of their child.

"I've got to constantly remind myself these kids are not their kids, they don't feel the same way about them as you do, you're the mother." (3P54F) [Node: Understanding parent perspective]

Parents were searching for staff that demonstrated understanding towards their children's needs.

"Sometimes if they go to somebody they'd say 'Oh well that's the way it is' and I can't stand those answers, or, 'You've got to learn to do this,' it's like yeah well that's what I'm trying to do! It's a dismissal." (3P54F) [Node: Friendliness of staff]

Given the importance of connectedness and its links with higher academic outcomes, less at-risk behaviour and as a predictor of future mental health outcomes (Anderman, 2002; Resnick et al., 1993) it is not surprising parents wanted staff to know their child as an individual.

“I’m disappointed, because I would tell the house mother things about his personality hoping she’d say ‘Yes I’ve noticed that’ and she wouldn’t, she sort of made comments like ‘Oh yes is he’s like that is he?’ and I’m like – surely you have noticed.” (3P54F) [Node: Staffing]

There were comments made, particularly from parents of boys regarding the tendency of some staff to expect the boys to discharge distress when their sons expressed this.

“They’re telling my 14 year old son to toughen up, I don’t want pouncy wouncy (sic) boys, but what’s wrong with loving your boys and giving them something when they have had a really hard day at school?” (1P43FGM) [Node: Homesickness]

These findings are consistent with research in this field (Bonny et al., 2000; Deci et al., 1991; McNeeley & Falci, 2004), as trust proved to be an issue of great importance with parents one mother described, “As far as the welfare of our boys, it is the most important thing to have trust in the person that is looking out for your son.” (1P43FGF) Another mother explained:

“One thing that could be even more helpful is if...the parents ring the kids have said something to them, to the parents, and they just need a bit of reassurance. They don’t necessarily want the staff to change the situation...when they’re straight forward with you, then you know you have that confidence in them.” (2P302F) [Node: Trust]

4.10.2. Staffing structures

Parents expressed varying degrees of understanding regarding the staffing structures in operation at the boarding houses their children attended. They did, however, discuss particular issues including: the age of staff, teachers and boarding staff, staffing the boarding house overnight; and, changes to boarding staff, each of these will be explored with reference to feedback provided in focus groups and interviews. In direct and indirect ways staffing structures were reported as impacting on the successful transition of their children into boarding.

There was support for younger staff members forming a part of the boarding house staffing complement, with parents feeling the younger staff could relate well and be excellent role models for their children. Concerns were raised regarding the level of training received by younger staff.

“The masters are 19 to 25 years old. They are totally in charge at busy weekends, afternoons and nights. I feel worried at that young age that they can handle the responsibility. They are great for activities and role modeling, I’m not sure they are good with homesickness and do not have really great judgment.” (3P25FN) [Node: Structure of staffing]

“I think it’s great that they have young boys there, particularly boys that have gone onto university, but I also feel that they have to make sure that those young men are taught...they can’t be friends with them, you know, they’ve got to be able to discipline them so they don’t walk all over them, and I have seen a couple of cases where one of the house masters obviously had no control.” (3P4F) [Node: Structure of staffing]

While parents appreciated boarding staff working closely with the day school they remarked about the level of exhaustion they witnessed with some teaching staff that taught all day at school and then worked through the evenings and weekends in the boarding house.

“I just notice with a couple of these younger men firstly they are overworked, so they are teachers in the school and then they have a role in the boarding school which is on top of that, and so sometimes I noticed that the way they dealt with a problem was they were too tired, they didn’t deal with it in a compassionate way.” (3P54F) [Node: Structure of staffing]

There was a great deal of discussion around staffing rosters and expectations, particularly parents’ expectations of how the boarding house should be staffed overnight. Most importantly parents wanted to know there was someone available for their children should they need support during the night. They wanted reassurance if their children were sick, for example, that they could go and knock on the door of a staff member and receive the help they needed.

Some parents expressed concerns over their children not being made to feel welcome to seek support during the night should they require this.

“I had to go to the duty master and do that on behalf of my son because he wasn’t game enough and because there is no one on duty from 11pm – 7am and all sorts of things can happen. And the worst thing is the lack of sleep boys get because of that.” (1P61FGF) [Node: Structure of staffing]

The particular situation retold above may be due to the young person not being willing to access support; however, it may also be linked to emotional illiteracy where the young person may have difficulty understanding and labeling the feelings they are experiencing (Wilson et al., 2011).

4.11. Summary

Parents described the transitioning of their children from home into a boarding house as a daunting experience where a range of challenges had to be overcome for their child to feel comfortable in their new environment. Parents worked to prepare their children for boarding, both in a physical and emotional capacity; focusing on remaining positive about their move into the boarding house. Parents appreciated transitioning activities provided by schools, such as their children having an opportunity to sleep over in the boarding house before their formal move. Parents felt such experiences allowed the children a chance to familiarise themselves with their new environment. The Orientation Day was important to parents as a means of gaining information and meeting other boarding parents; although almost all parents reported this day as being overwhelming for both them and their children. Mentoring programs were viewed as either very helpful or not at all helpful for their children, depending upon the mentor appointed for their child. While mentoring received mixed reviews from parents of younger students, parents of those students who acted as mentors spoke glowingly of the programs in place and appreciated their children having an opportunity to mentor younger students and exhibit their maturity.

Many parents encouraged vertical groupings of students where younger boarders' could have contact with older boarders on a regular basis. Parents felt vertical groupings added a more homely feel in the boarding house. Not only was rooming structure important, so too were staffing structures. Parents wanted to know there was someone in the boarding house who really knew their child, in addition they wanted staff to be available for their children if and when they needed them and for students to have access to staff during the night in case they became unwell or needed other forms of support. While all parents described the transition of their children into boarding as a challenging time, they made clear recommendations parents regarding how boarding houses could improve programs to assist in the transition process for their child/ren.

5 Qualitative results: Homesickness and homesickness help-seeking

5.0 Introduction

Homesickness has been identified in literature as debilitating to young people's capacity to flourish socially, emotionally and academically whilst at boarding school (Duffell, 2005; La Fontaine, 1991; Lambert, 1968; Schaverien, 2004). Parents of boarders were asked about the onset of homesickness in their child, the strategies they employed to help their children and the strategies they witnessed their children using.

5.1 Homesickness

5.1.1 Length of homesickness

Transitioning for some young people did not result in feelings of homesickness; however, for others homesickness was an ongoing challenge. Consistent with other research, parents explained their children all responded differently to the transition into boarding school with each child experiencing varying degrees of severity with regard to homesickness (Duffell, 2005; La Fontaine, 1991; Lambert, 1968; Schaverien, 2002). Parents most commonly reported the worst of their children's homesickness was during their first week or two of boarding.

“The school was aware of it but it was one of those things where he had to reach rock bottom over orientation where he just got very sad. We had to take a punt and hope that once he was there he would ease into it.”
(3P253FGF) [Node: Homesickness]

The onset of homesickness was delayed for some boarding students and a number of parents commented on their children not wanting to show, or talk about their homesickness for fear of further upsetting their already grieving parents.

“In second term she got really, really homesick. First term she was homesick but she didn't outwardly show it. I'm not sure if that was because she was distressed with me being so upset and stuff.” (5P285F)
[Node: Homesickness]

Other common responses from parents included reporting homesickness as something their children struggled with for either; all of their first term in boarding or, as an ongoing issue for their children.

“It was quite tough for him and it still is, it probably always will be.”
(2P229F) [Node: Homesickness]

A number of parents felt their children were homesick for their first year of boarding with this dissipating in their second year. The stigma surrounding mental illness continues to be a barrier to young people accessing support (Gulliver et al., 2010; McLaughlin et al., 2006; Phillopson et al., 2009; Sawyer et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2011; Yap et al., 2011), one mother felt this stigma assisted her son to overcome his homesickness as he had to assist other younger students:

“Quite honestly I don’t think he was completely over it until the following year, where then he became the next year up and with him becoming that year older and the next year group coming through and a couple of kids having problems, he sought of stepped up and took on a bit of a mentoring role. By becoming one of the bigger boys, it wasn’t so cool to be so homesick.” (1P218F) [Node: Homesickness]

5.1.2 Adjusting to living away from home

The adjustment to living away from home in a totally foreign environment was, in the opinion of many parents, an even bigger obstacle to their children’s happiness than was homesickness.

“I think he just hates it because it’s not home. Just the whole thing it’s to me it’s like a prison.” (1P43FGF) [Node: Need for freedom]

“Initially I would say that they missed home, missed things about home, their dog and their stuff like their bed and that sort of thing. It’s adjusting to something new, but I think as time went on, they are learning to be comfortable there.” (2P302F) [Node: Homesickness]

5.1.3 Triggers for homesickness

The isolation of being separated geographically from the rest of the family was reported as a major trigger for homesickness; in particular when another family

member became unwell, or there was a problem the rest of the family was dealing with at home. Many families, for whom this became an issue, discussed opting to bring their children home for the weekend so they could see things were okay at home before they were able to settle again.

“Last year it was quite draining having (name) ringing so much. She went through a phase where one of her brothers ended up in hospital quite unwell, and that was when she got really unsettled, she was ringing five to ten times a day and sobbing on the phone and I found that really draining. We ended up going and getting her and bringing her to the hospital to see her brother, so she could see he was still alive...I think that helped.” (1P157F) [Node: Homesickness strategies]

5.2 Strategies employed by parents to help their children to overcome homesickness

5.2.1 Visiting and taking children on leave

The more geographically removed parents were from their children often determined how regularly they could visit them or take them on leave. In general; however, the more homesickness experienced by their children, the more often parents came to visit them or took them on leave. Some parents drove to see their children every weekend while others felt it was better to try to space out their visits.

“I spent every weekend in Perth. I would come down on Saturday, and I still had the two boys at home because she is the oldest. So I would just come down every Saturday morning and sit in the corner of the boarding house, and she would just go and do her things, she would go out and get a Mr Whippy... and she would go out and get a paper and I would just sit there, and she was right for the week. And I’ve done that for the whole term.” (1P61FGF) [Node: Homesickness strategies]

Parents had varying opinions regarding whether or not to come and visit their children often or whether they would settle into boarding more quickly if they spaced out their visits. Regardless of their philosophical approach to the challenge of homesickness they all agreed the decision was not an easy one.

“It’s hard, I’m not going to say it’s not. I would say yes I think you need to have a basic ground rule. I think if you take them out every weekend then

they are going to keep pulling on your emotional heartstrings. They are not going to actually set a focus and say look, we are there for a reason.” (5P263F) [Node: Homesickness strategies]

A number of parents explained how their children went through periods of time when they were very homesick, during these times parents responded by visiting their children or taking them out on leave more often than they normally would.

“I did a lot of driving in the second term, it really was Monday to Friday...and she could cope through the five days and then it got to the next term and she settled right down, she was fine.” (2P285F) [Node: Homesickness strategies]

5.2.2 Planning when you are visiting

Most parents agreed taking their children out on leave alleviated homesickness; however, they also discussed the benefit of planning ahead of time with their children when they would be visiting or taking them on leave. Parents learnt quickly that the weekends recommended by schools for boarders to travel home in the calendar was not enough for their children. Most families negotiated before their children went back to school when they would be visiting during the upcoming term.

“We tried to focus them on (knowing) we’d come down in two weeks, so I guess that the five week span between long weekends and the end of term, I found for my kids it was too long. So we tried to slot in a visit in between. We’d come to Perth, and it seemed to get them through.” (1P176F) [Node: Going on leave]

5.3 Homesickness help-seeking

Sawyer et al. (2012) described three key steps in help-seeking the first of which is the capacity of young people to recognise there is a problem. One boarding parent retold the story of her son not quite recognising his homesickness symptoms until well after the episode of homesickness had passed. Parents also reported their children were unlikely to access support for their homesickness from staff.

“What do you mean you feel homesick? What is it? How do you know you’ve been homesick?’ He said ‘I just wake up in the mornings and I’m just sad’ and he said ‘But when I get up and get dressed and I get going, I forget about it,’ and then at the parent-teacher interviews at the beginning of this term, his house master sort of said ‘Yeah, I think he might have had a little bit of homesickness.’ He hid it well from us anyway. We knew he had a little bit but I think it might have been worse than he was letting on.” (1P240F) [Node: Homesickness]

5.4 Mobile phones and technology

Even though parents were geographically very removed from their children, they reported being in most cases, the first point of contact for their children when they felt homesick or were experiencing problems at school. Parents reported their child’s mobile phone was the most important device for communicating with them either by text message or by telephoning. Due to this, the discussion in focus groups was at times polarising with regard to opinions on boarding house policies. Some parents wanted their children to be allowed to have their mobile phones with them all of the time with very limited restrictions and other parents wanted the boarding house to remove phones from students overnight and to more closely monitor their children’s use of their mobile phone.

While expressing their gratitude at the improved communication mobile phones allowed, parents also commented on their concerns regarding what many felt was the unregulated use of devices, including but not limited to mobile phones. Parents felt the level of supervision offered in a boarding context made it difficult for staff to regulate their child’s use of technology. The majority of parents were in favour of times when their children were not allowed access to technology as they felt this more closely represented what would happen in their own homes.

“I think that they need to get some really strong policies in place regarding the use of electronic toys and computers and all that sort of thing. You know collecting them up and handing them out regularly.” (3P4F) [Node: Mobile phones and technology]

Concerns were raised by parents regarding mobile phones giving children access to inappropriate content and to the possibility of other people being able to make contact with their children on a regular basis. They discussed the capacity for this to go unnoticed within a boarding house context and in general, recognised it was a complex situation for boarding staff to manage and spoke of the additional responsibility it placed on staff.

“I do think there is trouble, there is so much responsibility on the boarding schools anyway and you know there is this thing that; this new technology that has come around and placed so much more pressure on them.” (2P299F) [Node: Mobile phones and technology]

Policies’ regarding the collection of mobile phones overnight was vehemently debated amongst parents with some adamant they should be collected and others feeling this was an unnecessary intrusion on their child’s privacy, making communication with their children more difficult than it needed to be. One father commented on how he and his wife found the constant contact with their son became upsetting, others similarly negotiated with the school to have their child’s phone removed from them overnight to stop their child from calling them all through the night.

“It was good that he could contact us, but it got to the point where we almost had to get it confiscated off him because he’d ring us at all hours at night, sometimes he’s ringing up to eight times a day, you know, it’s quite distressing...it was just hard as the parent because all you’re hearing is the negatives. You’re not hearing the good things that are happening in the day that he’s okay with.” (2P329M) [Node: Mobile phones and technology]

A number of parents felt the policies should be adapted for different year groups of students; there was a sense that students needed to learn to use their mobile phones appropriately whilst in the protection of the boarding house.

“My daughter’s school, unfortunately they find it and confiscate it overnight which I think is really stupid, retarded idea because...how on earth are they going to manage the following year when they’re at university?” (1P249F) [Node: Mobile phones and technology]

Other families were in general agreement with the policy; however, sought flexibility regarding the needs of their children in addition to wanting the boarding house to provide areas where they could talk to their children in private if their phone had been handed in.

Baier and Welch (1992) found the sense of embarrassment people experienced when feeling homesick lead to a lack of acknowledgement of the symptoms as people sought to hide their feelings. This appeared to be supported by parents as they expressed concern over their children not feeling comfortable in publically expressing their homesickness.

“Look I understand why they do it, it’s really frustrating. You know you’ve got to make sure that then you talk to them before they hand their phone in, and yes we can contact them after study and all the rest of it, on the house phone but there is only a half an hour period that you can do that and if they’re really upset they are not going to get upset on the phone...in the area where they have the phone.” (1P218F) [Node: Mobile phones and technology]

5.4.1 Regular and open communication

All parents in the study talked about the importance of communicating regularly with their children. Parents felt by doing this they not only remained connected with their children but it also ensured any problems were addressed quickly leading to a better outcome for their children.

“I believe if you keep the communication lines open when there’s something trivial going on then when the big things happen it’s such a natural thing so it can be discussed as if it’s trivial, it’s a passing comment. Whereas if it’s a big thing for him to suddenly ring then I think the problem is exaggerated.” (2P314F) [Node: Regular and open]

Text messaging was the most common means of quick communication between parents and their children. Parents felt this way they could remain connected to their children without being invasive or demanding on their time.

“She will text us like every day and I will send her texts but we are not on the phone constantly with each other. I would say to her ‘Have a good day’ in the morning and (husband) would say ‘How was your day and

have a good night we love you' and that sort of thing (via text)." (5P287F)
[Node: Mobile phones and technology]

Regular and open communication was not only seen as a means to address any problems, it was also seen as a way of ensuring their children understood they continued to be a very important part of their family:

"So I think as much contact as possible because they need to know that they are still part of the family, because they have lost everything when they go there." (2P263F) [Node: Regular and open]

5.4.2 Video conferencing

The separation of the family, in particular the separation of siblings was discussed by many parents as a source of distress both to their children at boarding school and their children at home (or in other boarding schools). Parents found video conferencing was an effective way of keeping family bonds alive. In particular for young children the benefit of being able to see their brother and sister helped them overcome their grief of not having them at home.

"I've found with Skype before with kids they can hold up things and show each other, and (name) is going 'Oh look here is the picture you drew me and I've put it up here on my wall,' she could show things and I felt that was really good for keeping those brother – sister bonds going." (1P157F) [Node: Mobile phones and technology]

Video conferencing may be an important means by which parents can remain actively engaged in their child's education, with possibilities for parents to meet their children's teachers through video conferencing or to assist with homework and or other day-to-day tasks. This contact could ameliorate the increased risks of poor health, found in the American National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health study, associated with parents who are disconnected from their children's education (Hoffnung et al., 2010).

5.4.3 Understanding communication patterns

Parents described patterns of communication that emerged when communicating with their children and the importance of understanding these

patterns. Many described how their children would contact them frequently, often calling a number of times a day, when they were upset and that when their children were happy they rarely heard from them.

“When she first went it was two to three times a day or more often she would call us. This year with (name), we’ve been going ‘Hello, are you still alive?’” (1P157F) [Node: Frequency of telephoning]

“Well at the end we realised that she sends me many texts when she is miserable and we do not hear from her when she is really happy.” (5P287F) [Node: Frequency of telephoning]

Additionally parents recognised the importance of being available for their children and understood that at times all their children needed was reassurance from them.

“I text him but the fact he hasn’t felt the need to respond to a text or ring us up or whatever is comforting, so it’s more for us to ring him.” (3P250FGF) [Node: Mobile phones and technology]

“It’s just be there for them and not ever not be available, you can always say ‘I can’t talk to you (right now) I’m going to ring you at this time,’ just to allow them to get rid of all that panic, of feeling unsafe or feeling they can’t cope or that sort of thing. Then as time goes on they feel more comfortable.” (2P302F) [Node: Communication]

5.4.4 Contacting boarding staff

Most parents viewed contacting boarding staff as an important means by which they could determine how distressed their children were. Many spoke of receiving teary calls from their children only to discover from the boarding house staff minutes later that they were happily playing. Other parents called on boarding staff to comfort their children following upsetting phone calls. In a focus group with parents one father spoke of the importance of informing parents of strategies to implement when their children were distressed, this concept could be seen to support the findings of Jorm et al. (2010) whose South Australian study that found teacher training assisted in proactive help-seeking behaviour.

“It’s important to let parents know that because it happens to every parent (sic), the kid’s calling in dire straits over the phone, and then they say okay and hang up and then you are all worried, and the best thing to do right then, I reckon, is to ring the house master to say ‘I’ve just had a call from my young bloke’ because the first thing you want to do is jump in the car and go down and hug the kid. So first thing you should do is ring the housemaster. He’ll go check it out and nine out of ten times he’ll come back and say he’s laughing.” (1P30FGM) [Node: Contact person]

5.4.5 Tough love

Challenging conversations were a common topic of discussion when speaking with parents about the communication they had with their children. Often parents spoke of the distress it caused them when they had to say no to their children or when they were not able to fulfill the requests their children made of them.

“I just gave him the phone and said ‘You talk to your daughter.’ And the poor man, he went off and cried after he got off the phone. But he had to be blunt and say ‘No we are not picking you up, you are there until the weekend and we will come down and see you (then).’” (5P263F) [Node: Homesickness strategies]

Other parents, upon reflection, commented that they would have made different decisions if they had their time over again.

“I wouldn’t have gone down as often, I would probably have made him stand on his own two feet a little bit more, and a bit more tough love.” (1P218F) [Node: Homesickness strategies]

While boarding schools implemented programs to support the effective transition of students into their new environment, parents often spoke of wanting the boarding house to set rules that provided more structure for their children, therefore alleviating the need for parents to say ‘No’ to their children’s requests to go on leave; particularly during the first few weeks of starting boarding.

“I think it would’ve actually helped him a lot if they had enforced that the kids don’t come home for the first few weeks, as silly as it sounds, because it would’ve just given him more of a chance to settle in without the rollercoaster of coming home and getting back into it all the time.” (2P329M) [Node: Homesickness strategies]

5.4.6 Reassurance

Not only did parents seek reassurance for their children, they also sought to be reassured by the boarding staff for their own personal wellbeing. Parents looked for the boarding school to clearly articulate a contact person who knew their child and had regular contact with their child. Lambert (1968) findings regarding the importance of connectedness between staff and students as a key to successful transition was evident in comments made by parents about the importance of the relationship between parent, staff and student.

“So that is the most important thing, the need to have a contact person to say ‘Hey this is what we are hearing over the phone, can you keep an eye on our boy, ask him a few questions, see how he is going or just take him aside and see how he is going?’” (1P157F) [Node: Contact person]

Often parents talked about the frustration of not being able to make direct contact with the person designated as the primary carer for their child. One mother explained how being able to make direct contact with her child’s carer gave her a sense of control.

“The most important thing I think for us is to always maintain our peace of mind. So that is where we cannot have every bit of parental thing taken from us. Just for me to have left a message for a particular person gives me a bit of control over a situation as opposed to me passing on a message to A, B, C to get to D.” (5P263F) [Node: Contact person]

5.5 Homesickness strategies employed by students

5.5.1 Keeping busy

Keeping busy was a strategy parents used to overcome the sadness of being separated from their children and also as a strategy they implored their children to use to overcome homesickness.

“Adjusting positively from the kid’s point of view, I told them to keep busy. By doing nothing, you’re thinking about wanting to be home.” (5P285F)
[Node: Keeping busy]

One mother expressed her frustration with her child’s inability to take responsibility for his time; this sentiment was expressed by a number of other parents who reported they felt it was important not to accept ownership for their children’s decisions.

“I have had to step back and say ‘I don’t want to know you are bored, it’s not my fault, if you are bored, find something to do.’ I’d take books down, and a couple of parents have bought book vouchers for their kids.” (3P263F) [Node: Keeping busy]

5.6 Summary

Parents reported their children suffered from varying degrees of homesickness with some young people suffering in an ongoing capacity, and others not having experienced homesickness at all. The onset of homesickness most commonly occurred during the first two weeks of moving to boarding school; however, a number of parents spoke of homesickness being more episodic, triggered by certain events such as the illness of a family member. A number of parents felt leaving home and the anxiety experienced by their children during this process was slightly different to homesickness and caused its own set of unique challenges.

Often parents were placed under significant pressure to visit their children or take them on leave when they experienced homesickness. All parents spoke of how taking their children on leave alleviated, albeit temporarily, the symptoms of homesickness; however, it posed other challenges with many parents speaking of the disruption the regular travelling to pick up and drop off their children

caused to their family. Parents looked to boarding schools to provide some structure with regard to leave, especially when young people first moved to boarding, and appreciated not being put into a position where they had to say no to their children's onerous leave requests. Knowing in advance when parents were visiting assisted young people in managing their homesickness, allowing them to focus on points of contact with their families.

Conversations regarding the use of mobile phones sparked vigorous debate in focus groups and heated comments in interviews. Parents all agreed on the importance of mobile phones; however, were torn as to whether devices should be collected overnight or not. Their children's access to mobile phones was reported as being both a blessing and a curse in that it enabled constant communication but also meant when their children were distressed parents received many upset phone calls during the day and night. Parents learnt to understand their children's patterns of communicating with them and looked to boarding staff to alleviate their concerns when their children had phoned in distress.

Parents provided reassurance to their children when they felt homesick and similarly looked to boarding staff to offer them support when their children were experiencing homesickness. The importance of a contact person who knew their child became very evident in conversations as parents wanted to feel they could trust the person they were speaking with knew their child and would spend time with them when they needed this.

Homesickness, when discussed with parents appeared to have not only a negative impact on boarding students, but also impacted on parents in a significant way, leaving many feeling distressed and at times helpless to provide the support they felt their children needed to settle into their new environment.

6 Qualitative results: separation distress

6.0 Introduction

Listening to parents describing leaving their children and returning home after dropping them off at boarding school was harrowing. Parents described in detail the difficulty they had in parting from their children, and how no manner of preparation equipped them for the moment of parting. They struggled adjusting to the change, dealing with their feelings of guilt, grief and worry that at times subsumed them as they returned home. Many of the strategies parents described recommending for their children, they too applied for their own purposes to assist in adjusting to the change. Siblings also grieved for their brother or sister, who for the majority of the year was no longer living at home.

While struggling with their emotions, rationally parents knew the decision they had made to send their children to boarding school provided an opportunity they would not otherwise have in their local communities. Parents focused on the positives and drew on the experiences of other boarding parents who predominantly described the great benefits and opportunities available to their children at boarding school.

6.1 Parental experience of separation distress

6.1.1 Adjustment

Adjusting to life without their children was difficult for every parent interviewed or who participated in focus groups. Parents retold, many in tears while they did so, of the sadness they experienced driving or flying back home without their child. Many parents spoke of supporting their child through their homesickness while suffering themselves with their inability to adjust to the change of not having their child with them. Marcia (2002) defined adolescence as a period of time when adults experience major changes in their lives; the language parents used to describe their experiences of sending their children to boarding school was consistent with Marcia's findings.

“I think more than anything, that my role had disappeared because I didn't work for anyone else when they were at home, so once they had

gone I thought, 'Oh great, what do I do now?'...I thought I was doing very well but I would find myself in the (local town) sitting at a coffee shop for a long time, not doing much, I think I was a bit depressed." (3P54F) [Node: Separation anxiety]

Distance proved to be a significant contributing factor to a parent's ability to feel comfortable when leaving their children at boarding school. Parents whose children had to fly home or whose home was a long drive away all spoke of the difficulty of leaving their children at boarding school, knowing if something went wrong it would be some time before they could physically get to them. Many of these families did not have the capacity to visit the school a number of times before starting at boarding school, heightening their concern.

"So it was huge because it's a flight down, you've seen the school probably once, and then you go back again." (3P250FGF) [Node: Separation anxiety]

While parents understood that it was likely they would experience feelings of distress when adjusting to not having their children with them, this understanding did little to ease their concerns regarding leaving their children.

"It's all normal and we've all been there before, so don't feel bad and like you're falling to pieces, it's just natural and you have to go through that." (1P43FGF) [Node: Separation anxiety]

6.1.2 Shock

Despite parents preparing themselves and their children for the move into boarding, this did not mitigate against the shock some parents experienced when it was time to leave their children.

"As the parents you are trying to adjust to, 'Oh my gosh, this is actually happening, this is real now.'" (1P176F) [Node: Separation anxiety]

One of the many difficulties parents spoke of was overcoming the feeling of abandoning their children, when as a parent they felt they should be caring for them. Parents were reluctant to relinquish the responsibility of being the primary carer for their children.

“So for us it’s a shock, we are letting our first born go off, and we are no longer the primary care giver, and that is a really hard thing to deal with.” (5P263F) [Node: Separation anxiety]

6.1.3 Letting go

One of the greatest struggles for many parents was coming to terms with parting from their children when they were aged twelve; this felt unnatural for parents, who worried they had underprepared their children. Despite in many cases parents knowing their children would transition into boarding school at this age, many expressed their inability to let go, which may have inhibited their capacity to prepare both themselves and their children to the best of their ability.

“For my husband and I anyway, that point of view...our first child is leaving home. And if your child is leaving home, you would think ‘Well, I’ve equipped them with some skills...I have coached them for x number of years.’ Before you become a parent and have a baby, you’re thinking; I have 18 years with this child, and then you send them off to boarding school when they’re 12. You’re sitting there thinking – we lost five years, and you don’t acknowledge that.” (5P263F) [Node: Understanding parent perspective]

6.1.4 Grief

Overcoming grief was described by parents in a way that was aligned with the Kubler-Ross (1969) five stages of grief and supported the findings of grey literature in the field (Dalton, 23 March 2013; McNeillage, 2013b). Parents described feeling ill equipped to overcome their emotional response at being parted from their children.

“Just at the most fundamental level of all you just cry and cry and cry when they first go away. It’s awful, it’s just like abandoning your child, even though intellectually you know they’re in a safe place, it’s a wonderful school, they have all these people looking after them. You know that in your brain but emotionally it’s just vile.” (3P192FGF) [Node: Separation anxiety]

Most parents described watching their children suffer from homesickness and feeling equally distressed. Despite their own emotional turmoil the majority of parents spoke of the importance of remaining positive when speaking with their children.

“It was very emotionally draining and we resolved that even though we had an emotional moment ourselves, we never did it in front of the kids, we were very careful.” (2P299F) [Node: Separation anxiety]

Siblings of young people who went to boarding school showed signs of suffering from the grief of no longer having their sibling with them. This was made even more challenging when the siblings were young and found it difficult to understand where their sibling had gone and why.

“She was missing them, they were missing her...her (brother) was crying after getting off the phone with her. We were grieving, not just (brother) and I, but the younger siblings (too). I was trying to explain to our six year old where his sister had gone and why.” (5P263F) [Node: Separation anxiety]

6.1.5 Worry

Parents worried about many things when their children went to boarding school including worrying about their children finding friends, settling in well, getting on with the staff, coping with the academic requirements and how they would manage to remember everything. For some parents, who were boarders themselves, their own experiences of boarding fed their concern.

“I was worried for (name) as to how he was going to fit in at boarding school and even now (I worry). I get a hollow feeling in my stomach on Sunday afternoons, so I was worried for (name) because it was bringing back feelings from when I was at school.” (3P247FGM) [Node: Separation anxiety]

Overwhelmingly, parents described the daily thoughts they had of their children, constantly wondering and worrying about their wellbeing.

“It felt like we had lost our arm, because we were constantly thinking ‘What is she doing tonight? Did it go all right today? What subjects did she have?’ (5P263F) [Node: Not knowing what is going on]

6.2 International perspective

Parents from remote and regional Australia often spoke of the expectation that their children would attend boarding school. For many of these families they understood this was a likely outcome of living where they did. Conversely, parents of international students had a significantly different experience. These parents spoke of the difficulty of making the decision to send their children abroad to be educated. Parents of Asian heritage who were interviewed, discussed how hard it was for them to explain to family members the benefits of their decision. Family members worried the children would become disconnected from their heritage and were concerned that sending children to boarding school from the age of twelve was too young to safeguard against this.

“Convincing the relatives around you, because I think that was a very hard one for us because a lot of our relatives would just come out and say being Asian parents a lot of them would come up to you and tell you, “The kids are best with you, why are you sending them off to a Western society at such a young age? They will lose all their cultural influence.’ I think that was a hard challenge.” (1P167F) [Node: Understanding parent perspective]

6.3 Not knowing what’s going on

Mothers and fathers described leaving children at boarding school as a loss of control over their children’s lives. Parents looked to find as many ways as possible to continue to parent their children. As boarding staff assumed the role of in loco-parentis, parents spoke of feeling pushed aside.

“You felt a bit pushed off to the side. I saw that it was not their intention but you just feel it though.” (2P314F) [Node: Communicating with parents]

Transitioning has been acknowledged in literature as a period of time where young people move from known to unknown (Greenberg et al., 1995). This transition was made even more distinctive for boarding parents who struggled to feel like they had a working understanding of their children’s school day. For most the dominant reason for sending children to boarding school was to

access what parents considered to be a better quality education for their child; with this in mind parents found it challenging to feel so detached from the primary purpose of their child's move away from home.

"I think the biggest challenge at that stage was the distance and communication with the school. I felt initially that I didn't feel a part of the system that was going on at school. Whereas a day scholar they bring home homework and you know what's going on all the time." (3P253FGM) [Node: Not knowing what is going on]

Other parents described feeling detached not only from the academic aspect of their children's lives but also socially, as they no longer had total control over where their children spent their spare time and with whom.

"I think the biggest thing you face is you feel very removed from their lives, educationally and sort of a little bit socially as well." (2P34F) [Node: Not knowing what is going on]

6.4 Inability to support children

6.4.1 Emotional support

Trusting staff to help their children in times of need was a difficulty for boarding parents; many expressed their sadness at their inability to be with their children when they needed them the most.

"I probably had tears in my eyes because I was helpless, I couldn't go and talk the issue out with (name) I had to rely on (staff name)." (5P263F) [Node: Inability to support children]

In addition to feeling sad, parents felt powerless to alter the outcome of situations for their children when they were struggling emotionally. In particular, parents who were very geographically removed from their children found it difficult as getting in the car and driving to see their children was not an option. Some boarding families had relatives in the same town, who they called upon to visit if the parents felt the situation warranted this level of support.

"I felt so powerless and I couldn't do anything...I couldn't get down to just...get to her." (1P249F) [Node: Inability to support children]

While some parents had a relationship built on trust with the boarding staff who cared for their children, others did not. There were many comments made regarding parents' concerns about speaking with staff and the possible outcome of such conversations. Additionally parents spoke of their children pleading with them to not discuss this with staff; heightening their sense of insecurity regarding the level of support available to their children. These concerns echo the work of researchers in the field, who found building connectedness was based on trust, security and mutual affection with staff who cared about the young people in their care (Bonny et al., 2000; Deci et al., 1991; Fredricks et al., 2004; Goodenow, 1993; McNeeley & Falci, 2004; Wingspread., 2004).

"It's hard as a parent because you know there'll be repercussions to talking to the staff about it, but you can't leave them vulnerable either."
(2P329M) [Node: Inability to support children]

6.4.2 Day to day support

Managing the daily requirements for boarding students was difficult for many boarding families who received phone calls from their children regarding requirements for projects, new sporting items needed, technology that was not working and a myriad of other items that needed almost immediate attention. When students first started boarding parents often struggled to know with whom they should make contact to address the needs of their children. In some schools systems appeared to be in place to address the daily-unforeseen requirements of students; while for others this was less obvious, adding to the feelings of helplessness parents' experienced.

"When they need new books or something it's hard to organise or they have outside sport and it's hard as they need to organise lifts. It's difficult as a parent organising uniforms or stationery items, it's constantly a challenge." (3P25FN) [Node: Organisation]

Many boarding parents believed sending their children away to school was necessary for their children to access a better quality education (Baker & Andrews, 1991; Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Dalton, 23 March 2013; Evans, 2008; Fisher et al., 1984; McGibbon, 2011; Stevens, 1995). It's understandable therefore that building close working relationships between the day school and the boarding house was actively encouraged by boarding parents. In particular

parents felt it was important to ensure teaching staff knew their child was a boarder and understood what this meant regarding their capacity as parents to support their children academically on a daily basis. Parents were frustrated with staff who commented on not realising their child was a boarder. While they greatly appreciated contact from teachers regarding their children's progress, equally they expected a level of understanding regarding the limited capacity they had, as boarder parents, to sit with their children and assist them with homework tasks.

"You get a message from a teacher saying that they need to be watched during prep or supported during this or that. You're not there to help them. You know it's a down side because you want to (support them)." (2P329M) [Node: Academic support]

6.5 Parent strategies used to overcome their separation distress

6.5.1 Preparing yourself for the separation

Preparation for the departure of their children to attend boarding school was described by parents as a continual mental battle. Parents, mothers in particular, spoke of spending hours speaking with other boarding parents reassuring each other of the worthiness of their choices and the normality of the awkwardness of the separation process. The need to understand the impact of parent-child attachment beyond infancy has been acknowledged by a renowned researcher in the field who wrote: "...attachment theory, which was initially directed toward understanding the attachment of infant to mother, can be useful in understanding attachments and other kinds of affectional bonds beyond infancy" (Ainsworth, 1989, p. 715).

"It's a bit like kids with attachment, when they're first learning, they'll come back to you often. Then they'll go off and they'll play, and then they'll come back. I think it's similar. It's a new stage of independence, and they need to have some sort of contact with that parent for a while, and they they'll slowly have less and less contact, and they'll work through their own issues. They'll just come back and tell you all about their achievements and things that they've accomplished." (2P302F) [Node: Development of life skills]

6.5.2 Visit regularly

When finding strategies to support their children through homesickness parents spoke of the importance of visiting regularly and of designing a plan, with their child, regarding how often they would visit. While an important strategy for young people, this was also described by parents as critical to their own capacity to cope with being separated from their children. For most parents visiting their children regularly provided them with a sense of comfort regarding their child's emotional, social and academic wellbeing.

“I spent a lot of time in Perth. I'm quite active in the community stuff where I live, so yeah just that and staying busy on the farm, not that I didn't go crazy for a while.” (1P218F) [Node: Homesickness strategies]

Family gatherings and functions remained important opportunities for boarding families to spend time together with parents describing how they went to extraordinary lengths to ensure their children attended family functions such as engagement parties, birthday parties, christenings and major school events for their siblings. Parents felt it was important for their children to know they considered the extra effort worth it to ensure their children stayed well connected with the rest of the family.

“Some engagement party comes up, you know, she is invited, yeah she is to come, we will go to her and pick her up, take her to the party, and then take her back it is huge mileage but it keeps her involved. We are trying to alleviate any isolation she is feeling through the school.” (5P263F) [Node: Parent strategies]

6.5.3 Communication

Utilising strategies, developed beforehand, to deal with difficult communication with their children was helpful for many parents who at times struggled with their children's need to talk with them about things that weren't going well in their lives. Both mothers and fathers spoke of the distress they felt at being separated from their children, supporting the findings of Bartle-Haring et al. (2002). Parents told of their need to share the responsibility for listening to their children in distress as a means to better support both their child and themselves.

“It sounds pretty obvious to me that preparation for a drastic call is always good. I mean it doesn’t matter what aspect it is, if the child is having a drastic situation, text then call in ten minutes is always a good opportunity to prepare yourself. One of you might be having a really crappy day, and you don’t want to deal with it, so hand the call over to Dad and vice versa.” (1P61FGF) [Node: Parent strategies]

Being removed from their children meant parents could no longer physically see their children when they had issues, limiting their capacity to use nonverbal cues to decipher their children’s state of mind; they had to rely on their knowledge of their children and their capacity to discern which problems genuinely needed them to make contact with the school. Parents described developing the skill of understanding how to guide their children through their problems, allowing them to take ownership of the problem while still offering their knowledge and support.

“So you have to be pretty smart in trying to work out what’s an issue and what’s not an issue and how to help them around it.” (2P320F) [Node: Communication]

6.5.4 Emotional support from other boarding parents

Parents’ spoke of benefiting from sharing with other parents in similar situations, their emotional trauma of being separated from their children. These findings supporting those of Bryant (2013) and Calderwood (2013) who found the Isolated Parents’ Children’s Association became for many parents, an important support network that linked them with other like-minded parents with whom they could laugh, cry and share common experiences.

“I have a fantastic network of older ladies from the town that have been there and done that, and it’s amazing. Just before (son) went away to school I had a lady ring me and she was telling me ‘It’s okay to be sad, it’s the worst time of your life,’ and that was just amazing just to have someone ring you and say it’s okay to be upset, it’s okay to feel really low at this time, and things like that. So the whole community support I guess, it’s fantastic.” (1P176F) [Node: Parent strategies]

6.5.5 Pragmatic support from other boarding parents

Connecting with more experienced parents, especially those whose children are at the same school as their child was helpful for parents in acknowledging their child's needs were being well catered for. Parents appreciated the boarding house organising opportunities for parents of students of all ages to come together. Similarly, the sharing of contact details amongst families was helpful for parents who needed to ask specific questions regarding the needs of their child, especially when they first started boarding.

“That interaction to start with, because there are a lot of questions you think of afterwards, and they all just come to a head and you think ‘Oh, okay.’ But little things like telling you that you may want to get them a bigger fan, they do need a bigger fan, you have to get one when you are up there...it gets hot up there, don't send chocolate in first and fourth term it just melts, little things like that.” (2P263F) [Node: Parent strategies]

6.5.6 Keeping busy

Recommending to their children to keep busy to overcome homesickness was a strategy parents employed for their own benefit as well. Parents who had other children at home found it easier to keep their daily routine similar to what it was before their child left for boarding school. Families for whom their only child had left for boarding school, or where the youngest child was leaving for boarding school recognised the importance of routine but had to establish an entirely new routine with no children at home during term time.

“Keep yourself busy, I guess from a parent's point of view do that as well, keep yourself busy and keep your day as normal as possible.” (5P285F) [Node: Parent strategies]

6.5.7 Focusing on the positives

Drawing on the benefits of the opportunities attending boarding school provided their children assisted in keeping parents focused on the positives of the experience, especially when their children were homesick or calling with problems.

“Just continually remind yourself that we’ve made this choice for good reasons and we made the decision because we knew we wanted them to have a better education.” (3P54F) [Node: Parent strategies]

The importance of forming a positive relationship with the boarding staff who were caring for their children was a priority for parents. Many had positive experiences; however, this was not always the case with some parents struggling to make connections with staff. While some parents openly spoke of their frustrations with staff, the majority felt it was important to keep this to themselves and focus on talking in positive terms with their children about the staff who cared for them. These parents recognised the importance of their children forming connections with the staff who cared for them (Lambert, 1968).

“If you don’t like the person then don’t let the children know.” (3P17MN)
[Node: Parent strategies]

6.6 Communication

6.6.1 Parents contacting children

Routines were respected by almost all parents who participated in this study as they realised the value of routine in assisting their children to cope with the daily tasks asked of them. Despite understanding why rules and routines were implemented, for some families these rules did not allow the flexibility they needed to communicate effectively with their children. In particular, those parents who were shift workers struggled to find appropriate times they could telephone their children.

“My family is not a farming family, so we find it sometimes difficult. We work different hours to farmers, so it doesn’t necessarily match very well with the...times that we are able to call.” (1P176F) [Node: Communication]

Parents were likely to respond negatively to any recommendation made by boarding staff that suggested minimising contact with their children. Parents on the whole, understood this advice was well intended; however, were likely to report they either told the staff member they disagreed or disagreed in private, with almost all parents reporting they were reluctant to accept the advice.

“When we came in here and we sat down the Year 8 co-ordinator, he made a point of saying try not to ring your son too much. Between (mother’s name) and myself we basically told him to rack off. We are going to keep our lines of communication to our son as much as possible and from him to us and that (between the ages) of 13 to 17 we want to play so much of a role in his life and if he rings us every second day just to say ‘I played soccer at lunch today,’ well we love that.” (3P247FGM) [Node: Regular and open]

6.6.2 School contacting parents

Information from boarding staff and teaching staff was gratefully received by families, regardless of whether it was positive or negative. Parents understood it may have been difficult for schools to release negative information about incidences at the school; however, explained it was difficult for them to support the school if they only heard their child’s side of the story.

“I think the fact that they tell you what’s happening even if it’s something that’s probably not a positive thing. They tell you what’s happening as much as they can.” (2P302F) [Node: Communicating with parents]

When incidences occurred parents were likely to find out about this very quickly, either directly from their child on his or her mobile phone or from friends whose children were also boarders at the school. Parents reported moving into an immediate panic response if they did not hear from the school quickly regarding what was happening, with many thinking the worst. Many reported being desperate for reassurance from the school and wanting to be able to make contact with their child, armed with knowledge from the school, so as to have a productive conversation with them.

“I would panic. I was sitting there thinking, ‘What has happened? Are they okay?’ ...so just being able to give (me) a quick call or something to say, ‘Look, this is what I’ve done, and this is what’s happened,’ I think that would be really, really reassuring.” (2P302F) [Node: Communicating with parents]

6.7 Summary

The emotional struggles described by boarding parents seemed equal to, if not greater than the struggles they described their children experienced when transitioning into boarding school. For many parents their geographic isolation resulted in them feeling disconnected from the day-to-day activities of their children and heightened their sense of fear regarding their children's wellbeing. Parents utilised strategies they recommended for their children to address their own feelings of insecurity, worry and guilt; in addition to looking to each other for support in testing times. While parents openly described their difficulties, the participants in the interviews and focus groups remained positive regarding their decision to send their children to boarding school and could attest to this providing for their children an opportunity they would not have had in their local communities.

7 Quantitative findings

7.0 Introduction

This mixed methods study investigated the school transitioning experiences of 267 boarding students aged 12-15 years old and their parents. Quantitative data were collected from students in Years 7-10 who were enrolled in one of five independent schools or three government, boarding hostels in the *Boarding the Future Project* in 2011; findings from the student survey will be presented in this chapter.

7.1 Restatement of problem

Australia is bound by a number of covenants and conventions that establish each child's right to an education ([UN], 1976). In 2000 this precipitated a national inquiry into equal access. This enquiry identified boarding schools and hostels as an important means by which young people living in regional and remote Australia could access an education (Balsamo, 2000). In 2010 Western Australia, Australia's largest and most isolated state, supported 31 boarding facilities run by either the government, independent or Catholic sectors ("Aboriginal independent community schools," 2009; "Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia (Inc)," 2013; Jackson, 2011-2012). While these boarding facilities offer a critically important means by which young people can access education, very limited research has been published to better understand the transitioning experience of boarding students and their parents, including the associated experiences of homesickness. The dramatic changes experienced by boarding students at the time of transition may influence their capacity to cope with their transitioning, including; social relationships, finding friends, fitting in and finding a sense of belonging (Berliner, 1993; Howard & Johnson, August, 2005; Pereira & Pooley, 2007). A number of studies about boarding students have reported associated negative outcomes from the experience, ranging from short-term distress to the longer term 'Strategic Survival Personality' (Duffell, 2005; Schaverien, 2002). Homesickness embodies emotional, cognitive and motivational features (Fisher et al., 1986) not dissimilar to those reported in studies into adjustment disorder (Cassidy & Asher, 1992). Adjustment disorder has been found to be linked with suicide ideation (Greenberg et al., 1995) and while the present study does not

explore associated psychological symptoms of homesickness, it does present quantitative findings showing strategies students have found helpful in reducing homesickness along with the most effective means by which young people seek help for homesickness while at boarding school. In addition, parents of boarders in this study were asked in focus groups and telephone interviews, to share the strategies they employed with their children during the transitioning process and what they found helpful in supporting their children to feel happy and settled in their new home away from home. Given the important role boarding schools play to enable access to education for all Australian students, a better understanding of the boarding transitioning process may provide both boarding staff and parents of boarders with effective approaches to support positive transitioning experiences.

7.2 Research questions

With a focus on the transitioning experiences of parents of boarders and boarding students themselves, the research questions were:

1. How do parents of boarders experience the transitioning of their child/ren into boarding school and which strategies do they perceive to be most helpful in easing the transition for them as parents, and for their children and in supporting their children when they experience homesickness?
2. Which transitioning activities do boarding students report as helpful in coping with transitioning into boarding school and are these activities associated with connectedness, their feelings of support from staff and loneliness?
3. What underlying constructs appear when measuring homesickness and which demographic variables are associated with students' experiences of homesickness?
4. What underlying factors are associated with how young people seek help for homesickness and which demographic variables, levels of connectedness, loneliness, feelings of staff support and

homesickness factors appear to be associated with help-seeking behaviour?

5. How do boarding students seek help when they experience homesickness and which of these help-seeking strategies do they find to be more effective in reducing their homesickness?

7.3 Organisation and order of presentation of findings

This chapter is organised by quantitative findings in accordance with each of the questions stated above. This follows the temporal experience of the boarding student from initial contact with the boarding facility through to associated, and in some cases long lasting, experiences of homesickness by some boarding students. Research question one is not discussed in this section as the question relates to the qualitative data and has been addressed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

7.4 Quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis was conducted in SPSS (Version 21) and STATA / IC (Version 13.1 for Mac). Factor analysis, reliability and Pearson's correlations and Chi-square analysis were conducted in SPSS while multi-level models with random effects were conducted in STATA. Linear and multi-level regression models with random effects were used to determine predictors of boarding house connectedness, feelings of staff support, loneliness, homesickness and homesickness help-seeking. Clustering at the school level was accounted for in all models.

7.4.1 Demographics

The categorical demographic variables included in the analysis were: gender, year level students were in 2011, year level they began boarding, if students were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) and whether they were international (Int'al) boarding students. These demographic variables have been found to possibly impact on the transitioning experience of boarding students (Fisher et al., 1990; Han et al., 2000a). The year level students began boarding was subtracted from the year level students were currently completing to form a continuous variable for analysis, called 'number of years boarding'.

The study also collected information about where students' families lived. The response options included: 'My family lives in a city' (1), 'My family lives in a community outside of a town' (2), 'My family lives on a farm' (3) and 'My family lives in a country town' (4). Due to the low response rates for the variable 'My family lives in a community outside a town' (n=13) this variable was combined with the variable 'My family live on a farm' for analysis purposes.

Table 1 describes the demographics of the study sample. Fewer females (41.0%) than males (59.0%) participated in the study, with the majority of students aged either 14 years (31.2%) or 15 years (34.2%). Most students were fulltime boarders (94.0%) whose families lived on a farm (59.0%) (Table 16).

Table 16. Demographic data described by frequency and valid percent

Age (years)	Frequency (n)	Valid percent (%)
12	13	5.6
13	49	21.2
14	72	31.2
15	79	34.2
16	14	6.1
17	4	1.7
Gender		
Female	109	41.0
Male	157	59.0
Enrolment type		
Full time boarder	251	94.0
Weekly boarder	16	6.0
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	20	7.5
Family home location		
International student	22	8.3
Family lives in a city	44	16.5
Family lives in a community outside of a town	13	4.9

Family lives on a farm	130	48.7
Family lives in a country town	80	30.0

n=231-267

7.4.1.1 Associations between demographic variables and connectedness to the boarding house, feelings of staff support and loneliness

The survey gathered data from students about their connectedness to the boarding house, connectedness to staff, feelings of staff support and loneliness. These measures were used in multiple regression models to explore the possible relationship between these measures and the demographic variables.

The connectedness to boarding house item, developed by Resnick et al. (1997) and later used by McNeely et al. (2002) for the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, used four descriptors. The items in McNeely et al's research investigated only overall school connectedness, as such this was amended to be more contextualised and included: 'I feel close to people in this boarding house', 'I feel like I am part of this boarding house', 'I am happy to be at this boarding house' and 'I am treated fairly by staff in this boarding house'. A five-point Likert-type scale was used to measure responses ranging from 'Never (1)', 'Sometimes (2)', 'Usually (3)', 'Always' and 'Unsure (4)', including a response option for 'Unsure'. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (using SPSS v21) utilising maximum likelihood factor analysis was used to determine the underlying dimensions of connectedness. Final estimates of communalities were iterated from squared multiple item correlations to convergence. As only one factor emerged student responses were averaged to provide a continuous variable for each student, which was used in analysis. The mean 'connected to the boarding house' score across the study population was 3.12 suggesting students 'usually' felt connected to the boarding house.

Multi-level regression with random effects was modeled in STATA showing international students are less connected to the boarding house than local students ($p=0.048$) and boys feel less connected to the boarding house than girls ($p=0.003$) (Table 17).

Table 17. Demographic variables associated with boarding house connectedness

Demographic variables	β	95%CI	P value
Age / Years boarding			
Age	0.05	-0.06, 0.16	0.351
Number of years boarding	-0.06	-0.16, 0.00	0.279
Gender	-0.30	-0.50, -0.10	0.003**
Family home location			
Lives on a community / farm	0.23	-0.08, 0.57	0.139
Lives in a town	0.12	-0.22, 0.46	0.476
International student	-0.46	-0.92, -0.00	0.048*
Fulltime	-0.07	-0.46, 0.43	0.759
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	0.18	-0.42, 0.32	0.752

n=254-264

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

The scale used to measure how supported students felt by boarding house staff members was developed from the original six-item scale, measuring environmental resilience, developed by the biennial Californian Healthy Kids Survey. Hanson and Kim (2007). Analysed data collected using this instrument and recommended combining questions in the subcategories of 'Caring relationships at school' and 'High expectations at school'. Each of these subcategories originally had six statements. Hanson and Kim (2007) found that by combining the categories the reliability measured $\alpha = 0.90$. Since that study the scale was further validated by Furlong et al. (2011). The scale used by Hanson and Kim (2007) was used for the present study with the qualifying word 'school' being altered to 'boarding house' to ensure the measure was contextually appropriate. Students were asked to respond to a number of statements following the leading question 'In my boarding house, there is a staff member or some other adult who...' including: 'Really cares about me', 'Tells me when I do a good job', 'Would notice when I am not there', 'Wants me to do my best', 'Listens to me when I have something to say' and 'Believes that I will succeed'. The statements were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale

including 'Never' (1), 'Sometimes' (2), 'Usually' (3) and 'Always (4)' and including 'Unsure (5)'. The coefficient alpha of the scale was $\alpha = 0.89$ ($n = 267$) for this sample. Responses from students were averaged with each student attaining a feeling of staff support score being a combined score measuring the one factor 'feeling of staff support'. The mean score for students' feeling of staff support across the sample population was 2.93, suggesting students 'usually' feel supported by boarding staff.

Students who identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander felt increased levels of the feeling of staff support ($p=0.012$) in comparison to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, while students who had spent less time boarding felt lower levels of staff support ($p=0.047$) than those students who had been boarding for a number of years (Table 18).

Table 18. Demographic variables associated with the feeling of staff support

Age / Years boarding	β	95%CI	P value
Age	0.10	-0.04, 0.24	0.170
Number of years boarding	-0.13	-0.28, -0.00	0.047*
Gender	0.02	-0.31, 0.35	0.854
Family home location			
Lives on a community / farm	0.12	-0.30, 0.54	0.753
Lives in a town	-0.08	-0.52, 0.35	0.436
International student	-0.51	-1.10, 0.09	0.097
Fulltime	0.26	-0.94, 0.80	0.099
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	0.24	0.13, 1.07	0.012*

n=254-264

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$

The scale used to measure loneliness was an adapted version of Cassidy and Asher's 23 item Loneliness and Social Dissatisfaction questionnaire which was found to be a psychometrically sound, reliable measure of loneliness in young children (Cassidy & Asher, 1992). The scale's reliability was assessed by

coefficient alpha as $\alpha = 0.722$ ($n = 267$). Seven of the nine items were positively keyed; the remaining two were negatively keyed with reverse scoring being applied to the negative measures.

The amended statements included 'I feel alone in my boarding house', 'I have lots of friends to talk to in my boarding house', 'I have nobody to talk to in my boarding house', 'I don't have anyone to spend time with in my boarding house', 'I'm lonely in my boarding house', 'I feel left out of things in my boarding house', 'There are areas of my boarding house that make me feel scared' and 'I feel there are areas of the boarding house that are safe'. Response options included 'Never' (1), 'Sometimes' (2), 'Usually' (3) and 'Always' (4). The average loneliness score across the sample population was 1.54 suggesting students never or only sometimes feel lonely in the boarding house.

In comparison to all other boarding students, those considered to be international students whose families lived outside of Australia, had significantly higher loneliness scores ($p=0.002$) (Table 19).

Table 19. Demographic variables associated with loneliness

Age / Years boarding	β	95%CI	P value
Age	-0.08	-0.16, 0.00	0.053
Number of years boarding	0.08	-0.00, 0.16	0.063
Gender	0.12	-0.04, 0.27	0.134
Family home location			
Lives on a community / farm	-0.09	-0.34, 0.16	0.462
Lives in a town	-0.05	-0.30, 0.21	0.726
International student	0.53	0.19, 0.88	0.002*
Fulltime	-0.06	-0.35, 0.23	0.702
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	0.24	-0.03, 0.51	0.085

n=254-264

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.001$

7.4.1.2 Summary of findings for demographic variables

Boarding students in this study were predominantly full time boarders who were aged 14 or 15 years old; 9% more boys responded in the study than girls. Multiple regression with random effects was modeled in STATA to explore which demographic variables were associated with connectedness, feelings of staff support and loneliness. Key demographic findings include: international students reported feeling less connected to the boarding house and lonelier in comparison to other students; younger students and those students whose families live in towns felt less safe in the boarding house; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students felt significantly higher levels of staff support; while, those students who had been boarding for fewer years felt lower levels of staff support in comparison to students who had been boarding for longer periods of time. Boys were found to be significantly less connected to the boarding house than girls.

7.4.2 Research question two

Which transitioning activities do boarding students report as helpful in coping with transitioning into boarding school and are these activities associated with connectedness, their feelings of support from staff and loneliness?

Students were asked in the survey which transitioning activities they participated in and the helpfulness of these activities. The choice of activities was drawn from focus groups with students and parents who discussed transitioning activities they or their children participated in. The list in the survey included: mentoring program, tour of the school, sleep over before started with or without parents, written information sent home, orientation day, information on the Internet, starting school a day early, another student telephoning and a staff member telephoning. The rating scale for each statement included 'Very helpful' (1), 'Somewhat helpful' (2), 'Not at all helpful' (3) and 'I did not take part in this' (4). For analysis, categorical variables were created where 'Very helpful and somewhat helpful' were recoded into (1) and 'Not at all helpful' and 'I did not take part in this' into (0). Categorical variables were also created to measure student participation in activities. 'Very helpful', 'Somewhat helpful' and 'Not at all helpful' were recoded into (1) and 'I did not take part in this' was recoded into (0).

Descriptive statistics identified the number of students who participated in transitioning activities. A percentage calculation using only those who had indicated they had participated in the activity determined which of these activities were found to be somewhat or very helpful. The three activities reported as the most helpful for students were, taking part in orientation day (n=242, 94.2%), a tour of the school and boarding house (n=239, 94.9%) and a sleepover without parents before they started boarding (n=154, 88.9%) (Table 20).

Table 20. Frequency of students who participated in transitioning activities and percentage of students who found this somewhat or very helpful

Transitioning activities	Participation in activity (n)	Very or somewhat helpful activities %(n)
Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	99	83.8(83)
Tour of the school and boarding house	239	94.9(227)
Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	154	88.9(137)
Sleepover WITH parents before school started	77	71.4(55)
Written information sent to you or given to you	224	84.3(189)
Orientation day	242	94.2(228)
Information provided over the Internet	178	78(139)
Starting school a day earlier than the other students	146	86.9(127)
Another student telephoning before you started boarding	92	81.5(75)
A staff member telephoning before you started boarding	61	68.8(42)

n=260-264

Multiple regression with random effects was used to determine if transitioning activities predicted connectedness to the boarding house, the feeling of staff support and loneliness. Results from these analyses can be seen in Tables 7

through to 10. Age, gender, number of years boarding and international student were entered as covariates in the models.

Findings showed the tour of the school and boarding house ($p=0.024$) and written information sent or given to you ($p=0.034$) were associated with greater connectedness to the boarding house (Table 21).

Table 21. Transitioning activities associated with connectedness to the boarding house

Transitioning activities	β	95%CI	P value
Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	0.15	-0.05, 0.36	0.147
Tour of the school and boarding house	0.37	0.04, 0.70	0.024*
Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	0.04	-0.16, 0.24	0.703
Sleepover WITH parents before school started	-0.13	-0.36, 0.09	0.251
Written information sent to you or given to you	0.28	0.02, 0.53	0.034*
Orientation day	0.15	-0.19, 0.49	0.395
Information provided over the Internet	-0.02	-0.22, 0.19	0.863
Starting school a day earlier than the other students	0.11	-0.08, 0.30	0.268
Another student telephoning before you started boarding	-0.02	-0.23, 0.19	0.842
A staff member telephoning before you started boarding	-0.17	-0.42, 0.08	0.178

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.001$

Age, number of years boarding, gender and international entered as covariates in all models
n=254-264

The tour of the boarding house ($p=0.001$) along with information provided over the Internet ($p=0.017$) were associated with greater levels students' feeling supported by staff (feelings of staff support) (Table 22).

Table 22. Transitioning activities associated with feelings of staff support

Transitioning activities	β	95%CI	P value
Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	0.18	-0.87, 0.45	0.184
Tour of the school and boarding house	0.71	0.28, 1.13	0.001**
Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	0.16	-0.13, 0.44	0.277
Sleepover WITH parents before school started	-0.09	-0.40, 0.21	0.554
Written information sent to you or given to you	0.28	-0.05, 0.61	0.100
Orientation day	-0.19	-0.64, 0.25	0.392
Information provided over the Internet	0.32	0.06, 0.59	0.017*
Starting school a day earlier than the other students	0.10	-0.17, 0.37	0.470
Another student telephoning before you started boarding	0.10	-0.19, 0.39	0.515
A staff member telephoning before you started boarding	0.11	-0.22, 0.43	0.513

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

Age, number of years boarding, gender and international entered as covariates in all models
n=253-264

Information provided over the Internet (p=0.030) and a staff member telephoning students before they started boarding (p=0.017) were both found to be associated with decreased loneliness (Table 23).

Table 23. Transitioning activities associated with reducing loneliness

Transitioning activities	β	95%CI	P value
Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	0.05	-0.11, 0.20	0.568
Tour of the school and boarding house	-0.25	-0.50, 0.01	0.057
Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	-0.04	-0.19, 0.12	0.650
Sleepover WITH parents before school started	0.14	-0.03, 0.31	0.108
Written information sent to you or given to you	-0.09	-0.29, 0.10	0.352
Orientation day	-0.04	-0.30, 0.22	0.773

Information provided over the Internet	0.17	0.02, 0.33	0.030*
Starting school a day earlier than the other students	0.09	-0.05, 0.42	0.212
Another student telephoning before you started boarding	0.12	-0.04, 0.29	0.145
A staff member telephoning before you started boarding	0.23	0.04, 0.41	0.017*

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

Age, number of years boarding, gender and international entered as covariates in all models
n=254-264

Chi-square analyses were used to explore comparisons between demographic variables and transitioning activities, to better understand which groups of students found particular activities more helpful than other students. A significantly greater proportion of girls than boys found: sleeping over without parents (p=0.003); written information sent or given to them (p=0.028) and starting school a day earlier (p=0.026) either somewhat or very helpful. A greater proportion of boys found: mentoring programs (p=0.009) and either a staff member (p=0.007) or student (p=0.003) telephoning them before they started boarding more helpful than girls (Table 24).

Table 24. Helpfulness of transitioning activities according to girls and boys

Transitioning activities	Girls %(n)	Boys %(n)	χ^2	P value
Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	22.9(24)	38.3(59)	6.847	0.009*
Tour of the school and boarding house	82.4(89)	88.4(137)	1.883	0.170
Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	63.6(68)	44.8(69)	8.897	0.003*
Sleepover WITH parents before school started	20.0(21)	22.1(34)	0.161	0.688
Written information sent to you or given to you	79.4(85)	67.1(104)	4.798	0.028*
Orientation day	83.3(90)	88.4(137)	1.376	0.241
Information provided over the internet	59.4(63)	49.0(76)	2.736	0.098
Starting school a day earlier than the other students	56.5(61)	42.6(66)	4.926	0.026*
Another student telephoning before you started boarding	18.9(20)	35.7(55)	8.681	0.003*

A staff member telephoning before you started boarding	8.7(9)	21.3(33)	7.315	0.007*
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*p<0.05, **p<0.001

n=255-263 denominator for percentage calculation varies depending on number of students who responded to question

The cohort sizes of both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and International students are small; as such data in the Chi-square analysis where more than 20% of the data has an expected cell count of less than five have been excluded from the results tables below. There were no significant transitioning activities reported as helpful by International students.

A larger number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students found another student telephoning them before they started boarding more helpful when compared with other students (p=0.018) (Table 25).

Table 25. Helpfulness of transitioning activities according Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

Transitioning activities	Non-A&TSI students %(n)	A&TSI students %(n)	χ^2	P value
Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	31.4(75)	42.1(8)	0.928	0.335
Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	51.9(125)	57.9(11)	0.256	0.613
Written information sent to you or given to you	71.8(173)	75.0(15)	0.095	0.758
Information provided over the Internet	52.1(125)	70.0(14)	2.382	0.123
Starting school a day earlier than the other students	47.5(115)	66.0(12)	1.152	0.283
Another student telephoning before you started boarding	27.1(65)	52.6(10)	5.586	0.018*

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

n=255-263 denominator for percentage calculation varies depending on number of students who responded to question

Younger students found the tour of the boarding house to be more helpful than older students (88.8%, p=0.006) (Table 26).

Table 26. Reported helpfulness of transitioning activities according to students aged 12 to 14 and students aged 15-17

Transitioning activities	12-14yr ^a %(n)	15-17yr ^b %(n)	χ^2	P value
Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	26.9(35)	26.3(25)	7.278	0.201
Tour of the school and boarding house	88.8(119)	78.9(75)	16.161	0.006*
Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	55.6(74)	49.5(47)	7.139	0.210
Sleepover WITH parents before school started	21.5(28)	20.0(19)	5.277	0.383
Written information sent to you or given to you	77.7(101)	67.7(65)	4.921	0.426
Orientation day	86.6(116)	85.4(82)	5.059	0.409
Information provided over the Internet	60.5(78)	43.8(42)	10.621	0.059
Starting school a day earlier than the other students	52.7(68)	43.8(42)	4.067	0.540
Another student telephoning before you started boarding	32.3(42)	16.7(16)	10.755	0.056
A staff member telephoning before you started boarding	15.3(20)	11.6(11)	2.275	0.810

^aAge 12, 13, 14

^bAge 15, 16, 17

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

n=255-263 denominator for percentage calculation varies depending on number of students who responded to question

Students who lived in all geographic locations found the orientation day to be one of the most helpful activities. Interestingly, a greater proportion of students whose families lived in a city found this activity less helpful than other students and a larger number of those whose families lived in a town found orientation day more helpful in comparison to other students (p=0.010) (Table 27).

Table 27. Reported helpfulness of transitioning activities according to students whose families live in a city, on a farm / community or in a town

Transitioning activities	City ^a %(n)	Farm ^b %(n)	Town ^c %(n)	χ^2	P value
Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	34.9(15)	37.0(51)	21.5(17)	7.601	0.055
Tour of the school and boarding house	88.4(38)	86.5(122)	83.8(67)	0.612	0.894
Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	39.5(17)	53.9(76)	56.4(44)	4.831	0.185
Sleepover WITH parents	33.3(14)	21.0(29)	15.0(12)	6.372	0.095

before school started					
Written information sent to you or given to you	65.1(28)	72.1(101)	75.0(60)	2.160	0.540
Orientation day	73.8(31)	87.3(124)	91.3(73)	11.332	0.010*
Information provided over the internet	46.5(20)	51.8(72)	58.8(47)	5.504	0.138
Starting school a day earlier than the other students	48.8(21)	48.9(69)	46.3(37)	2.521	0.471
Another student telephoning before you started boarding	23.3(10)	33.8(47)	22.8(18)	4.813	0.186
A staff member telephoning before you started boarding	14.6(6)	18.0(25)	13.8(11)	2.486	0.478

^aMy family lives in a city

^bMy family lives on a farm or in a community outside a town

^cMy family lives in a country town

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

n=255-263 denominator for percentage calculation varies depending on number of students who responded to question

7.4.2.1 Summary of findings for research question two

This question explored the uptake of transitioning activities and reported helpfulness of these. This question also explored if taking part in transitioning activities was associated with increased connectedness, feelings of staff support and less loneliness. The orientation day, tour of the boarding house and written information sent or given to students were the activities most students participated in and the transitioning activities students reported as most helpful. Written information sent to students and the tour of the boarding house, were associated with greater levels of connectedness. Written information was also found to be significantly more helpful for girls compared to boys.

The tour of the boarding house was associated with greater connectedness to the boarding house. Having a staff member telephone students before they started boarding school was associated with decreased feelings of loneliness and this activity was found to be more helpful to boys than girls. A telephone call by another student prior to starting boarding was reported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and boys as significantly more helpful than other students, with boys also finding mentoring programs more helpful with transitioning into boarding school compared to girls. Higher levels of staff support were associated with students who toured the boarding house, or were provided with information over the Internet.

7.4.3 Research question three

What underlying constructs appear when measuring homesickness and which demographic variables are associated with students' experiences of homesickness?

Students were asked to respond a single item question 'How often did you feel homesick?' The descriptors used in the question were drawn from the qualitative findings of the study where students described their homesickness. Students selected from seven descriptors: 'I have not felt homesick' (1), 'I felt homesick when I first started boarding, but it got better within a few weeks' (2), 'I felt homesick when I first started boarding and it took a while for me to feel better' (3), 'I felt homesick when I first started boarding and it took a long time for me to feel better' (4), 'I feel homesick every time I come back to school from home' (5), 'I feel homesick almost all of the time' (6) and 'I feel homesick all of the time' (7).

When asked the single item question 'How often have you felt homesick?' 38.4% of students indicated they have not felt homesick. Of those who did experience homesickness, 31.6% of students felt homesick when they first started boarding but it got better within a few weeks and 14.6% of students felt homesick every time they came back to school. Just over 10.0% of students indicated it took a while for them to feel better after experiencing homesickness (Table 28).

Table 28. Results from the single item question "How often have you felt homesick?"

Homesickness descriptors	Frequency (n)	Valid percent (%)
I have not felt homesick	101	38.4
I felt homesick when I first started boarding but it got better within a few weeks	83	31.6
I felt homesick when I first started boarding and it took a while for me to feel better	28	10.5
I felt homesick when I first started boarding and it took a long time for me to feel better	7	2.6
I feel homesick every time I come back to school from home	39	14.6

I feel homesick almost all of the time	4	1.5
I feel homesick all of the time	1	0.4

n=264

Spearman's rank correlation was used to examine the correlation between the variable 'How often have you felt homesick' and the demographic variables. Being an international student ($r_s < 0.01$) and / or female ($r_s < 0.01$) were significantly correlated with increased feelings of homesickness (Table 29).

Table 29. Correlations evident when comparing demographic variables with the single item question 'How often have you felt homesick?'

Demographic variables	Felt h'sick	Age	Fulltime	A&TSI	Int'al	Family lives	Gender
How often have you felt homesick		0.75	0.51	0.26	0.89	0.21	0.00**
Age	0.75		0.17	0.52	0.09	0.79	0.82
Fulltime	0.51	0.17		0.24	0.82	0.13	0.42
Aboriginal	0.26	0.52	0.24		0.78	0.97	0.39
International	0.09	0.09	0.82	0.78		0.00**	0.01*
Family lives	0.41	0.79	0.14	0.97	0.00**		0.23
Gender	0.00**	0.82	0.42	0.39	0.01*	0.23	

n=231-267

* $r_s < 0.05$, ** $r_s < 0.01$

A second more detailed homesickness scale, informed by the qualitative data collected in the study together with Fisher's homesickness scale (Fisher et al., 1990), was included in the survey with descriptors including: missing family, missing home environment, need to return home, missing friends, feeling a loss of ways of life, crying, lost and lonely, feeling unhappy, feeling depressed, regret for the decision, hating new place, feeling ill, feeling disoriented and no confidence, wanting to avoid school because I felt so homesick, was not able to concentrate in class because I was missing my family, worried about my family and had trouble getting to sleep because of homesickness. A five-point Likert-type scale was used to measure frequency levels from 'This has never

happened to me' (1), 'Once or twice' (2), 'Every few weeks' (3), 'About once a week' (4) to 'Most days' (5).

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (using SPSS v21) utilising maximum likelihood factor analysis was used to determine the underlying dimensions of homesickness. Final estimates of communalities were iterated from squared multiple item correlations to convergence. The collection of items was deemed suitable for factor analysis (KMO=0.90). Using Kaiser's criterion (Eigenvalues ≥ 1.0) together with Cattell's scree test, three factors were extracted accounting for 57% of the common variance factor (Field, 2009). These three factors; separation distress, grief and loss and psychosomatic symptoms, represent the way boarding students reported their experience of homesickness. The reliability of each of the factors is excellent (all $\alpha > 0.8$). Factor loadings ranged from 0.46 to 0.86 (Table 30).

Table 30. Factors of homesickness with items ranked in order of factor loadings

Homesickness factors	Item	Factor loading
Psychosomatic	Wanting to avoid school because I felt so homesick	.768
	Had trouble getting to sleep because of homesickness	.714
	Was not able to concentrate in class because I was missing my family	.704
	Felt physically sick (sore / upset tummy, headache, tight chest) because I was so homesick	.704
	Got upset / cried because I felt homesick	.573
	Felt a lack of confidence	.478
Separation distress	Missed my family	.859
	Missed my family environment / home	.756
	Worried about my family	.540
	Felt like I needed to go home	.499
Grief and Loss	Felt I hate the boarding house	.689
	Felt sad about having to be a boarder	.683

	Felt unhappy	.627
	Felt lost / lonely	.494
	Feeling like I have lost my normal way of life	.455

Multiple regression with random effects was used to determine if the demographic variables were associated with increased feelings for all the homesickness factors. Findings indicated girls reported greater feelings of grief and loss than boys ($p=0.003$) (Table 31).

Table 31. Demographic variables as associated with grief and loss

Demographic variables	β	95%CI	P value
Age	-0.12	-0.24, 0.01	0.078
Number of years boarding	-0.00	-0.13, 0.13	0.979
Gender	-0.38	-0.63, -0.13	0.003*
Fulltime	-0.36	-0.85, 0.13	0.152
Lives on a community / farm	-0.31	-0.72, 0.10	0.137
Lives in a town	-0.15	-0.58, 0.28	0.492
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	-0.09	-0.55, 0.37	0.703
International students	0.35	-0.22, 0.92	0.227

* $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.001$

n=250-264

Multiple regression analysis found being a girl predicted significantly more feelings of separation distress such as: missing their family, family environment, worrying about their family and feeling like they needed to go home ($p<0.001$) (Table 32).

Table 32. Demographic variables as associated with separation distress

Demographic variables	β	95%CI	P value
Age	-0.12	-0.25, 0.01	0.075
Number of years boarding	-0.11	-0.24, 0.03	0.120
Gender	-0.69	-0.95, 0.01	<0.001**
Fulltime	-0.20	-0.71, 0.30	0.429
Lives on a community / farm	-0.04	-0.46, 0.39	0.867
Lives in a town	0.02	-0.24, 0.64	0.366
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	0.00	-0.47, 0.48	0.985
International students	0.03	-0.56, 0.61	0.928

*p<0.05, **p<0.001
n=250-264

Using multiple regression analysis it was found girls reported experiencing more psychosomatic symptoms such as physical and mental distress as a result of their homesickness than did boys ($p=0.002$). Younger boarding students were also more likely to report significantly increased psychosomatic symptoms ($p=0.018$) (Table 33).

Table 33. Demographic variables as associated with of psychosomatic symptoms

Demographic variables	β	95%CI	P value
Age	-0.12	-0.23, -0.02	0.018*
Number of years boarding	0.01	-0.10, 0.11	0.898
Gender	-0.31	-0.50, -0.11	0.002*
Fulltime	-0.06	-0.45, 0.33	0.758
Lives on a community / farm	-0.09	-0.41, 0.23	0.590
Lives in a town	-0.15	-0.49, 0.18	0.371
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	0.19	-0.18, 0.55	0.371
International students	0.23	-0.22, 0.68	0.313

*p<0.05, **p<0.001
n=250-264

Multiple regression with random effects was conducted to explore if any of the transitioning activities offered by schools were associated with any psychosomatic symptoms, feelings of separation distress or feelings of grief and loss. Information provided over the Internet was found to be the most significant transition activity associated with reduced levels of separation distress ($p=0.040$) and psychosomatic symptoms ($p=0.009$). Starting school a day earlier was also associated with reduced psychosomatic symptoms ($p=0.045$). No transitioning activities were found to be associated with reduced feelings of grief and loss.

7.4.3.1 Summary of findings for research question three

Research question three explored the homesickness experienced by boarding students in the study group. Three underlying factors of homesickness were found, which accounted for 57% of variance including: grief and loss, separation distress and psychosomatic symptoms. While only 61.6% of students experienced homesickness; being a female boarder was significantly associated with all of the factors of homesickness. Results from both the single item question and the homesickness scale were used for analysis; international students' scores were correlated with increased homesickness when using only the single item question. Being younger was associated with increased psychosomatic symptoms. There were no transitioning activities associated with less grief and loss. Information provided over the Internet was associated with a decrease in both separation distress and psychosomatic symptoms, whereas starting school a day earlier was associated with lowering psychosomatic symptoms of homesickness.

7.4.4 Research question four

What underlying factors are associated with how young people seek help for homesickness and which demographic variables, levels of connectedness, loneliness, feelings of staff support and homesickness factors appear to be associated with help-seeking behaviour?

Multiple regression with random effects were used to determine which demographic variables predicted help-seeking and helpful help-seeking.

Students were asked to rate the helpfulness of a range of homesickness help-seeking strategies, in addition they were asked a single item question to strengthen the homesickness data. This question and its responses were drawn from the qualitative responses given by staff, students and parents in the *Boarding the Future Project*. The single item question asked students 'When you felt homesick, did you find any of the following helpful?' with response options including 'Very helpful (1)', 'Somewhat helpful (2)', 'Not at all helpful (3)' and 'I did not do this (4)'. To create the 'Yes help-seeking' binomial variable 'Very helpful', 'Somewhat helpful' and 'Not at all helpful' were recoded into (1) and 'I did not do this' was recoded into (0) for each of the help-seeking strategies, the sum of all of the help-seeking strategies students reported utilising was calculated and recoded as 'yes help-seeking'.

The help-seeking strategies listed in the question, which were informed by the qualitative data collected previously in the study, included: talking to my parents on the phone, text messaging my parents, emailing my parents, going out on leave with my parents, going on leave with someone other than my parents, knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave, talking to a boarding house staff member, talking to friends, keeping busy, trying to have a positive attitude, listening to talking books, reading books/magazines, talking to older boarding students, exercising or playing sport and being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own. Binominal variables were created to explore the students who used help-seeking strategies and those who reported finding these strategies helpful. The 'Helpful help-seeking' binominal variable was created by recoding 'Very helpful' and 'Somewhat helpful' into (1) and 'Not at all helpful' and 'I did not do this' into (0) for each of the help-seeking strategies, the sum of all of the help-seeking strategies reported as helpful by students was calculated and recoded as 'helpful help-seeking'.

Being a younger boarding was associated with the use of significantly more help-seeking strategies ($p > 0.001$). Boys used significantly fewer help-seeking strategies than girls ($p < 0.001$) (Table 34).

Table 34. Demographic variables associated with students who seek help

Demographic variables	β	95%CI	<i>p</i> value
Age	-1.50	-2.15, 0.86	<0.001**
Number of years boarding	-0.06	-0.72, 0.60	0.860
Gender	-2.57	-3.81, 1.32	<0.001**
Fulltime	-0.46	-2.28, 2.06	0.722
Lives in a community / on a farm	0.30	-1.76, 2.36	0.775
Lives in a town	0.29	-1.86, 2.44	0.793
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	1.89	-0.41, 4.18	0.107
International	-0.89	-3.73, 1.95	0.538

p*<0.05, *p*<0.001
n=231-267

Using the same type of analysis, findings indicated that younger students found help-seeking significantly more beneficial than older students (*p*<0.001). When boys used help-seeking strategies they reported these to be significantly less helpful compared to girls (*p*<0.001) (Table 35).

Table 35. Demographic variables associated with students who find help-seeking either very or somewhat helpful

Demographic variables	β	95%CI	<i>p</i> value
Age	-1.26	-1.78, 0.75	<0.001**
Number of years boarding	-0.06	-0.58, 0.46	0.814
Gender	-1.92	-2.91, 0.94	<0.001**
Fulltime	-0.08	-2.08, 1.92	0.937
Lives in a community / on a farm	0.25	-1.38, 1.89	0.763
Lives in a town	-0.05	-1.76, 1.66	0.955
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	0.89	-0.94, 2.71	0.342
International	-1.17	-2.08, 1.09	0.309

p*<0.05, *p*<0.001
n=253-263

A factor analysis was used to explore the underlying factors of homesickness help-seeking. Final assessments of communalities were iterated from squared multiple item correlations to convergence. The item pool was judged appropriate for factor analysis (KMO=0.92). Using Kaiser’s criterion (Eigenvalues ≥ 1.0) together with Cattell’s scree test, three factors were extricated accounting for 51% of the common variance. These three factors; “parental contact”, “keeping busy” and “conversing with staff/students” describe the ways in which young people access help when they are experiencing homesickness. The reliability of each of the factors was found to be acceptable (all $\alpha > 0.75$). Factor loadings ranged from 0.39 to 0.80 (Table 36).

Table 36. Factors of homesickness help-seeking with items ranked in order of factor loadings

Homesickness help-seeking factors	Item	Factor loading
Parental Contact	Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	.798
	Going out on leave with my parents	.745
	Talking to my parents on the phone	.601
	Text messaging my parents	.544
	Going on leave with someone other than my parents	.514
	Emailing my parents	.424
Keeping Busy	Trying to have a positive attitude	.788
	Keeping busy	.655
	Listening to music	.597
	Exercising or playing sport	.512
	Reading books/magazines	.470
	Talking to friends	.428
	Being able to find a quiet, private place where I could spend time on my own	.392
Conversing with staff/students	Talking to an older boarding students	.739
	Talking to a boarding house staff member	.590
	Talking to friends	.482
	Listening to talking books	.426

Multiple regression with random effects was used to determine if demographic variables were associated with increased feelings of the homesickness help-seeking factors. When the age in years of students was entered as a variable,

younger students compared to older students used significantly more help-seeking strategies including: parental contact ($p < 0.001$), keeping busy ($p < 0.001$) and conversing ($p < 0.001$). Girls engaged in significantly more parental contact ($p = 0.004$), keeping busy activities ($p = 0.001$) and used conversing ($p < 0.001$) as strategies when experiencing homesickness than boys (Table 37).

Table 37. Demographic variables associated with the factors of homesickness help-seeking

Demographic variables	Parental contact	Keeping busy	Conversing
Age	-0.18(-0.27,0.91)**	-0.20(-0.29,-0.10)**	-0.13(-0.21,-0.05)**
Number of years boarding	0.05(-0.04,0.14)	0.04(-0.06,0.14)	-0.01(-0.09,0.08)
Gender	-0.25(-0.41,0.08)*	-0.31(-0.50,-0.13)**	-0.29(-0.45,-0.13)**
Fulltime	-0.08(-0.42,0.26)	-0.07(-0.45,0.30)	-0.23(-0.55,0.10)
Lives in a community / on a farm	0.997(-0.28,0.28)	0.12(-0.19,0.43)	0.02(-0.25,0.28)
Lives in a town	-0.00(-0.29,0.30)	0.20(-0.12,0.52)	0.16(-0.11,0.44)
Aboriginal / Torres Strait Islander	-0.11(-0.42,0.21)	0.15(-0.20,0.49)	0.04(-0.25,0.34)
International	-0.01(-0.39,0.38)	-0.18(0-.60,0.25)	-0.06(-0.43,0.30)

n=231-267

Multiple regression with random effects was used to determine if boarding house connectedness, feeling of staff support, loneliness and the factors of homesickness were associated with how students accessed support when they felt homesick.

Students who were lonelier engaged in significantly more conversing strategies ($p=0.049$) than keeping busy and parental contact as a means of seeking help for homesickness. Students who experienced any of the factors of homesickness (grief and loss, psychosomatic symptoms, separation distress) engaged in significantly more of all three help-seeking for homesickness factors (Table 38).

Table 38. Boarding house connectedness, loneliness, feeling of staff support and the factors of homesickness associated with the factors of homesickness help-seeking

Variables	Parental contact	Keeping busy	Conversing
Boarding house connectedness	-0.02(-0.14,0.09)	-0.06(-0.19,0.07) ^a	0.00(-0.11,0.11)
Loneliness	0.10(0.05,0.25)	0.14(-0.26,0.30) ^a	0.14(0.00,0.28) *
Feeling of Staff support	-0.02(-0.10,0.07)	0.06(-0.03,0.16) ^a	0.04(-0.04,0.12)
Grief and Loss	0.13(0.04,0.21) *	0.13(0.03,0.22) ^{a*}	0.13(0.11,0.52) *
Psychosomatic	0.18(0.07,0.29) **	0.24(0.12,0.36) ^{a**}	0.22(0.11,0.32) **
Separation distress	0.13(0.04,0.21) *	0.20(0.11,0.29) ^{a**}	0.18(0.14,0.30) **

n=253-263

All models included age, number of years boarding and gender entered as covariates

^aModel also included where family lives as a covariate

The three statistically significant factors found to be associated with keeping busy as a help-seeking strategy were entered as covariates in a multiple regression to determine which of the three were the most significant. Separation distress was found to be significantly associated with students using keeping busy as a help seeking strategy ($p=0.018$) (Table 39).

Table 39. Regression to determine the strength of the association between the variables of the help-seeking factor keeping busy

Homesickness factors	β	95%CI	p value
Grief and Loss	-0.01	-0.12, 0.11	0.931
Psychosomatic symptoms	0.13	-0.03, 0.29	0.118
Separation distress	0.14	0.02, 0.26	0.018*

n=253-263

The four statistically significant factors associated with using conversing as a help-seeking strategy were entered as covariates in a multiple regression to determine which of the three were the most significant.

Separation distress remained significantly associated with ($p < 0.001$) students' use of conversing as a help-seeking strategy when it was entered as a covariate with loneliness, grief and loss and psychosomatic factors (Table 40).

Table 40. Regression to determine the strength of the association between homesickness and help-seeking factor conversing

Loneliness and homesickness factors	β	95%CI	p value
Loneliness	0.03	-0.12, 0.17	0.730
Grief and Loss	-0.02	-0.13, 0.08	0.659
Psychosomatic	0.08	-0.05, 0.21	0.249
Separation distress	0.19	0.09, 0.29	<0.001**

n=253-263

When the statistically significant homesickness factors associated with parental contact were used as covariates in a single regression model none were found to be more significant.

7.4.4.1 Summary of findings for research question four

Three factors appeared as underlying constructs of homesickness help-seeking; "parental contact", "keeping busy" and "conversing with staff and students". These factors accounted for 51% of common variance. Girls and younger students reported higher engagement in all forms of homesickness help-seeking and they also found their help-seeking more helpful than other students. Students who were more lonely were more likely to use "conversing with staff and students" as a help-seeking strategies, while those experiencing greater separation distress were more likely to use "keeping busy" to alleviate their homesickness.

7.4.5 Research question five

How do boarding students seek help when they experience homesickness and which of these help-seeking strategies do they find to be more effective in reducing their homesickness?

The analysis for this research question used the same data described in research question four. 'Yes help-seeking' and 'Helpful help-seeking' were created as binominal variables for analysis. Grief and loss, separation distress and psychosomatic symptoms were the factors of homesickness as described in research question three.

Multiple regression analysis with random effects was used to show which boarding students who were experiencing any of the factors of homesickness, were associated with their engagement in help-seeking behaviour or were associated with reported helpfulness of help-seeking. The findings showed students experiencing all of the factors of homesickness were more likely to report increased help-seeking including: separation distress ($p < 0.001$); psychosomatic symptoms ($p = 0.001$); grief and loss ($p = 0.037$) (Table 41), this supports the findings in research question four (Table 41).

Table 41. Help-seeking, helpful-help seeking and the factors of help-seeking associated with the factors of homesickness

Help-seeking variables	Grief and Loss	Separation distress	Psychosomatic
Yes help-seeking activities	0.03(0.00,0.54)*	0.06(0.03,0.08)**	0.04(0.02,0.06)**
Helpful help-seeking	0.01(-0.02,0.06)	0.03(-0.00,0.07)	0.02(-0.00,0.05)

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$
 $n = 259-263$

Age, number of years boarding and gender entered as covariates

Multiple regression analysis was used to explore if, when students were experiencing any of the factors of homesickness, this was associated with an increased likelihood of students utilising individual help-seeking strategies and if so, which strategies were used. Students who experienced psychosomatic symptoms as a factor of homesickness were more likely to engage in a large

number of help-seeking strategies including: going on leave with their family ($p < 0.001$); knowing when their parents would next be visiting them or taking them on leave ($p < 0.001$); talking to a boarding staff member ($p < 0.001$); talking to friends ($p < 0.001$); talking to their parents on the phone ($p = 0.002$); sending text messages to their parents ($p = 0.003$); going on leave with someone other than their parents ($p = 0.021$); keeping busy ($p = 0.032$); trying to have a positive attitude ($p = 0.019$) and finding a quiet private place where they could spend time on their own ($p = 0.005$) (Table 42). When all associations were entered into the one model, they were not significantly associated with psychosomatic symptoms of homesickness.

Table 42. Homesickness help-seeking strategies associated with the factor of psychosomatic symptoms of homesickness

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	B	95%CI	p value
Talking to my parents on the phone	0.41	0.15, 0.67	0.002*
Text messaging my parents	0.31	0.10, 0.52	0.003*
Emailing my parents	0.12	-0.08, 0.32	0.247
Going out on leave with my parents	0.37	0.15, 0.59	0.001**
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	0.25	0.04, 0.45	0.021*
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	0.41	0.18, 0.63	<0.001**
Talking to a boarding house staff member	0.40	0.19, 0.61	<0.001**
Talking to friends	0.41	0.18, 0.66	<0.001**
Keeping busy	0.28	0.02, 0.54	0.032*
Trying to have a positive attitude	0.31	0.05, 0.57	0.019*
Listening to music	0.11	-0.11, 0.34	0.325
Listening to talking books	0.03	-0.19, 0.24	0.817
Reading books/magazines	0.15	-0.06, 0.36	0.171
Talking to an older boarding student	0.15	-0.05, 0.36	0.132
Exercising or playing sport	0.04	-0.19, 0.27	0.736

Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	0.30	0.09, 0.52	0.005*
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*p<0.05, **p<0.001

n=256-263

Age, number of years boarding and gender entered as covariates

Student experiences of grief and loss were more likely to be those who went on leave with their parents ($p=0.044$), talked to a boarding house staff member ($p=0.003$) and knew when their parents would next be visiting or taking them on leave ($p=0.001$) (Table 43). When all predictors were entered into the one model, knowing when parents would be next visiting or taking them on leave was the most significant factor associated with higher levels of grief and loss ($p=0.031$).

Table 43. Homesickness help-seeking strategies associated with the factor of grief and loss

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	B	95%CI	p value
Talking to my parents on the phone	0.28	-0.05,0.61	0.100
Text messaging my parents	0.23	-0.06, 0.49	0.091
Emailing my parents	0.05	-0.20, 0.30	0.698
Going out on leave with my parents	0.28	0.01, 0.56	0.044*
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	0.26	-0.00, 0.52	0.053
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	0.47	0.18,0.75	0.001**
Talking to a boarding house staff member	0.40	0.13, 0.66	0.003*
Talking to friends	0.20	-0.10, 0.50	0.189
Keeping busy	0.21	-0.12, 0.53	0.208
Trying to have a positive attitude	0.30	-0.03, 0.63	0.075
Listening to music	0.15	-0.13, 0.44	0.294
Listening to talking books	0.03	-0.19, 0.24	0.817
Reading books/magazines	0.11	-0.16, 0.38	0.435
Talking to an older boarding student	0.19	-0.06, 0.44	0.132

Exercising or playing sport	0.04	-0.25, 0.33	0.784
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	0.18	0.09, 0.44	0.198

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

n=256-263

Age, number of years boarding, gender and international entered as covariates

Students experiencing separation distress were associated with being more likely to engage in 13 of the 16 help-seeking strategies, these included: talking to their parents on the phone (p<0.001), talking to a boarding house staff member and friends (p<0.001), knowing when their parents would next be visiting or taking them on leave (p<0.001), keeping busy (p<0.001), trying to have a positive attitude (p<0.001) and finding a quiet private place where they could spend time on their own (p<0.001), text messaging their parents (p=0.001), going on leave with their parents (p=0.038), going on leave with people other than their parents (p=0.026), listening to music (p=0.009), reading books or magazines (p=0.003) and talking to an older boarding student (p=0.006) (Table 44). When all associations were entered into the one model, no help-seeking strategies were significantly associated with separation distress.

Table 44. Homesickness help-seeking strategies associated with the factor of separation distress

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	β	95%CI	p value
Talking to my parents on the phone	0.61	0.27,0.94	<0.001**
Text messaging my parents	0.44	0.17, 0.71	0.001**
Emailing my parents	0.12	-0.14, 0.38	0.361
Going out on leave with my parents	0.30	0.02, 0.59	0.038*
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	0.31	0.04, 0.58	0.026*
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	0.38	0.08,0.68	<0.001*
Talking to a boarding house staff member	0.48	0.21, 0.75	<0.001**
Talking to friends	0.63	0.33, 0.93	<0.001**
Keeping busy	0.61	0.28, 0.94	<0.001**

Trying to have a positive attitude	0.62	0.28, 0.95	<0.001**
Listening to music	0.39	0.10, 0.68	0.009*
Listening to talking books	0.02	-0.26, 0.30	0.873
Reading books/magazines	0.42	0.14, 0.69	0.003*
Talking to an older boarding student	0.36	0.10, 0.62	0.006*
Exercising or playing sport	0.15	-0.15, 0.45	0.318
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	0.58	0.31, 0.84	<0.001**

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

n=256-263

Age, number of years boarding and gender entered as covariates

The frequency and percentage of students who found activities helpful or reported having engaged in help-seeking activities is reported below against the demographic data collected in the study. Chi-square analysis was conducted to determine if any demographic groups were significantly more likely to engage in these activities or to find these helpful.

A greater number of girls in comparison to boys utilised the following help-seeking strategies: text messaging (p=0.004), emailing (p=0.014) and talking to their parents on the phone (p=0.029); talking to friends (p<0.001) or boarding house staff (p=0.005); keeping busy (p=0.004); trying to have a positive attitude (p=0.003); knowing when parents were visiting them or taking them on leave (p=0.024); finding a private place where they could spend time on their own (p=0.025) and reading books or magazines (p<0.001) (Table 45). Boys were less likely to employ any of the help-seeking strategies in comparison to girls (Table 45).

Table 45. Girls and boys *most commonly used strategies to overcome homesickness*

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	Girls %(n)	Boys %(n)	X ²	p value
Talking to my parents on the phone	89.0(97)	78.7(118)	4.771	0.029*
Text messaging my parents	74.3(81)	57.0(85)	8.178	0.004**

Emailing my parents	55.0(60)	39.6(59)	6.046	0.014*
Going out on leave with my parents	77.1(84)	70.0(105)	1.397	0.237
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	71.6(78)	67.3(101)	0.422	0.516
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	82.6(90)	69.3(104)	5.131	0.024*
Talking to a boarding house staff member	63.3(69)	45.3(68)	7.888	0.005*
Talking to friends	88.1(96)	70.0(105)	11.334	<0.001**
Keeping busy	89.8(98)	76.5(114)	8.221	0.004*
Trying to have a positive attitude	90.7(98)	77.2(115)	8.637	0.003*
Listening to music	84.4(92)	72.5(108)	5.521	0.019
Listening to talking books	33.0(36)	23.5(35)	2.871	0.090
Reading books/magazines	79.4(85)	58.4(87)	12.517	<0.001**
Talking to an older boarding student	63.9(69)	55.7(83)	1.736	0.188
Exercising or playing sport	80.4(86)	77.0(114)	0.411	0.521
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	78.0(85)	65.1(97)	5.026	0.025*

n=255-259

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

A greater proportion of girls than boys found talking to friends ($p<0.001$), keeping busy ($p<0.001$), reading books or magazines ($p<0.001$), trying to have a positive attitude ($p=0.002$), talking to an older boarding student ($p=0.024$), texting messaging ($p=0.006$) or emailing parents ($p=0.016$) and finding a quiet private place where they could spend time on their own ($p=0.037$) helpful as help-seeking strategies to overcome homesickness (Table 31). For boys, no help-seeking strategies were more helpful to overcome homesickness compared to girls (Table 46).

Table 46. Girls and boys *most helpful strategies* to overcome homesickness

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	Girls %(n)	Boys %(n)	X ²	p value
Talking to my parents on the phone	83.5(91)	74.7(112)	2.898	0.089
Text messaging my parents	66.1(72)	49.0(73)	7.444	0.006*
Emailing my parents	47.7(52)	32.9(49)	5.804	0.016*
Going out on leave with my parents	70.6(77)	68.0(102)	0.142	0.707
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	66.1(72)	62.7(94)	0.242	0.623
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	77.1(84)	66.2(98)	3.574	0.059
Talking to a boarding house staff member	35.8(39)	27.5(41)	2.009	0.156
Talking to friends	85.3(93)	64.7(97)	13.260	<0.001**
Keeping busy	85.3(93)	68.5(102)	10.180	<0.001**
Trying to have a positive attitude	85.2(92)	69.1(103)	9.283	0.002**
Listening to music	76.1(83)	67.1(100)	2.736	0.098
Listening to talking books	22.0(24)	15.4(23)	1.831	0.176
Reading books/magazines	66.4(71)	41.6(62)	15.276	<0.001**
Talking to an older boarding student	59.3(64)	45.0(67)	5.118	0.024*
Exercising or playing sport	76.6(82)	72.3(107)	0.609	0.435
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	67.9(74)	55.0(82)	4.353	0.037*

*p<0.05, **p<0.001
n=255-259

More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reported employing multiple strategies when they experienced homesickness in comparison to other students, these included: text messaging their parents (p=0.025); going on leave with someone other than their parents (p=0.018) and talking to an older boarding student (p=0.029). Talking to an older boarding student (p=0.017) and finding a quiet space to spend time on their own (p=0.041) were both found to

be significantly more helpful to a greater number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, in comparison to other students as help-seeking strategies (Table 47 and Table 48).

Table 47. Homesickness strategies used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	ATSI students % <i>(n)</i>	Non- ATSI students % <i>(n)</i>	X ²	<i>p</i> value
Text messaging my parents	88.9(16)	62.8(150)	4.996	0.025*
Emailing my parents	55.6(10)	45.6(109)	0.666	0.414
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	94.4(17)	67.8(162)	5.629	0.018*
Talking to a boarding house staff member	55.6(10)	52.7(126)	0.054	0.816
Reading books/magazines	77.8(14)	66.7(158)	0.941	0.332
Talking to an older boarding student	83.3(15)	57.1(136)	4.745	0.029*
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	88.9(16)	69.9(167)	1.467	0.226

p*<0.05, *p*<0.001

n=256-259

Any analysis where more than 20% of cells have an expected count of less than five have been removed.

Table 48. Reported helpfulness of homesickness strategies used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) students

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	ATSI % <i>(n)</i>	Non- ATSI % <i>(n)</i>	X ²	<i>p</i> value
Text messaging my parents	77.8(14)	54.8(131)	3.591	0.058
Emailing my parents	55.6(10)	37.7(90)	2.256	0.133
Going out on leave with my parents	77.8(14)	69.0(165)	0.605	0.437
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	83.3(15)	63.2(151)	2.973	0.085
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	77.8(14)	70.6(168)	0.421	0.516
Talking to a boarding house staff member	50.0(9)	29.3(70)	3.373	0.066

Listening to music	83.3(15)	70.0(168)	1.444	0.230
Reading books/magazines	50.0(9)	52.3(124)	0.036	0.849
Talking to an older boarding student	77.8(14)	48.7(116)	5.646	0.017*
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	83.3(15)	59.0(141)	4.156	0.041*

*p<0.05, **p<0.001
n=256-259

Higher proportions of international boarding students used emailing their parents as a help-seeking strategy in comparison to other students ($p=0.010$), and a greater proportion of these students also found this very or somewhat helpful ($p=0.014$). A greater number of international students found finding a quiet space to spend time on their own helpful compared to non-international students ($p=0.035$) (Table 49 and Table 50).

Table 49. Homesickness strategies used by International students

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	International students % <i>(n)</i>	Non - international students % <i>(n)</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i> value
Text messaging my parents	68.2(15)	64.0(151)	0.155	0.694
Emailing my parents	72.7(16)	44.1(104)	6.644	0.010*
Going out on leave with my parents	63.6(14)	74.2(175)	1.136	0.287
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	68.2(15)	69.5(164)	0.016	0.899
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	76.2(16)	75.8(179)	0.001	0.972
Talking to a boarding house staff member	36.4(8)	54.2(128)	2.579	0.108
Listening to talking books	18.2(4)	28.0(66)	0.974	0.324
Reading books/magazines	72.7(16)	66.8(157)	0.320	0.571
Talking to an older boarding student	63.6(14)	58.3(137)	0.237	0.627
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	86.4(19)	69.5(164)	2.778	0.096

*p<0.05, **p<0.001
n=255-259

Any analysis where more than 20% of cells have an expected count of less than five have been removed.

Table 50. Reported helpfulness of homesickness strategies used by International students

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	International students % (n)	Non-international students % (n)	χ^2	p value
Text messaging my parents	59.1(13)	55.9(132)	0.082	0.775
Emailing my parents	63.6(14)	36.9(87)	6.055	0.014*
Going out on leave with my parents	59.1(13)	70.3(166)	1.198	0.274
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	63.6(14)	64.4(152)	0.005	0.942
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	76.2(16)	70.3(166)	0.319	0.572
Talking to a boarding house staff member	18.2(4)	31.8(75)	1.752	0.186
Talking to friends	72.7(16)	73.3(173)	0.003	0.953
Keeping busy	72.7(16)	75.5(179)	0.085	0.771
Trying to have a positive attitude	77.3(17)	75.4(178)	0.037	0.847
Listening to music	72.7(16)	71.2(168)	0.033	0.855
Reading books/magazines	54.6(12)	51.9(122)	0.056	0.813
Talking to an older boarding student	59.1(13)	49.8(117)	0.697	0.404
Exercising or playing sport	63.6(14)	75.5(176)	1.499	0.221
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	81.8(18)	58.9(139)	4.438	0.035*

*p<0.05, **p<0.001
n=255-259

Fewer older students reported being willing to seek help for homesickness from boarding house staff members, with this declining from 74.4% in Years 7 and 8 to 42.9% in Years 10 ($p<0.001$). A greater proportion of younger students, in comparison to older students, engaged help-seeking. The activities where the younger students engagement with the activity significantly differed from that of older students included them: keeping busy ($p<0.001$), talking to parents on the phone ($p<0.001$), texting ($p<0.001$) and emailing their parents ($p=0.040$), going

on leave with parents or someone other than parents (0.006), talking to boarding house staff members ($p < 0.001$), friends ($p = 0.002$) and older boarding students ($p = 0.017$); knowing when their parents would next be visiting ($p < 0.001$), having a positive attitude ($p < 0.001$), listening to music reading books or magazines ($p = 0.018$) and exercising or playing sport ($p = 0.005$) (Table 51).

Table 51. Current age of students and reported engagement with homesickness help-seeking activities

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	Year 7 and 8 % (n)	Year 9 % (n)	Year 10 % (n)	X ²	p value
Talking to my parents on the phone	92.3(72)	83.3(45)	77.3(99)	22.486	<0.001**
Text messaging my parents	76.6(59)	66.7(33)	58.6(75)	2.253	<0.001**
Emailing my parents	58.9(46)	50.0(27)	36.7(47)	11.672	0.040*
Going out on leave with my parents	85.9(67)	74.1(40)	64.8(83)	16.886	0.005*
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	76.9(60)	64.8(35)	66.4(85)	16.393	0.006*
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	88.2(67)	75.9(41)	67.9(87)	22.380	<0.001**
Talking to a boarding house staff member	74.4(58)	44.4(24)	42.9(55)	30.783	<0.001**
Talking to friends	92.3(72)	68.5(37)	71.9(92)	18.448	0.002*
Keeping busy	93.6(73)	74.1(40)	78.1(100)	21.798	<0.001**
Trying to have a positive attitude	92.3(72)	83.3(45)	75.8(97)	22.607	<0.001**
Listening to music	83.3(65)	70.4(38)	76.6(98)	13.315	0.021*
Listening to talking books	37.2(29)	24.1(13)	22.7(29)	7.569	0.182
Reading books/magazines	81.6(62)	59.3(32)	62.2(79)	13.700	0.018*
Talking to an older boarding student	70.5(55)	66.7(33)	50.4(64)	13.862	0.017*
Exercising or playing sport	87.2(68)	79.2(42)	72.2(91)	16.841	0.005*
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	74.4(58)	66.7(36)	69.5(89)	7.819	0.167

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.001$
n=256-263

Younger students (Years 7 and 8) engaged in help-seeking strategies more readily than older students, as seen in Table 50, and a greater proportion of them found help-seeking either somewhat or very helpful in comparison to older students. The strategies more younger students reported as helpful in comparison to older students included them: keeping busy ($p=0.002$), talking to parents on the phone ($p<0.001$), texting ($p=0.005$) and emailing their parents ($p=0.012$), going on leave with parents ($p<0.001$) or someone other than parents ($p=0.014$), talking to boarding house staff members ($p=0.007$), friends ($p<0.001$) and older boarding students ($p=0.005$); knowing when their parents would next be visiting ($p=0.016$), having a positive attitude ($p<0.001$), reading books or magazines ($p=0.008$) and exercising or playing sport ($p<0.001$) (Table 52).

Table 52. Current age of students and reported helpfulness of help-seeking activities

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	Year 7 and 8 % <i>(n)</i>	Year 9 % <i>(n)</i>	Year 10 % <i>(n)</i>	X ²	<i>p</i> value
Talking to my parents on the phone	91.0(71)	74.1(40)	72.7(93)	24.367	<0.001**
Text messaging my parents	67.5(52)	53.7(29)	50.8(65)	16.826	0.005*
Emailing my parents	53.8(42)	37.0(20)	30.5(39)	14.559	0.012*
Going out on leave with my parents	80.8(63)	74.1(40)	60.2(77)	19.710	<0.001**
Going on leave with someone other than my parents	75.6(59)	57.4(31)	60.2(77)	14.218	0.014*
Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	82.9(63)	66.7(36)	64.8(83)	13.900	0.016*
Talking to a boarding house staff member	44.9(35)	27.8(15)	23.4(30)	16.061	0.007*
Talking to friends	91.0(71)	62.9(34)	66.4(85)	23.007	<0.001**
Keeping busy	87.2(68)	64.8(35)	72.7(93)	19.218	0.002*
Trying to have a positive attitude	88.5(69)	70.4(38)	69.5(89)	22.468	<0.001**
Listening to music	75.6(59)	59.3(32)	72.7(93)	7.955	0.159

Listening to talking books	26.9(21)	14.8(8)	14.1(18)	6.183	0.289
Reading books/magazines	67.1(51)	44.4(24)	46.5(59)	15.495	0.008*
Talking to an older boarding student	65.4(51)	51.9(28)	40.9(52)	16.780	0.005*
Exercising or playing sport	85.9(67)	73.6(39)	66.7(84)	19.726	<0.001**
Being able to find a quiet private place where I could spend time on my own	60.3(47)	53.7(29)	63.3(81)	3.969	0.554

*p<0.05, **p<0.001
n=256-263

A larger proportion of boarding students whose parents lived on a farm or a community outside a town were willing to seek support from boarding staff, than students whose parents lived in other areas (p=0.029). More of these farm/community students: emailed their parents (p=0.012) and talked to friends (p=0.033) in comparison to students whose parents did not live on a farm or community outside a town (Table 53).

Table 53. Location where boarding students' families live and the help-seeking activities they engaged in

Homesickness help-seeking strategies	City ^a % (n)	Farm ^b % (n)	Town ^c %(n)	χ^2	p value
Emailing my parents	59.5(25)	70.0(70)	32.1(25)	10.964	0.012*
Talking to a boarding house staff member	40.5(17)	60.0(84)	40.9(36)	8.756	0.029*
Talking to friends	64.3(27)	82.1(115)	75.6(59)	9.024	0.033*

^aMy family lives in a city

^bMy family lives on a farm or in a community outside a town

^cMy family lives in a country town

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

n=256-263

Of the strategies reported as either very or somewhat helpful, a greater proportion of students whose parents lived on a farm or on a community outside a town compared to others, found talking to a boarding staff member helpful (p=0.006) (Table 54).

Table 54. Location where boarding students' families live and the reported helpfulness of help-seeking strategies

Homesickness help-seeking strategy	City^a % (n)	Farm^b %(n)	Town^c %(n)	X²	p value
Talking to a boarding house staff member	23.8(10)	38.6(54)	20.5(16)	12.504	0.006*

^aMy family lives in a city

^bMy family lives on a farm or in a community outside a town

^cMy family lives in a country town

*p<0.05, **p<0.001

n=256-263

7.4.5.1 Summary of findings for research question five

Research question five explored the use and helpfulness of individual help-seeking strategies to boarding students and if any of these strategies were associated with less grief and loss, psychosomatic symptoms, and feelings of separation distress (factors of homesickness). Students who experienced any of the factors of homesickness were more likely to engage in help-seeking. However, none of the factors of homesickness were associated with increased reported helpfulness of homesickness help-seeking activities.

Multiple regression with random effects modeled in STATA was used to determine the significance of help-seeking strategies. Grief and loss appeared to be the homesickness factor that was least associated with help-seeking for homesickness. When investigating student responses to talking to boarding staff as a strategy, a greater proportion of younger students (Year 7 and 8), girls and those students whose families lived on a farm or on a community outside a town talked to staff when they felt homesick; however, of these groups only younger students also found this a helpful strategy. A larger number of girls, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students whose parents lived on a farm or in a community outside a farm and younger students all found talking to older boarding students to be one of the most helpful strategies. No significant differences were found between fulltime and weekly students' application of, or reported helpfulness of help-seeking strategies. Boys were less likely than girls to engage in any of the help-seeking strategies nor did they find any strategies more helpful in comparison to girls.

A summary of findings (Table 55) indicate that while parents of boarding students experience significant grief when their children transition into boarding, there are strategies which may support both them and their children when making this transition. Findings indicate a number of transitioning activities are effective in supporting students as they transition into boarding. Homesickness, while debilitating for a minority of students appears to follow a pattern allowing parents and staff to implement strategies to support students during these critical times. Girls, younger students and International students reported experiencing more homesickness, with a number of help-seeking activities being reported as more helpful than others.

Further research is required to better support international students who demonstrated the highest risk profile of all the demographic sub-groups. Findings from this study indicate the need for boarding staff, school staff, families and students to continue to work together to develop shared understandings regarding the transitioning challenges faced by boarding students, and their families and how best to support successful transition.

Table 55. Summary of study results by question

Question number	Question	Results summary
1	How do parents of boarders experience the transitioning of their child/ren into boarding school and which strategies do they perceive to be most helpful in easing the transition for them as parents, and for their children and in supporting their children when they experience homesickness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Geographic isolation intensified their feelings of disconnection from their children’s day-to-day activities and heightened their sense of fear regarding their children’s wellbeing. - Parents described feeling guilty, anxious and at times depressed when separated from their children. - Parents described positive conversations with their children, practical preparatory activities and allowing their children to spend time away from them prior to moving to boarding school, as helpful strategies to ease transitional challenges. - Parents, connecting with other parents of boarding students at least six months prior to their children moving to boarding school was reported as helpful in overcoming feelings of anxiety regarding their children leaving home. - Parents reported the sleepover prior to starting boarding, orientation day and student mentoring as helpful activities for their children when transitioning into boarding school. - When their children experienced homesickness parents reported the following appeared to assist their children; keeping busy, having staff who were caring and compassionate, reminding their children when they were next visiting (having a term-based leave plan was encouraged) and talking with their children on their mobile phone (including having a communication plan). - When their children became homesick parents reported finding this particularly difficult as it resurfaced emotions of guilt and worry leaving parents feeling unable to appropriately support their children. - Parents reported using a number of helpful strategies when their children were homesick including ensuring communication was open and regular, contacting boarding staff, being firm with their children and reassuring their children.

2	Which transitioning activities do boarding students report as helpful in coping with transitioning into boarding school and are these activities associated with connectedness, their feelings of support from staff and loneliness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The most helpful transitioning activities included the orientation day, tour of the boarding house and written information sent or given to students. - Written information sent or given to students and the tour of the boarding house were associated with greater levels of connectedness to the boarding house. - The tour of the boarding house and information provided over the Internet were associated with feelings of support from staff. - Information provided over the Internet and a staff member telephoning students before they started boarding were both associated with decreased loneliness.
3	What underlying constructs appear when measuring homesickness and which demographic variables are associated with students' experiences of homesickness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spearman's rank correlation examined the relationship between the single item homesickness question and demographic variables revealing international students and female students were more likely to experience feelings of homesickness. - An exploratory factor analysis revealed three factors of homesickness being separation distress, grief and loss and psychosomatic symptoms. - Girls reported experiencing more of all of the three factors of homesickness. - Younger students were more likely to report significantly increased psychosomatic symptoms.
4	What underlying factors are associated with how young people seek help for homesickness and which demographic variables, levels of connectedness,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Younger students were more likely to use of all help-seeking strategies and experience all of the factors of homesickness help-seeking and also found help-seeking more beneficial in comparison to older students. - Boys reported utilising fewer help-seeking strategies than girls and found help-seeking less helpful in comparison to girls. - A factor analysis revealed three factors of homesickness help-seeking being; parental contact, keeping busy and conversing with staff/students.

	loneliness, feelings of staff support and homesickness factors appear to be associated with help-seeking behaviour?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lonely students engaged in more conversing strategies in comparison to other strategies. - Separation distress was found to be significantly associated with students using keeping busy help-seeking strategies.
5	How do boarding students seek help when they experience homesickness and which of these help-seeking strategies do they find to be more effective in reducing their homesickness?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students experiencing all of the factors of homesickness were more likely to report increased help-seeking. - Students who experienced psychosomatic symptoms were more likely to engage in a wide range of help-seeking activities including; talking, texting, going on leave and knowing when they would be next going on leave with their parents, going on leave with someone other than parents, talking to staff and friends, keeping busy, having a positive attitude and finding a quiet place to spend time on their own. - Students experiencing grief and loss were more likely to report knowing when their parents would next be visiting or taking them on leave in comparison to other coping strategies. - Students experiencing separation distress were more likely to talk to, text and go on leave with their parents (and other people) and know when their parents would next be visiting, talk to a boarding house staff member, friends and older boarding students, keep busy, try to have a positive attitude and find a quiet private place where they could spend time on their own, listen to music and read books or magazines. - International students were more likely to email their parents and were more likely to find both emailing and spending time on their own helpful in comparison to non-international students. - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were more likely to text their parents, go on leave with someone other than their parents and talk to an older boarding students in comparison to other students. These students found talking

		<p>to an older students and finding a private place to spend time on their own more helpful in comparison to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Boarding students whose parents lived on a farm or a community outside a town reported being more likely to seek support from boarding staff, email their parents and talk to friends; they found talking to boarding staff more helpful in comparison to other students.- Younger students (Years 7 and 8) were more likely to utilise all of the help-seeking strategies excluding listening to talking books and finding a quiet place to be on their own, additionally they found all of the help-seeking strategies more helpful in comparison to older students excluding those mentioned above and listening to music.- Boys were less likely than girls to use any of the help-seeking strategies and equally less likely to find any of these helpful.
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8 Discussion and Limitations

8.0 Study Limitations

8.0.1 Qualitative study

The qualitative data were taken from the *Boarding, the Future Project*, which includes focus groups or interviews with 37 parents of boarding students in Years 7, 8 or 10 in May to June, 2011. Parent participants had children attending one of five non-government schools, including two all girls' metropolitan boarding schools, two metropolitan all boys' schools and one regional co-educational boarding school.

8.0.1.1 Sample selection bias

Sample selection bias may have been evident due to the limited representation of a range of lower socio-economic status schools. Parents self-selected into the project as such bias may be evident.

Chapter 3 outlines the criteria used to purposefully select schools into the study. Seven non-government schools were invited to participate in the qualitative component of the study and of these five agreed to participate. All schools in the qualitative study were medium to high socio-economic status schools, therefore not representative of lower socio-economic status schools.

Parents self-selected to be interviewed or to participate in focus groups. Those who chose not to participate, compared to those who self selected, may have had different experiences when their children transitioned into boarding school, again limiting the representativeness of the qualitative findings. Due to government hostel participants joining the study after the qualitative component had been completed, no parents of boarding students who attended government hostels participated in the qualitative study, and no parents of students attending government sector schools were interviewed or in focus groups. As such sample selection bias may be present at both the school and individual level in the qualitative study.

To address this limitation consideration was given to this group through stakeholder interviews. Stakeholders included representatives from the Australian Boarding Schools' Association, the Isolated Children's Parents' Association and Boarding Australia whose members are connected with both the government and independent sector. In addition to dual representative bodies, the General Manager of the Western Australian Boarding Hostels Authority, who is the governing body for boarding hostels in Western Australia, was interviewed as a stakeholder in an effort to ensure stakeholders were representative of both government and non-government sectors of boarding.

8.0.1.2 Methodological limitations

The methods used for qualitative data collection included focus groups, telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews, this may have resulted in methodological limitations. Many more mothers than fathers of boarding students participated in the study which may result in limitations within the findings.

The qualitative study sought to understand the transitioning challenges faced by boarding school students and their families. The design of the interviews and focus groups were exploratory by nature, based on post-positivism critical realism philosophy, designed to better understand the phenomenon of transitioning. While there was opportunity for new data to emerge the researcher used a focus group and interview guide with some predetermined hypothesis of what the researcher sought to understand. This may have limited the range of responses from the parent participants.

The different methods of data collection used in the qualitative study may have impacted on participants' contributions to the discussions. Parents who participated in focus groups may have been influenced by the opinions of other parents participating in the groups. For those parents interviewed over the telephone the lack of face-to-face connection, not being prompted by other parents and the capacity to provide detailed accounts of their own unique situation may have resulted in them presenting different information to those parents who participated in focus groups. In interviews or focus groups where the conversation appeared to begin to reflect concerns of a personal nature

regarding staffing or the management of the boarding house, the interviewer realigned the conversation to focus on the key aspects being explored within the context of the study. Telephone interviews were conducted in addition to focus groups to bolster participation rates and to allow for a more heterogeneous sample (i.e., allowing parents who live a greater distance from school) within the study given the difficulty some parents had in attending focus groups. The first data coded was the largest focus group, followed by the balance of the focus groups. Interview data was coded in accordance these initial findings as a means to reduce the influence of one interview on the findings.

Both mothers and fathers were invited to participate in the interviews and focus groups; however, in most cases it the mother chose to participate. A number of fathers were present in all of the focus groups and these data were coded first to ensure the themes arising from the data gathered where fathers were present formed the foundation for the generation of themes within the data. Given parents spoke of the impact boarding had on siblings, the study would have benefited from including siblings in the focus group and interview data collection.

8.0.1.3 Analysis bias

The author of this thesis, who conducted all of the focus groups and interviews, was previously a boarding student and has held a variety of positions working in boarding houses; while this strengthens the researcher's contextual understanding of the situation it may have introduced some bias in the data collection and analysis (Bluff, 2005; Charzman, 2006). To reduce this bias the first focus group was coded by two independent researchers and crosschecked against the coding conducted by the researcher, a meeting was held to discuss the coding and consensus regarding the emerging codes was reached. The method of data analysis was categorical where some contextual relationships discovered through the narrative approach may have been lost. The narrative approach was used as it recognises and values the parts of the story that contribute to the whole. Therefore, by utilising the links, connections, meaning and coherence provided by the categories determined through the data

analysis, the impact of the contextual relationships that are lost through the process is minimised (Polkinghorne, 1995).

8.0.2 Quantitative study

The survey used a cross-sectional design involving a purposeful sample of 267 boarding students aged 12 - 15 years who lived in one of eight metropolitan and regional boarding settings in Western Australia (WA) in 2011.

8.0.2.1 Sample selection bias

Heterogeneity within the sample may be present due to the nature of the schools who participated in the study. Three boarding houses self-selected into the project which may have resulted in sample bias.

Sampling bias most likely occurred as boarding houses, from the non-government education sector, that participated in the quantitative component of the study were purposefully selected as described in Chapter 3. Seven schools were invited to participate, five accepted and two declined. Active / passive consent procedures were used for students from the non-government boarding hostels, minimising the likelihood of self-selection bias. School selection criteria attempted to increase the heterogeneity of the sample by ensuring schools that were single sex, co-educational, metropolitan and regional boarding houses were included in the study.

Self-selection bias may have occurred as the three boarding hostels, from the government sector that participated in the study were self-selected. Due to the Department of Education's requirement that all participants' provide active consent, self-selection bias may have impacted upon the study findings (T. Shaw & D. Cross, 2012). The Project Director worked closely with the managers of boarding hostels to encourage as many parents as possible to consent to their child participating, to minimise this self-selection bias.

8.0.2.2 Design limitations

The cross-sectional design of the quantitative data collection precludes causal assumptions being made. Quantitative data were collected using a student self-

report survey. While these are commonly used methods of data collection, threats to validity may have occurred due to the time between when students transitioned into boarding school in early February 2011, and when the survey was administered in mid-August 2011. Students may have been unable to remember in detail their transitioning experiences and their homesickness and homesickness help-seeking experiences. To reduce this threat, student data were triangulated with the parent qualitative data. The combined input helped to provide an overall perspective of the students' experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by boarding students and their families.

8.0.2.3 Data collection

Boarding students have previously expressed concerns regarding confidentiality of information provided to staff (Gulliver et al., 2010; Sawyer et al., 2012). To enhance the likelihood students would more accurately report their experiences, the survey was administered by an independent trained researcher who was also a qualified teacher; which meant other school staff did not need to be present while students completed the survey. The researcher reinforced the confidentiality of the students' responses and explained that their surveys did not identify individual student participants.

8.1 Discussion introduction

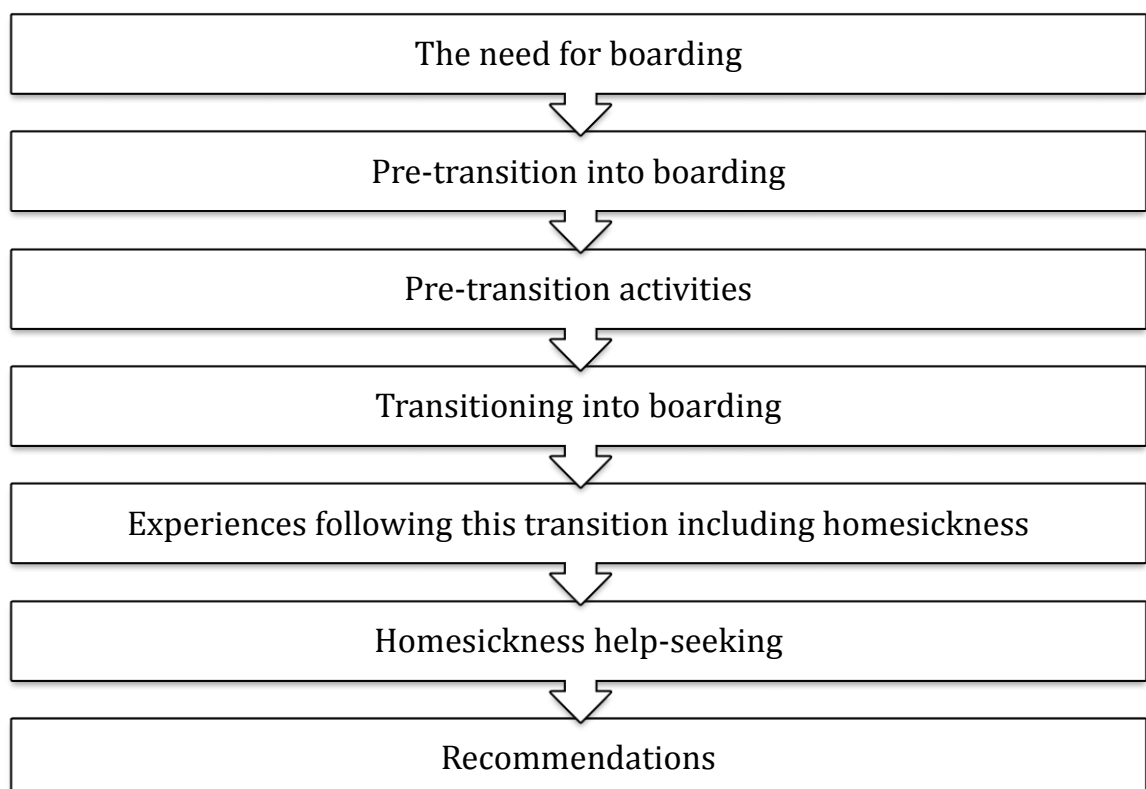
The findings from this thesis indicate there are significant challenges for boarding students, their parents and families when transitioning from home into a boarding environment. Transitioning activities provided by schools are helpful for students and their parents, with some identified as more effective than others in building feelings of connectedness to the boarding house, feelings of support from staff and reducing loneliness. For parents the distress they experienced when their children transitioned into boarding school was significant, with many finding the separation challenging for the duration of their child's time at boarding school. The feelings of homesickness by students has been found to encompass emotional, cognitive and motivational features (Fisher et al., 1986). For boarding students, feeling sad about leaving home was more likely to be experienced when they first started boarding and/or every time they returned to the boarding house from their home. Help-seeking

strategies utilised by students to cope with their feelings of homesickness appeared to be helpful for some but not for others, with parents describing the distressed phone calls they received when their children were missing home.

8.1.1 Discussion

This discussion tells the story of young people and their families' journey into boarding. The discussion of findings is organised to chronologically follow this transition, beginning with why families choose boarding school for their children through to considering a boarding school, transitioning into boarding, experiences following this transition including homesickness, and how young people seek help when they experience homesickness (Figure 9). As limited research has been published specifically addressing the boarding context, relevant research findings have been extrapolated to help understand the findings in the context of what is known about related issues.

Figure 9. Overview of plan for discussion



8.1.2 The need for boarding

Parents in this study wanted the best academic outcomes for their children; in their opinion this meant their children would need to leave home and attend a boarding school in a larger regional or metropolitan setting. While galvanised to the concept of boarding, parents discussed the impact of increasing financial pressure on their capacity to fund this style of education for their children.

Supporting previous findings, parents felt the quality of education and the opportunities available to their children were vastly better in larger, regional or metropolitan schools in comparison to local high schools. This in turn influenced the decision to send their children away to access what they considered was a better education (Baker & Andrews, 1991; Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Evans, 2008). Sending children away to boarding school to access a quality education was not the preferred option for the parents who were interviewed for this thesis. All of the responding parents would have preferred to have their children remain with them for the duration of their secondary schooling. While some families had planned for their children to attend boarding school from before they were born, when it was time for their children to go to boarding school, it was still a decision with which families struggled.

Balsamo (2000) in the National Inquiry into Rural and Remote Education found boarding to be a means by which young people could access an education. However, the rate of increase in fees coupled with limited rebates resulted in participants in this thesis expressing concern about their ongoing capacity to fund their children's attendance at boarding school. While assistance schemes are available for families, these schemes are not increasing at the same rate as costs. The assistance for isolated children (AIC) scheme (Federal) increases annually in alignment with increases in the consumer price index (CPI) which in 2013 was 2.9%; however the Education (CPI) for the same period was 5.1% (*Consumer price index, Australia, Mar 2014*, 2014) meaning parents are annually funding a growing gap in the cost of educating their children. The basic AIC allowance in 2014 is \$7,667 (Government, 2014); however, independent boarding houses have an average annual combined tuition and boarding fee of approximately \$44,000 per student and government boarding hostels in the study charged \$17,550 per student for boarding fees, with minimal tuition fees

given these students attended government schools attached to hostels ("Cost of boarding - 2014," 2013). This increased financial pressure may be adding to an already difficult time for parents as they consider their children's need for boarding.

8.1.3 Pre-transition into boarding school

Both parents and schools took proactive actions to prepare new boarders for their transition from home. Parents appeared to prepare their children in two distinct ways; emotionally and practically. However, parents reported struggling with how best to support their children as they prepared for, and transitioned into boarding school, with a variety of parenting strategies applied and mixed effects reported.

Parents reported they were reticent to let go of their children and to relinquish their role as the first point of contact for their children. In this study some parents expressed remorse that they did not provide practical lessons to prepare their children for the transition into boarding. They felt this lack of preparation added to their children's feelings of being overwhelmed. Parenting styles have been previously examined by researchers to explore links between parenting and children's wellbeing. There is some evidence to suggest that certain parent actions are indicative of over-parenting and may impact negatively on the wellbeing of young people (Locke, Campbell & Kavanagh, 2012). There have been a number of terms coined by researchers that describe over-parenting styles including 'lawnmower parenting' and 'helicopter parenting'. 'Helicopter parenting' has been described as 'appropriate parenting characteristics taken to an inappropriate degree' (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011, p. 405). Most published research exploring the popularised term "helicopter parenting" that focused on parents being unable to let go of their older college aged children, described how this can lead to an increase in levels of depression and anxiety in young people and reduced wellbeing (LeMoyne & Buchanan, 2011). While "helicopter parenting" is unlikely to be a pervasive concern amongst boarding parents, the guilt they often experience at sending their children away to school at an early age may lead in some cases to other changes in their parenting behaviour. These changes may include greater

responsiveness to their children's needs, less encouragement for their children to find ways to cope and more demands on boarding staff to rescue young people, rather than allowing them to develop their own coping mechanisms.

For some families transitioning their child into boarding resembled a time of mourning. Bowlby (1980) found the prerequisites for a positive mourning process for young people who had lost a parent, included a secure attachment prior to the loss, information sharing about the loss, participation in the family grieving process and comforting support being provided by the surviving parent. While not directly related to boarding, each of these prerequisites may apply within this context and provide important insight into how best to support the effective transition of boarding students into their new environment. Some parents in this study felt they over parented their children as a response to the grief they experienced when their children transitioned into boarding. Previous research indicates this response by parents may minimise the coping skills of young people (Fox, Henderson, Marshall, Nichols, & Ghera, 2005). Not only could this minimise coping skills, it may also lead to young people developing less resilience, life skills, sense of responsibility and higher feelings of entitlement and anxiety (Locke, Campbell, & Kavanagh, 2012).

Conversely, proactive parenting, where parents anticipate their children's problems and provide guidance for their children before the problem occurs, has been found to be critical in the socialisation of young people, and associated with positive developmental outcomes both in adolescence and young adulthood (Crouter & Head, 2008; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). A lack of proactive parenting may enable negative behaviour to become entrenched making positive change in the latter years of schooling more problematic (Pettit, Keiley, Laird, Bates, & Dodge, 2007). The importance of students being active participants in the monitoring process has been well recognised and backs the notion of supporting boarding parents and their children to promote proactive parenting processes (Laird, Marrero, & Sherwood, 2010). The development of proactive parenting programs for boarder parents to be implemented well before transition may assist in increasing the confidence of parents and in return the coping skills of boarding students as they move into their new environment.

The development of effective programs to support parents of boarders may form part of a package of prevention programs aiming to support parents, staff and students. A meta-analysis investigating the effectiveness of 177 primary prevention mental health programs for young people and adolescents found prevention programs can reduce behavioural and social problems and increase social competencies (Durlak & Wells, 1997). Similarly, an analysis of 19 peer reviewed papers addressing prevention programs found that such programs reduced stress symptoms and increased coping skills in adolescence (Kraag, Zeegers, Kok, Hosman, & Huijjer Abu-Saad, 2006). Supporting recommendations made within this thesis Hodges et al. (2013) reported the need for more skills based staff training and evidence based parenting programs within a boarding context. Confirming these recommendations Hodges (2013) review of *ConnXionz*, a program designed to train staff caring for teenagers, showed improved staff competence, self-efficacy and role satisfaction in boarding staff who undertook the training. Developing a sense of understanding regarding the difficulties of parenting boarding students from both a boarder parent perspective and a loco-parentis boarding staff perspective may assist in developing relationships based on trust. Parents in this study articulated a need for staff to better understand their unique perspective to build more supportive relationships, which will benefit boarding staff, students and the families of boarders. Listening to the needs of all stakeholders has been found to assist in planning effective transitioning programs (Coffey, 2013) and may be an important factor when designing programs that target boarding students, their parents and the staff who work in boarding schools.

Parents' uncertainty about how best to parent when their children transition from primary school into middle and secondary school is a perception also experienced by both day and boarding students. Parents wrestle with the challenge of finding the right balance between allowing children to assume responsibility for their learning, while providing sufficient structure and support to ensure their children flourish (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Johnson, Pugach, & Hawkins, 2004). Just as talking together as a family (Dyregrov, 2008) and using humour (*Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief*, 1996) assisted young people overcome the grief of the loss of a parent, these strategies were

ratified by study parents as helpful when preparing their children for boarding. Many parents spoke of the importance of focusing on the positives of moving to boarding school when talking with their children. These conversations may have been equally important for parents by helping them to reconcile their children attending boarding school. Brief positive psychology interventions such as keeping a gratitude journal and using signature strengths in new ways have been shown to increase happiness (Mongrain & Anselmo-Matthews, 2012; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). This supports the recommendations of parents in this study who found humour and focusing on the positives helped both them and their children with the upcoming transition and may be worth incorporating the use of humour and focusing on the positives associated with moving to boarding into pre-transition programs.

Information provided on school websites was an important factor that helped parents to make the decision about which boarding school would best suit the needs of their child. Website based information also assisted young people to transition successfully; with those students who accessed this information feeling more supported by staff, less lonely and experiencing lower levels of separation distress and the physical symptoms associated with homesickness. Parents described the school website as an important means by which they remained in contact with the school and their children. Wilkins (2012) suggested websites that are visually oriented are the most beneficial in promoting schools. Boarding schools could consider engaging young people to co-design the school's website to ensure a relevant a youth focus (Chow, Smith, & Sun, 2012) that includes interactive features with dynamic content, such as the inclusion of video clips and allows for student content creation in some sections (Scott, 2011).

Familiarising young people with their environment prior to moving into boarding may assist in a smoother transition. Familiarisation to change was found to lead to greater openness to change (Axtell, Wall, Stride, & Pepper, 2002). Where possible visiting the boarding house a number of times before the transition was seen as important for new boarding families, to assist young people by offsetting worries regarding transition (Colin & Bishop, 2012). For families where

another sibling had or was attending the boarding house led to the students feeling a degree of familiarity with the environment.

Parents who were indecisive about which school to send their child commented on the value of the tour of the school prior to confirming their child's enrolment. Findings from this study supported previous research indicating that tours of this nature were very helpful in increasing feelings of being supported by staff, being better connected to the boarding house, aiding in developing a sense of community and in overcoming procedural challenges during transition such as reducing the worry of getting lost in their new school environment (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Mizelle, 1999; Uvaas & McKevitt, 2013).

8.1.4 Pre-transition activities

Prior to transitioning into boarding, schools are busy preparing students and their families through a series of structured activities, in readiness for the move into the boarding house. Parents in this study made a number of suggestions regarding how these activities could better support the needs of both them and their children for a more positive transition for their children into boarding.

Following confirmation of school enrolment a series of activities was offered by the boarding house to assist students making the transition into boarding. The Student Orientation Day for boarding schools in the study occurred in October to December of the year preceding young people moving into boarding. This day was reported to be critically important for students and parents in many ways. Most parents felt the Orientation Day was the moment when their children moving into boarding school became a reality for them. Parents reported that this day contributed to their heightened sense of anxiety and that they looked for staff to recognise their feelings of distress, with most reporting they and their children felt overwhelmed at the end of the day. Parents described the change as being somewhat daunting and not limited to boarding, but including the new academic environment.

Boarding schools may be able to reduce boarding student distress by adopting the recommendations of Akos (2002). Akos recommended keeping Orientation

Days very simple with explicit understandings of rules and regulations presented, where there is a focus on the positives, and where peer mentors are available for students and families to meet and get to know each other. Supporting the findings of Howard and Johnson (August, 2005) most parents in this study were excited about the opportunities offered to their children, but they were concerned about how their children would cope with organising themselves, and how they as parents would cope with not being available to support their children when they needed them.

Despite Orientation Day being found to be helpful, no associations were found between the Orientation Day and connectedness to the boarding house, students feeling supported by boarding staff, loneliness or reduction in reported homesickness. This may have been due to both parents and students feeling overwhelmed on this day, as described above. Further research is needed to explore how this event could build the connectedness and being supported by staff and reduce loneliness in a way that better supports students transitioning into boarding.

Post-Orientation Day schools began to make personalised, regular contact with students and their families. Communicating with families and creating an environment that respects students as individuals and fosters the development of identity with adolescent Aboriginal young people was a key feature supporting successful school outcomes for these students (Groome & Hamilton, 1995). Consistent with these findings older students telephoning new students prior to starting boarding was found to be particularly helpful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in this study. Perhaps the oral culture and connection to the value of and importance of community ("Aboriginal independent community schools," 2009; Mander, 2012; Newman et al., 1999) for these young people and their families makes this form of personalised contact a valued inclusion for a well-formulated transitioning program.

Phone calls made by boarding staff to families prior to transitioning were particularly helpful for boys and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Boys reported feeling less lonely when boarding schools focused on contacting students rather than parents. Given the importance of parental involvement in

their child's education, strategies utilising these phone calls to build family engagement may also assist in fostering positive relationships between the boarding house and families. While Martin and Hagan-Burke (2010) outlined seven factors that strengthen such relationships, boarding parents in this study were particularly supportive of the following factors; a) the school assigning a particular staff member to connect with the student and family, b) keeping conversations simple; c) school contact to happen routinely and ensuring parents' easy access to the contact person.

When encouraging positive school-home relationships, a number of barriers to parents making meaningful connections with schools need to be taken into consideration prior to staff contacting families. Hornby and Lafaele (2011) developed a model of possible barriers impacting on parental involvement in schools, including individual parent and family factors, child and societal factors and parent-teacher factors. By using families' cultures and experiences LaRocque, Kleiman, and Darling (2011) explored possible ways to overcome barriers to parental involvement. Many of these suggestions were supported by parents in this study, and Anderson and Minke (2007) reported that teacher invitation had the greatest impact on parent involvement.

8.1.5 Transition into boarding

Transitioning into boarding posed challenges for both boarding students and their families. Parents reported feeling distressed at parting with their children, this distress was similar to the characteristics of mourning for some parents, who struggled to overcome being separated from their child. Further, just as migrants move from known to unknown, strategies found to support these families may also assist boarding students as they move into their new school and home environments. To address transitioning challenges, boarding schools offer a range of activities, some of which are reported in this study as more helpful than others and are discussed in this section.

In this study and in previous research parents spoke of the importance of the boarding house environment feeling homely (Bramston & Patrick, 2007), where their children could laugh, play and make noise. They sought trusting

relationships with staff who exhibited care and compassion for their children and who demonstrated a level of understanding regarding the challenges of transitioning into boarding. Adams and Christenson (2000) recommended schools focus on the quality of interactions between staff and families rather than the quantity, as this approach increased feelings of trust. Boarding parents in this study, for example, spoke of the value of individual interviews at transition as being an important means by which they could discuss the uniqueness of their child. While transition to boarding school may be a moment in time when families leave their children in the care of boarding staff, Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) have described transitioning as evolving over time. This description is more reflective of transitioning into boarding where the process varies for each child and their family. An individualised approach from boarding staff was found to be the most helpful in supporting the positive transition into boarding.

Assimilation as a social science concept offers a way to understand and describe the integration of migrants into a mainstream population (Alba & Nee, 1997). While boarding students are not migrants, they are moving into a foreign environment where their families are not present to help them. Successful assimilation in migrant children leads to an increase in educational outcomes and a decrease in depression (Greenman & Xie, 2008). Similar outcomes may be present for boarding students who assimilate well into their new environment. Piedra (2009) found a child's background (ie. parental wealth, occupation skills and knowledge of the English language), patterns of acculturation and parental support are all key factors contributing to successful assimilation. These factors may prove to be critical components when exploring how to build programs that support the successful transition of boarding students.

Parents appreciated assimilation or transitioning activities, such as sleeping over in the boarding house. Young people mostly preferred to sleepover without parents, which may support their increased need to develop a sense of autonomy as they enter adolescence (Connell & Wellborn, 1991; Deci et al., 1991; Maslow, 1968). This was especially true for girls who reported that sleeping over without parents as more helpful than did boys, perhaps because

girls seek support from friends sooner than do boys (Helsen, Wollebergh, & Meeus, 2000). Alternatively this could indicate that increasing the presence of student mentors, which were found to be particularly helpful for boys, may bolster the helpfulness of this activity for boys.

Starting school a day earlier than other students was also reported as very helpful for new boarders, particularly girls, and was associated with less school avoidance, insomnia, lack of concentration in class, physical symptoms, crying and lack of confidence. Young people who are grieving a death need time to cognitively master the change associated with this and need to be given an opportunity to feel a sense of control and the space to digest the change at their own cognitive level (Di Ciacco, 2008; Doka, 2013; Dyregrov, 2008). Starting school a day earlier and sleeping over in the boarding house before school started may both provide students with opportunities to begin to cognitively process the change and assimilate into their new environment, without the additional pressure of the busyness of the boarding house and day school when fully functional. Utilising mentors on this day may further assist young people to assimilate into their new environment.

As mentioned previously, over 80% of the boarding students found mentoring programs to be either very or somewhat helpful, with boys finding these programs more helpful than girls. The positive findings relating to mentoring as a means to increase self esteem, social skills, behavioural competence and resilience (Corcoran, 2002; Goodlad, 1998; Karcher, 2005; Karim, O'Reilly, & Yadav, 2010), suggest it may serve as a critical activity to support the positive transition, of boys in particular, into boarding.

In a meta-analysis of 55 studies addressing mentoring DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) found effective implementation, ongoing training, involvement of parents, structured activities and clarifying expectations led to a doubling of the effectiveness of programs. Parents of both genders spoke in mixed terms regarding their perception of the effectiveness of mentoring. Some parents reported their children found mentoring to be very helpful while for others they found this not at all helpful for their children. The quality of the mentoring program was described as an important contributing factor to the

programs success, along with supporting Karcher's (2005) findings that the specific mentor who was assigned to their child impacted greatly on the quality of their experience.

Parents felt their children's involvement as mentors was particularly valuable, enhancing their children's life skills and assisted them in overcoming their own experiences of homesickness. This supports findings that mentoring teaches young people how to help others, take responsibility for decisions and deal with peer pressure (Corcoran, 2002). Parents in this study agreed with research findings that early exposure to the suffering of others may lead to a greater awareness of the suffering of others, along with a concern for future generations of people in a similar situation (Matsuba & Walker, 2005).

8.1.6 Experiences following this transition including homesickness

Young people in this study reported varying degrees of homesickness dependent upon their age, gender and whether they were international students. A number of triggers for homesickness were identified and the length of time students were boarding appeared to impact on the degree to which young people experienced the symptoms of homesickness. At times parents struggled to support their children. Parents' reported their emotional response to their children's homesickness was at times overwhelming, with many turning to friendship networks for support. Formal and informal support programs, some of which were more effective than others, assisted parents in overcoming their grief, enabling them to better support both themselves and their children.

This study sought to discover any underlying constructs evident when measuring homesickness. Previous studies have identified homesickness as having cognitive, emotional and motivational features (Fisher et al., 1986), where young people may feel alone, sad (Baier & Welch, 1992; Cassidy & Asher, 1992; Han, Jamieson, & Young, 2000b; Yeo, 2010), have increased reports of illness (Baier & Welch, 1992; Fisher et al., 1990; Fisher et al., 1986) and may become distressed at being disconnected from their families (Baier & Welch, 1992; Fisher et al., 1990; Van Der Molen et al., 1989). These factors were built into the measurement of homesickness in this study. Findings from

this study identified the three factors associated with homesickness, including: a) psychosomatic symptoms, b) separation distress and c) grief and loss. While findings are somewhat consistent with previous research, this study more clearly defines the ways young people experienced homesickness within each of the factors, allowing an exploration of help-seeking strategies that may work to alleviate homesickness.

Consistent with Fisher et al. (1986), both parents and students reported homesickness was worst for the first two weeks when young people started boarding, and for some students every time they returned to boarding school from their home, homesickness was triggered. Parents felt this may be due to their children struggling to adjust to living away from their family and away from their home environment, where many children had much more freedom than they experienced in boarding school. Very few students indicated they were homesick all of the time, which differs from previous findings indicating young people were frequently plagued by bouts of homesickness (Duffell, 2005; La Fontaine, 1991; Lambert, 1968; Schaverien, 2002). However, this may have been due to response bias as the survey was completed in July to September when most students may have settled into the routine of boarding.

Van Der Molen et al. (1989) and Fisher et al. (1990) found girls reported experiencing more homesickness than boys. This thesis also found that girls reported being more affected by all of the factors of homesickness than were boys. Alternatively, the higher reporting of homesickness by girls may also indicate they have higher levels of mental health literacy (Williams & Pow, 2007), enabling them to more easily recognise their symptoms of homesickness. This in turn may translate into a greater willingness amongst girls to express their concerns regarding mental illness (Johansson, Brunnberg, & Eriksson, 2007). Boys have previously expressed concerns around reporting mental illness and that doing so may bring into question their masculinity (MacLean, Hunt, & Sweeting, 2013; Roose & John, 2003; Timlin-Scalera, Ponterotto, Blumberg, & Jackson, 2003). This may also help to explain the variance of reports of homesickness between the genders in this study.

The increased intensity of homesickness experienced by younger students was evident both in this study and in previous research (Fisher et al., 1990; Fisher et al., 1986). Younger students reported experiencing more psychosomatic symptoms including: school avoidance, poor concentration in class, sleep problems, illness, lack of confidence and sadness. These findings are similar to those of Fisher et al. (1990) who found younger students reported feeling more unhappy and unwell. Amato and Keith (1991) in their meta-analysis of the effects of divorce on children, found negative effects were worse in the middle years, which may explain why younger boarding students (Years 7 and 8) were more effected by homesickness than were older students (Years 9 and 10).

The language barrier experienced by international boarding students, most likely contributed to their increased feelings of isolation, sadness and loneliness (Han et al., 2000a; White, 2004; Yeo, 2010) and to elevated reports of homesickness by this group of students. Yeo (2010) found international students preferred to keep together which could have intensified their homesickness by limiting their ability to make friends in their new environment. Findings from a study of the transitioning programs of 11 International Schools indicated these transitioning programs were underutilised due to time constraints, resourcing issues and language barriers, limiting the effectiveness of the programs for international students (Bates, 2013). In particular, the study found staff did not have a deep understanding of the complexities faced by what Bates terms as '*Third Culture Kids*' (Bates, 2013, p. 85). These findings provide important insight into possible areas for improvement when transitioning international students into Australian boarding schools.

During their children's transition many parents were equally if not more distressed than their children and struggled with the shock, grief and worry they experienced at being separated from their children. Many of the experiences of boarding parents are similar to parent responses to the death of a child including feelings of guilt, anger, pain at separation, search for meaning, unrealistic expectations of social support and growing up with the loss at significant times (Barrera et al., 2007; Rando, 1991; Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2005). Again, similar to parents who had lost their children, some parents described experiencing increased levels of depression and anxiety when their

children left for boarding school (Kreicbergs, Valdimarsdotter, Onelov, Henter, & Steineck, 2004; Rando, 1991; Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2005). Being aware of possible triggers, such as Mother's Day, and providing opportunities for parents and young people to make meaningful connections during times such as this may assist in reducing the negative response to such triggers. Parents' search for meaning sometimes manifested into feeling they had lost their sense of self-worth without their children at home to care for. Having other siblings still at home to care for appeared to result in parents being less likely to be consumed by their grief. This finding is also consistent with the responses of parents who have lost a child.

McNeilage (2013a) and Calderwood (2013) wrote of the importance of parent networks. In this study those parents who had an existing network of friends with similar experiences appeared to be better prepared emotionally for the transition. Parents who have had a child die report support groups, social support and friends provided a sense of acceptance and shared understanding (Hatton & McBride Valente, 1981). Grieving parents who accessed counseling in the last month prior to their child dying were more likely to have worked through their grief (Kreicbergs, Lannen, Onelov, & Wolfe, 2007). This may be an important finding to apply to boarding parents who may benefit from connecting to support networks, particularly those with an altruistic purpose (Videka-Sherman, 1982), prior to their children transitioning into boarding (Crouter & Head, 2008; Stattin & Kerr, 2000). Organisations such as the ICPA who encourage parent networks, were reported by parents in this study as effective in supporting boarder parents.

While some transitioning activities were associated with reductions in both psychosomatic symptoms and separation distress, no transitioning activities reduced feelings of grief and loss. Boarding students who were grieving for their home environments hated boarding, felt sad, lonely and lost. Worden (1991) described grief as not only pertaining to death, but that change is also equal to loss, which may trigger a grief response. Grief is not a time bound experience and when grief, in particular grief unrelated to death, becomes disenfranchised the grief response becomes intensified and the social supports available to help overcome the grief experience are missing (Doka, 1989). The grief response

some boarding students reported feeling as a result of moving away from home was significant, and these students may benefit from utilising strategies previously tested in situations unrelated to boarding to assist them in overcoming their grief. Some of the most effective means of caring for young people grieving the loss of a parent is through open and direct communication where adults make themselves available, listen, are sensitive to, and respect the feelings of the grieving child (Di Ciacco, 2008; Doka, 2013; Dyregrov, 2008). Through understanding the communication patterns of their children, parents were better able to cope with both their own emotions, and better able to support their children through their grief. For example, parents recommended calling staff immediately after children called them in distress to see if their children really were as upset as they sounded on the phone and to seek reassurance. While talking to staff may have assisted in overcoming feelings of grief, talking together as a family has been found to stimulate emotional coping in young people grieving after the loss of a parent (Doka, 2013) and as such is a valid means by which boarding parents can support their children during this difficult time.

8.1.7 Homesickness help-seeking

Help-seeking for the purposes of this study included the use of formal and informal supports (Barker, 2007). Demographic variables such as age, gender and being an international student impacted on how young people sought help for homesickness. Young people often turned to their parents for support when they experienced homesickness, however, many parents in this study discussed feeling unsure about how best to parent their children through this difficult time.

Qualitative findings from this study were used to develop an instrument to measure the various ways in which boarding students cope with and seek help when they experience homesickness. This current study sought to understand if there are commonalities in the ways young people seek help for their homesickness. Analysis of the findings revealed three underlying constructs associated with homesickness help-seeking: parental contact, keeping busy and conversing with staff and or students. Those students who experienced any of the factors of homesickness (psychosomatic symptoms, separation distress

and grief and loss) reported the highest likelihood of using of all of the factors of help-seeking.

As students moved from Years 7 and 8 to Years 9 and 10 they were less likely to engage in help-seeking for homesickness. This finding may contradict theories that younger students lack emotional literacy and are less able to understand and label their feelings, therefore making them less capable of recognising homesickness symptoms and seeking help for these (Wilson et al., 2011). In this study younger students reported help-seeking from all available avenues (adults and peers), which may support the findings of Seiffge-Krenke (1995) and Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) who found students younger than fifteen were less targeted when seeking help and were more likely to seek help from multiple available sources in comparison to older students, who were far more discerning in their help-seeking choices. Given young people become more selective about sources of support as they mature from childhood into adolescence (Silverman & Worden, 1992) it may be necessary for boarding staff to find ways to ensure they remain a primary source of support in the minds of boarding students as they grow and develop. During adolescence young people transition from seeking help from adults as the primary source of support, to utilising their friends (peers) as their principal source of support (Seiffge-Krenke, 1995). Barker (2007) recommends utilising peer promoters, adolescents who are employed by health clinics, to support help-seeking information campaigns including staff, parent and community training programs. Hence, young people may be more inclined to use these services when they are in need of support. Given boarding students spend so much time together, utilising peer promoters may be an effective strategy to encourage young people to seek help from adults within the boarding context.

As mentioned previously international students were found to be lonelier and reported elevated levels of homesickness in comparison to other students. When exploring how international students coped or sought help, the only strategy reported as particularly helpful was finding a quiet place to be on their own. Seiffge-Krenke (1995) categorised coping strategies into functional and dysfunctional with the latter referring to those young people who withdrew when they were struggling to cope. The language barriers that inhibit friendships may

also limit international students help-seeking within a boarding context (Yeo, 2010). The importance of positive initial help-seeking experiences where students feel a sense of trust, familiarity and belonging has been found to be a critical factor in a young person's willingness to continue to seek help from staff (Fryenburg, 1997); this may be especially pertinent for international students who are feeling isolated and concerned about losing contact with their families (Han et al., 2000a; White, 2004).

Social support has previously been found to be significant for girls when seeking help for homesickness and as a commonly used coping strategy (Barker, 2007; Helsen et al., 2000; Mason, 1997; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995; Thurber & Weisz, 1997). Girls found talking to anyone more helpful than did boys; however, they found talking to friends and older boarding students particularly helpful in comparison to talking to their parents or boarding staff. Their willingness to talk to boarding staff, even though this was not reported as the most helpful strategy, could help them in overcoming feelings of homesickness. Previous research addressing coping found girls were more willing to take control of a situation and to address problems immediately (Fisher et al., 1990; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995). Adding to this, when responding to the death of a parent boys, compared with girls were more likely to suppress their response to not worry the surviving parent, and were more likely to be told by relatives they needed to 'grow up' when they became distressed (Silverman & Worden, 1992). Both suppression and being told to 'grow up', were discussed by parents participating in this study. The concept of learning that is co-constructed within a context, known as situated learning, may be evident within the boarding context and implicitly impacting upon the help-seeking behaviour of boys (Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Lave, 1988, 1991a, 1991b, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1990).

Boarding students have (in the past), and continue to seek help from their parents when they experience homesickness (Bramston & Patrick, 2007; Han et al., 2000a; Thurber & Weisz, 1997). Coping literature supports the importance of children seeking counsel from parents for school and for other issues including emotional problems (Helsen et al., 2000; Seiffge-Krenke, 1995). Boarding students reported turning to their parents for support, in particular, when they were feeling unwell due to homesickness or feeling distressed at

being separated from them. A large-scale longitudinal study led by Martin et al. (2014) found stronger parent relations existed between boarding parents and their children, in comparison to day school students and their parents. Distance from each other may contribute to more positive relationships between a parent and a child, or due an increased need for boarding students to contact their parents for emotional problems.

Parents felt it was unlikely, in most cases, that their children would access boarding staff for support when they experienced homesickness, commenting that their children expressed a sense of hesitation for fear their information would not remain confidential, or that boarding staff would not understand their situation. This may have been driven by parents' own prior experiences of help-seeking either at school as a day student or as a boarder (Barker, 2007). The ability of staff to understand each family, and child within the family, could be key to boarding students feeling a sense of belonging to the school and within the boarding environment (Johnson et al., 2004). In particular, relationships between staff and students based on trust, where staff are sensitive to the needs of the student, understand their situation and are prepared to listen, have been found to be most beneficial in supporting young people to cope with challenges (Baker & Andrews, 1991; Fryenburg, 1997).

Therapists working with young people grieving the loss of a parent have had more success in assisting the mourning process by creating a narrative regarding the deceased parent. While boarding parents continue to actively parent their children, creating a narrative with boarding students, where staff allow students to tell them stories about their family and home, may build trust and enhance relationships and assist them to overcome their separation distress (Sossin, Bromberg, & Haddad, 2014). The benefits of these types of relationships extend beyond the parent and student, to teachers who report that having positive relationships with parents gives them a greater sense of belonging to the school and increased job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011).

Overcoming their feelings of grief was complicated for parents when their children also experienced homesickness. Parents reported struggling with how

to best support their children during this time, with some resorting to visiting weekly and others preferring to use “tough love” tactics to assist their child to settle into their new environment. Many studies have shown positive authoritative styles of parenting adolescents leads to academic advantages, greater social competence, better control over internalized distress and reduced problem behaviour (Lamborn, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991; Maccoby & Martin, 1983; Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). While parents may have intuitively been adopting “tough love” in an attempt to achieve better outcomes this may not have been the key factor to be considered. Purdie, Carroll, and Roche (2004) in their study of 214 Australian high school children and their parents found parenting styles had no impact on self-regulatory behaviours; however, the increased sense of self-efficacy of parents was found to be significant. Providing parents with reassurance and developing programs to increase their feelings of self-efficacy regarding the parenting of their children in a boarding context, may assist their children in learning to regulate their emotional responses and behaviour when transitioning into boarding.

Young people who reported they were suffering from grief and loss were also regularly going on leave with their parents, and knew when their parents would next be visiting or taking them on leave. Studies exploring young people in foster care have found frequent visits lead to greater feelings of connectedness between parents and their children, less anxiety, support positive reunifications, nurture attachment and alleviate fear of abandonment (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013; Haight, Mangelsdorf, Black, & Szewczyk, 2005; Hess, 1988; Lee & Whiting, 2007; McWey & Mullis, 2004; Poulin, 2008; Samuels, 2009). While visiting young people would appear to have positive outcomes, both boarder parents in this study and foster parents described the distress they experienced at separating from their children at the end of each visit (Haight, Black, Workman, & Lakshmi, 2001).

Nesmith (2013) in a study of 133 parents whose children were in foster care found parents were better able to manage their emotions before, during and after visits, and children felt visits were more normal following the use of a training tool *Family Connect*. This tool included parent and student modules on

preparation for visits, communication, emotions, connection and transitions. Implementing a program such as this, and incorporating the development of leave plans outlining when parents would be visiting or taking their children on leave throughout the term, may assist parents to manage their commitments at home, and further support both them and their children as they work to overcome their feelings of grief and loss.

Keeping busy has previously been reported as an effective strategy to ameliorate homesickness (Thurber & Weisz, 1997), with boys more likely to engage in sport to keep busy and to assist them in making friends (Han et al., 2000a). Similarly, students in this study found keeping busy helped them cope with homesickness. The meta-analysis conducted by Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) found that many forms of distraction assisted adolescents to cope with challenges in their lives. Keeping busy and avoiding reminders has assisted parents to cope after the death of a child (Schwab, 1990), and was found to be an important strategy used by parents in this study to alleviate their own feelings of distress. Encouraging parents to consider a variety of activities that may assist them in coping with their children transitioning into boarding, along with a well-planned activities program for boarding students particularly in the first two weeks of boarding, may enhance the transition process.

8.2 Summary of findings

This thesis sought to explore the transitioning experiences of boarding students and their parents with particular reference to transitioning activities, homesickness and homesickness help-seeking. Previous studies have sought to explore the benefits of boarding; however, this study targeted the challenges associated with leaving home and transitioning into boarding school in an attempt to uncover strategies to support successful transitions for both boarding students and their families.

Parents of boarders appeared to be more affected by their children leaving home than did the majority of boarding students, with some reporting they were continually plagued by worry and grief. Effective strategies to support positive transitions included preparing both them and their children effectively for the move, making contact with other boarding parents at least six months prior to

the transition, having meaningful connections with staff caring for their children, communicating and visiting their children regularly and co-developing with their children communication and visiting plans. Parents also found keeping busy assisted them in overcoming their feelings of grief.

A number of transitioning activities were found to be associated with decreased loneliness, greater connectedness to the boarding house and feeling more supported by boarding staff. The following transitioning activities were found to be either very helpful or both very helpful and / or associated with other benefits (as listed above): a tour of the boarding house; a sleepover without parents; separate information targeting students and parents sent or given to boarding families, up to date information on the Internet; Orientation Day; peer mentors; staff telephoning students prior to transition and boarding staff meeting with each boarding family individually on or following Orientation Day. Further research is needed to ensure each of these activities within the context of the boarding school, is structured in such a way that it maximises possible benefits. Interviewing, running focus groups or surveying current and past families within each boarding house is recommended as a means to review school-based programs.

Homesickness, while debilitating for a minority of students was most commonly experienced during the first two weeks of boarding and when students returned to the boarding house after holidays. Girls, younger students (Year 7 students were most affected and Year 10 students least affected) and international students reported experiencing more homesickness than did other students. Three factors were found to explain how students experienced homesickness, including psychosomatic symptoms, separation distress and grief and loss.

Help-seeking was most evident for students who experienced psychosomatic symptoms or feelings of separation distress while those students who experienced grief and loss were less likely to seek help, leaving them particularly vulnerable. Help-seeking was found to comprise largely of parental contact, keeping busy and conversing with staff and students. Girls reported utilising all of the help-seeking strategies more often than did boys and younger students (Year 7 and 8) actively sought more help for homesickness in

comparison to older students (Year 9 and 10). While there were a number of activities that were associated with reductions in both psychosomatic symptoms and separation distress, for those students who experienced grief and loss, going on leave with their parents and knowing when their parents would next be visiting or taking them on leave, appeared to be the only activities that reduced their grief response.

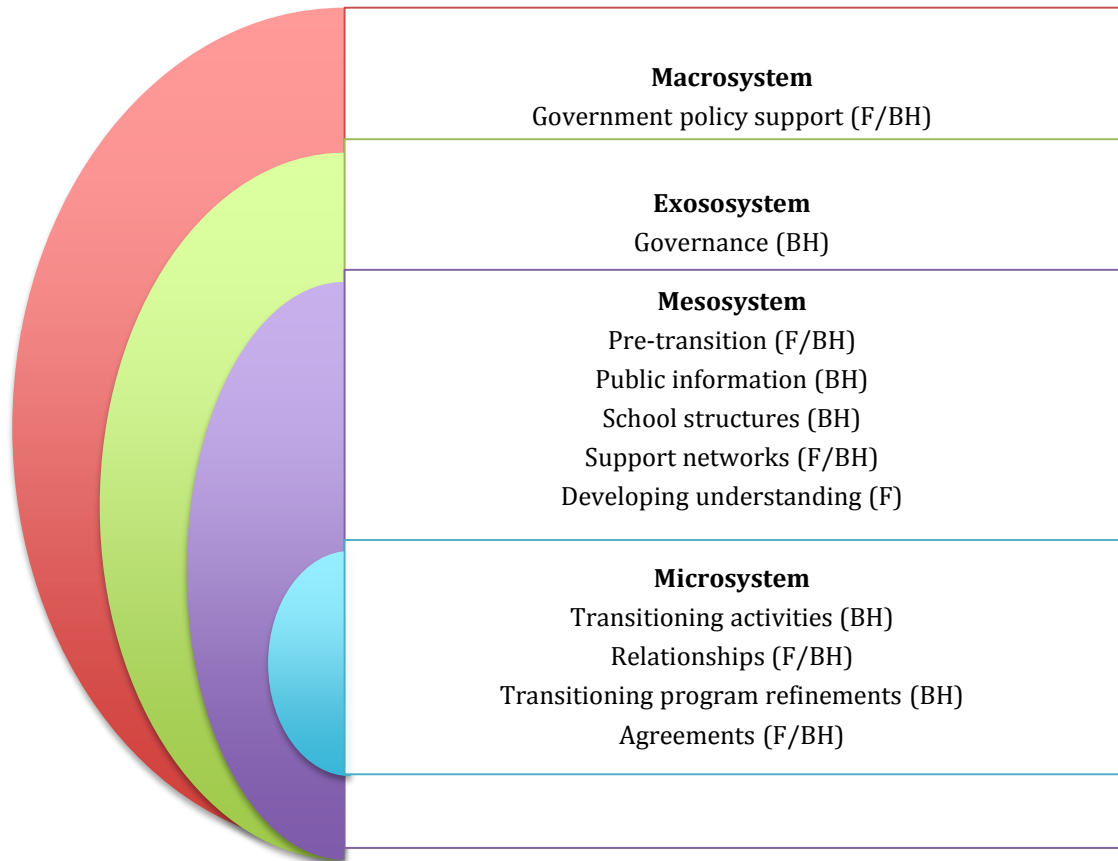
Boys and international students reported being less connected to the boarding house. However, the touring of the boarding house and providing information to students, associated with increased levels of boarding house connectedness for these students. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reported being more connected to boarding house staff, while international students felt less connected to staff. Again the tour of the boarding house increased feelings of connectedness to staff as did information provided on the Internet. International students reported feeling more lonely in comparison to other students. Activities supporting reductions in loneliness included information provided over the Internet and staff telephoning students prior to transitioning into the boarding house.

9 Recommendations

9.0 Introduction

The following recommendations were drawn from the thesis findings exploring the transitioning challenges faced by boarding students and their families. The recommendations have been divided into those for families and those for boarding houses (schools). Recommendations are presented using Bronfenbrenner's Social Ecological Theory of Human Development as seen in Figure 10 (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979). This theory focuses on the importance of the relationships between people and their environment and consists of four nested structures. The *macrosystem* represents belief systems or contextual patterns within the society being studied, this may include economic conditions, cultural norms, language, legal, educational and political systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Leonard, 2011; Reifsnider et al., 2005). The *exosystem* does not include the participants (boarding students); however, it does have a direct impact on them, for example home environments, school attached to boarding house, mass media, school governance (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The *mesosystem* comprises a system of microsystems, whenever a participant, for example the boarding student, moves into a new environment, in this case the boarding house, a new microsystem is created within the mesosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1979; Leonard, 2011; Reifsnider et al., 2005). The *microsystem* represents individual factors such as the development of relationships and agreements made between parents and their children along with those factors immediately impacting upon the individual, such as transitioning activities (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Recommendations have been organised so they can be used to present to stakeholder groups such as Boarding Australia or the Isolated Children's Parents' Association.

Figure 10. Boarding house and family recommendations presented using Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model



(F) = Family recommendations

(BH) = Boarding house (school) recommendations

9.1 **Macrosystem:** *belief systems or contextual patterns*

9.1.1 **Government policy support** (*family recommendations*)

The increasing costs of educating young people is making sending children to boarding school increasingly difficult for families to afford. Assistance schemes are available for families, however these schemes are not increasing at the same rate as costs.

Family recommendation 1: That parents continue to lobby for increases to the isolated children's scheme allowance to bring this allowance into alignment with the Education CPI annual increases and that State based allowances for boarding students similarly align their funding models.

9.2 Exosystem: External influences

9.2.1 Governance (boarding house recommendations)

Across Australian states and territories over the past decade schools have moved to a model where secondary school begins at Year 7 instead of this transition historically taking place in Year 8. For personal reasons some parents are unwilling or unable to send their children to boarding school for Year 7, in other cases parents had budgeted for this transition to take place in Year 8. Parents with multiple children are substantially affected by the change of entry age with additional costs for a family with three children starting boarding a year earlier than planned, costing the family an additional \$132 000 (approx.) in combined school and boarding fees if their children attend a non-government school ("Cost of boarding - 2014," 2013). Parent feedback was scathing of schools that were inflexible with entry options, regarding when their children could begin boarding.

Boarding house recommendation 1: That boarding schools adopt a flexible policy regarding the year at which boarding students' transition into the boarding house.

In Perth in Western Australia, there are no co-educational non-government boarding schools, meaning parents with children of both genders, who wanted a non-government education for their children, are forced to send their children to different boarding schools or to government hostels, minimising their choice of school. Many schools offer sibling discounts making the cost of education more affordable for families with multiple children. While such discount arrangements may be present in some brother / sister schools, this arrangement limits flexibility regarding educational options for boarding students should the discount be an important consideration.

Boarding house recommendation 2: That single sex, non-government boarding schools within the same geographic region negotiate an arrangement where a sibling discount is available to boarding students regardless of pre-existing relationships that may or may not exist between schools.

9.3 Mesosystem: Relationship between the person and the setting

9.3.1 Pre-transition (boarding house and family recommendations)

Findings from this study indicate transitioning activities undertaken by young people prior to boarding have the capacity to increase students' sense of connectedness to the boarding house, and feelings of support by boarding staff, and decrease loneliness and associations with the factors of homesickness. Parents suggested ways that current-transitioning programs could be improved.

Boarding house recommendation 3: That boarding schools seek feedback from parents to review the information provided to parents, to ensure the information is comprehensive and meaningful.

Boarding house recommendation 4: That boarding schools encourage and openly welcome multiple visits by parents and students prior to transitioning into the boarding house.

Boarding house recommendation 5: That boarding schools, following appropriate privacy legislation, provide parents at least six months prior to transition with the contact details of other boarding parents whose children are attending the same boarding school where possible.

Boarding house recommendation 6: That boarding schools seek feedback from families to ensure the tour of the boarding house is a meaningful experience for prospective parents and students; and that it is conducted by boarding house staff. Prior to the commencement of boarding, every student including international students have an opportunity to tour the boarding house.

Boarding house recommendation 7: That boarding schools work with their students to better understand how the tour of the boarding house can be refined to be more meaningful for older students, particularly those in Year 10, as it is for younger students.

Boarding house recommendation 8: That boarding schools explore how written information sent or given to boys could be presented in a format more appealing for them. This may require including other communication mediums, such as multimedia.

Boarding house recommendation 9: That boarding schools prepare written information to be sent or given to prospective families in dual formats, one focused on the needs of parents and the other focused on the needs of students.

Boarding house recommendation 10: That boarding schools consider how Orientation Day could be restructured to be less overwhelming for both parents and students.

Family recommendation 2: That parents spend time with their children looking over written information sent from the boarding house and that this information is readily available for students prior to the transition into boarding.

Family recommendation 3: That parents develop a plan or give consideration to strategies they could employ to assist in overcoming feelings of separation distress they may experience when their children transition into boarding school.

9.3.2 Public information *(boarding house and family recommendations)*

The Internet has become an important medium for communication between schools and both prospective and current students, and their families (Chow et al., 2012; Scott, 2011; Wilkins, 2012). Boarding parents have limited

opportunities for face-to-face contact with the school their child attends, therefore placing greater importance on other mediums of communication.

Boarding house recommendation 11: That boarding schools work with their students to develop sections of their websites for both prospective and current students and their families, incorporating interactive features and video clips together with information targeting parents and information targeting students.

Boarding house recommendation 12: That boarding schools include multimedia presentations for prospective students that include current students touring the facilities and introductions to staff.

Family recommendation 4: That parents encourage their children to regularly access information on the Internet about the boarding house in the months prior to transitioning into boarding.

9.3.3 School structures (boarding house recommendations)

Developing resources for students, staff and parents prior to and at the point of transition may support positive relationships founded on trust and improve communication and understanding (Coffey, 2013; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Hodges, 2013; Hodges et al., 2013; Kraag et al., 2006).

Boarding house recommendation 13: That boarding staff participate in programs developed by parents, to encourage them to be more responsive to parents and react appropriately to episodes of homesickness.

Boarding house recommendation 14: That boarding schools incorporate a boarding house component into all teaching staff induction programs, including touring the boarding house and listening to information provided by boarder parents regarding ways to support boarding students academically and socially.

Boarding house recommendation 15: That boarding schools ensure teaching staff: are up-skilled regarding the needs of boarding students, make positive contact with parents (either via email or telephone, where possible within the first two weeks of students starting school) and then in ongoing regular contact with the families of boarding students throughout the year.

Boarding house recommendation 16: That boarding schools invest time and energy into the development of a program for parents that assists them to understand the legal and other constraints placed on boarding houses that affect decisions regarding their children, and to foster greater understanding between parents and boarding staff.

9.3.4 Support networks *(family and boarding house recommendations)*

Connecting with other boarding families who have similar experiences has been found to be a source of comfort and reassurance for parents both before their children transition into boarding and in an on-going capacity (Bryant, 2013; Calderwood, 2013).

Family recommendation 5: That parents consider joining organisations such as the Isolated Children's Parents' Association at least six months prior to their child beginning boarding school.

Family recommendation 6: That the Isolated Children's Parents' Association give thought to introducing an arm of their organisation, with an altruistic focus that is dedicated to parent support and is promoted through boarding schools.

Boarding house recommendation 17: That boarding schools actively promote parent support networks such as the Isolated Children's Parents' Association and encourage parents to connect with other parents of boarding students at least six months prior to their child beginning boarding school.

9.3.5 Developing understanding (family recommendations)

The transitioning of young people from primary school to middle or secondary school has been found to result in parents grappling with knowing how to best allow their children to assume responsibility for their learning while continuing to have a purposeful relationship with school staff (Johnson et al., 2004; Maayan, 2011). Improved communication and the quality of interactions between parents and teachers is important to developing trust within these relationships, allowing parents to feel more confident during the transitioning process (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Through communicating with boarding schools about the level of information they would like regarding their child's academic progress, advances may be made regarding the quality of the interaction between parents and the boarding school.

Family recommendation 7: That parent organisations such as the Isolated Children's Parents' Association work towards formulating separate professional development programs for boarding staff and other school staff to assist in developing shared understandings regarding parent expectations, within the context of their child's academic and social and emotional growth.

Family recommendation 8: That parents make recommendations to boarding and school staff regarding the type of information available on the Internet that is beneficial to them to best support their child's transition into boarding and their continued academic, social and emotional development.

9.4 Microsystem: Immediately involving the person or environment

9.4.1 Transitioning activities (boarding house recommendations)

Transitioning activities, as mentioned above, have been found to minimise some of the challenges associated with transitioning into the boarding house for students.

Boarding house recommendation 18: That boarding schools consider structuring their transitioning programs to include, as a minimum, the

following activities: a tour of the boarding house; a sleepover without parents; separate information targeting students and parents sent or given to boarding families; up-to-date information on the Internet; Orientation Day; peer mentors and staff telephoning students prior to transition.

Boarding house recommendation 19: That boarding schools seek feedback from students regarding their mentoring programs to see how these programs can be enhanced to ensure benefits from such programs are maximised.

Boarding house recommendation 20: That schools attached to boarding houses or hostels incorporate into their transitioning programs the opportunity for new students, both day and boarding, to start at least one day earlier than other students in the school.

Boarding house recommendation 21: That boarding schools be aware girls, younger students and international students report significantly higher levels of homesickness in comparison to other students, and that adequate staffing is provided to support these groups of students, particularly in the first two weeks of boarding.

9.4.2 Relationships (boarding house and family recommendations)

Developing relationships built on trust may be critical to developing connectedness and to the successful transition of boarding students into their new environment (Lambert, 1968). Being connected to school has been found to be associated with better future mental health outcomes, less at risk behaviour and higher academic outcomes (Anderman, 2002; Resnick et al., 1993). Findings from this study revealed associations between a number of transitioning activities and connectedness to boarding staff.

Boarding house recommendation 22: That boarding staff have more contact with boarding parents either through email or telephone during

the first two weeks of boarding and whenever boarding students are exhibiting symptoms of homesickness.

Boarding house recommendation 23: That the boarding staff member directly responsible for the care of the student (e.g., Head of House, Head of Year) meets with each family individually during or immediately following Orientation Day to get to know the students who will be in their care and the operation and expectations of each family. This meeting is also an opportunity to reassure parents, listen to their concerns and allow them to ask questions.

Boarding house recommendation 24: That boarding staff identify students who regularly go on leave with their parents, especially when this may not have been the family's original plan, as these students may be experiencing some grief and loss and may require targeted intervention, which could include support from school mental health specialists.

Boarding house recommendation 25: That boarding staff work to quickly develop relationships of trust with all students who are new boarders as a means to further develop feelings of safety in their new environment.

Family recommendation 9: That parents encourage their children to seek out boarding staff for support when they are feeling homesick.

Family recommendation 10: That parents make contact with boarding staff when their children phone them experiencing homesickness, and discuss with staff how they recommend best supporting their child when he/she is upset.

Family recommendation 11: That parents make every effort to form a positive relationship with the boarding staff caring for their child and ensure the lines of communication remain open.

Family recommendation 12: That parents make contact with their child's teachers within the first few weeks of term and in an ongoing capacity to encourage communication and discuss with staff any academic or pastoral matters that may impact on their child's learning.

9.4.3 Transitioning program refinements (boarding house recommendations)

Findings indicate

that schools provide few options within transitioning programs to ensure these programs are well suited to minority groups or other cultural or demographic groups. International boarding students have previously been found to have difficulty finding friends and fitting into a boarding setting (Yeo, 2010). The findings of this study indicate that international boarding students are more likely to experience loneliness, less connectedness to the boarding house and more homesickness, and that tailoring programs may assist to better support successful transitions for international students into boarding school.

Boarding house recommendation 26: That boarding schools explore how transitioning programs can be modified to better support international students transitioning into boarding, including supporting the development of authentic friendships. These programs may include activities involving all students. As such both international and local students can develop common interests to discuss or engage in structured activities where international local students spend time together with staff who can help to mediate conversations based on issues that can be discussed by both parties, such as families, music interests and television program interests.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have a rich oral history that remains relevant in contemporary society and where face-to-face communication or telephone communication are important when remaining connected and in building feelings of trust (Brady, David, Manas, & Corperation., 2003; Newman et al., 1999; Rabbitt, 2013). Recommendations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students seek to explore incorporating more oral communication mediums into transitioning programs.

Boarding house recommendation 27: That boarding schools explore how to vary transitioning programs to provide information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families in an oral format, and to adapt policies to encourage oral communication with parents.

Boys in the study reported being less likely than girls to experience homesickness, less likely to seek help for homesickness and less likely to find this helpful. Developing programs to better support boys when transitioning into boarding may impact on the gender bias, regarding seeking help and assist them to develop help-seeking strategies that are relevant to boys.

Boarding house recommendation 28: That boarding schools explore strategies to minimize homesickness experienced by boys and enable boys to seek help for homesickness. This could be achieved by exploring and then implementing help-seeking strategies boys indicate are of most assistance to them in reducing homesickness.

9.4.4 Agreements *(Boarding house and family recommendations)*

The importance of the student being an active participant in self-regulation and self-determination supports the notion of agreements to promote proactive parenting processes (Laird et al., 2010). Parents in this study, who had negotiated agreements with their children regarding leave arrangements and communication found this to be an effective means to support their children's wellbeing.

Boarding house recommendation 29: That boarding staff encourage parents to develop a flexible leave plan for each term with their children, which is then discussed with boarding staff so the plan can be implemented and supported.

Boarding house recommendation 30: That boarding staff encourage parents to develop a communication plan with their children articulating strategies that support boarding students to remain connected with their

families and that this plan be discussed with, and supported by boarding staff members.

Family recommendation 13: That parents develop a leave plan with their children prior to the beginning of each term detailing when they would visit or take their children on leave during the term and that this plan be shared with boarding staff.

Family recommendation 14: That parents develop a set of agreements regarding communication with their children, including the use of their mobile phone and share this agreement with boarding staff.

Appendix 1

Non-government school recruitment letter

«Principal_Title» «Principal_First» «Principal_Surname»
Principal
«Name»
«Street»
«Town» «State» «Postcode»

21 May 2015

Dear «Principal_Title» «Principal_Surname»

RE: Invitation to participate in Healthway Funded *Boarding, the Future Project*

The Child Health Promotion Research Centre (CHPRC) at Edith Cowan University has recently received funding from Healthway to conduct a world first study which seeks to **understand the unique challenges faced by boarding students, parents, and staff**. In addition this project aims to **inform effective policy and practice** in schools as well as aid in the **development of an intervention** to assist students to gain the necessary skills to manage the very unique challenges within this context.

We would like to invite «Name» to participate in the Boarding, the Future Project in 2011. Your school is one of five secondary boarding schools in Western Australia invited to participate in this research study. Participation in this research project is voluntary.

The CHPRC has a large multi-disciplinary research team of over 30 staff and is nationally and internationally recognised for its innovative and relevant school and community based research. All school strategies will build on the CHPRC's experience and success in building social skills and reducing bullying in Western Australian primary and secondary schools.

What does participation in the Cyber Friendly Project involve?

1. **Phase one:** Involves working with key stakeholders to gain a greater understanding of the challenges faced by boarding students, parents, and staff. Due to your unique experiences as a Principal of a boarding school, we would be delighted if you would agree to take part in this world first formative study.

We would like to chat with you (either in person or by telephone) to gather your thoughts on pertinent issues relating to this area of research and to strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the key research gaps. The interview should take between 30 minutes and 1 hour in total. The topics we wish to discuss include: challenges faced by boarders, transitioning, homesickness, bullying / cyber bullying, communication, physical layout of boarding houses and anything else you feel is important to this project.

The analysis of these interviews will be synthesised with available literature in the field and will be used to inform the design of focus group questions to be asked of boarders, their parents and school staff in phase two of the project.

2. **Phase two:** Comprises of focus group data collection with three groups: boarding students, parents, and staff. The focus groups will take approximately one hour to complete. Focus groups with students will be conducted outside of school hours. Parent and staff focus groups will be conducted at a time convenient for each group.



Child Health Promotion Research Centre
School of Exercise, Biomedical & Health Science
Edith Cowan University
Bradford Street
Mt Lawley WA 6050

Phone: (08) 9370 6350
Fax: (08) 9370 6511
<http://chprc.ecu.edu.au>

3. **Phase three:** Involves boarding students, parents, and staff completing a 30 minute online survey at a time of their convenience. The development of the questionnaire will be informed by data collected in phases one and two.

Data will be collected during the following periods:

Phase one: Stakeholder interviews (principals): Middle of Term 1

Phase two: Focus groups (boarding students, parents, and staff): End of Term 1 and beginning of Term 2

Phase three: Online questionnaire (boarding students, parents, and staff): End of Term 2 and beginning of Term 3.

Your school will receive a summary report of the project findings in Term 4 once the data collection is complete and results analysed. The name of your school will be confidential and will not be included in any publications produced as a result of this research.

The Commitment for Your School

Should your school agree to participate in this important and innovative intervention research, your school's involvement would be as follows:

- Provide assistance in identifying a person to coordinate the data collection at your school in 2011.
- Encourage boarding parents, students, and staff to participate in the project.
- Mail home to the Year 7, 8, 9, and 10 boarding students' parents in Term 1, 2011 an information letter and consent form. A second 'reminder' letter will also be sent to parents who need to be encouraged to return their consent forms. Your school will receive stamped, pre-packaged envelopes (containing an information letter, consent form and reply paid envelope) for your school administrators to attach address labels and mail from your school. Alternatively, your school may email the information letter and consent form to reduce the lag time in mailing out to parents who may experience delayed mail services in country towns.
- Distribute an information letter and consent form to boarding school staff to participate in the study.
- Provide approximately one hour of time after school for students to complete the focus group.
- Provide approximately half an hour of time after school for students to complete the online questionnaire.

If you wish to register your school's interest in participating in this project, please complete the attached fax back form. Upon receipt of this form the CHPRC will contact your school's nominated Boarding, the Future Project Coordinator to discuss the next steps in the study. You or your school may withdraw your permission to participate in this research project at any time without prejudice. If you choose to withdraw your school's consent to participate, we will destroy upon request the information your school has provided.

Thank you for considering assisting us with this exciting research project, we will be in touch with you over the next couple of weeks to answer any questions you may have and to follow up on this invitation.

Yours sincerely

Kate Hadwen
Senior Research Fellow
Child Health Promotion Research Centre
Edith Cowan University

Western Australia **FACSIMILE**
TRANSMITTAL SHEET

TO: Ashley Fenner	FROM:
DEPT: Child Health Promotion Research Centre	DEPT: «Name»
FAX NUMBER: (08) 9370 6511	RETURN FAX NUMBER: «FAX»
DATE:	NO OF PAGES (INC. THIS ONE): 1
SUBJECT: Boarding, the Future Project	

SCHOOL PARTICIPATION

- I understand the general purpose and procedures of the Boarding, the Future Project.
- I have received a letter providing information about the Boarding, the Future Project.
- I understand that involvement in this project is voluntary and I can withdraw my school's consent at any time without a problem.
- I understand that no personal identifying information of students or the school will be used and that all information will be stored securely for 7 years before being destroyed.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

<input type="checkbox"/> YES, «Name» would like to register our interest in participating in this project in 2011.				
Principal Name: _____				
Principal Signature: _____				
Nominated Boarding, the Future Coordinator: _____				
Boarding, the Future Coordinator email address: _____				
Boarding, the Future Coordinator phone number: _____				
Number of boarding students enrolled for 2011:	Year 7:	Year 8	Year 9:	Year 10:

OR

NO, «Name» would NOT like to participate in the Boarding, the Future Project in 2011.

Please fax this form to (08) 9370 6511. Thank you.

Appendix 2

Student questionnaire



BOARDING, THE FUTURE PROJECT CONFIDENTIAL SURVEY

Dear Boarder

We are using this survey to find out about your experiences as a boarder and how boarders treat each other in your boarding house. We will be asking you some questions about homesickness, the layout of the boarding house, bullying and your experiences while using the Internet or a mobile phone.

All information you provide will remain confidential. No one at your boarding house or your home will see your answers. Your answers will be stored on an external server accessible only by the researchers.

This is not a test, there are no right or wrong answers. Please answer all the questions as honestly as you can. We are very interested in what you have to say and not what others around you think. If you have any questions, please ask the researchers and NOT your boarding supervisor or other boarders. If you don't want to answer any questions, you don't have to and if you do not want to complete this survey you do not have to.

Thank you for your help.

A handwritten signature in purple ink that reads "Kate Hadwen".

Kate Hadwen
Senior Research Fellow
Child Health Promotion Research Centre
Edith Cowan University
Western Australia



1. What is your age in years? (please write your age in the boxes below)

<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Years
----------------------	----------------------	-------

2. Are you male or female? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** only)

a Male	1
b Female	2

3. In what year did you start boarding? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** only)

a Before Year 7	1
b Year 7	2
c Year 8	3
d Year 9	4
e Year 10	5
f Year 11	6
g Year 12	7

5. What year level are you in at school (NOW)? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** only)

a Year 7	1
b Year 8	2
c Year 9	3
d Year 10	4
e Year 11	5
f Year 12	6

6. Are you a full-time or weekly boarder? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** only)

a Full-time boarder	1
b Weekly boarder	2

7. Are you of Aboriginal descent? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** only)

a Yes	1
b No	2

8. Are you an International student (your family is NOT an Australian resident)?
(please circle **ONE NUMBER** only)

a Yes	1
b No	2

9. Is English your first language? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** only)

a Yes	1
b No	2

10. Which best describes where your family lives? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** only)

a My family lives in a city	1
b My family lives in a community outside of a town	2
c My family lives on a farm	3
d My family lives in a country town	4

13. Did you take part of any of the following activities BEFORE moving into the boarding house and if so how helpful were they to you in making you feel more confident about boarding? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** for each statement)

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not at all helpful	I did not take part in this
a Mentoring program (for example big brother or sister program)	1	2	3	4
b Tour of the school and boarding house	1	2	3	4
c Sleepover WITHOUT parents before you started boarding	1	2	3	4
d Sleepover WITH parents before school started	1	2	3	4
e Written information sent to you or given to you	1	2	3	4
f Orientation day	1	2	3	4
g Information provided over the internet	1	2	3	4

h	Starting school a day earlier than the other students	1	2	3	4
i	Another student telephoning before you started	1	2	3	4
j	A staff member telephoning before you started	1	2	3	4
k	Other (please describe) _____	1	2	3	4

14. How often have you felt homesick? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** only)

a	I have not felt homesick	1
b	I felt homesick when I first started boarding but it got better within a few weeks	2
c	I felt homesick when I first started boarding and it took a while for me to feel better	3
d	I felt homesick when I first started boarding and it took a long time for me to feel better	4
e	I feel homesick every time I come back to school from home	5
f	I feel homesick almost all of the time	6
g	I feel homesick all of the time	7

15. How often have you felt this way this year? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** for each statement)

	This has not happened to me	Once or twice	Every few weeks	About once a week	Most days	
a	Missed my family	1	2	3	4	5
b	Missed my family environment / home	1	2	3	4	5
c	Felt like I needed to go home	1	2	3	4	5
d	Feeling like I have lost my normal way of life	1	2	3	4	5
e	Got upset / cried because I felt homesick	1	2	3	4	5
f	Felt lost / lonely	1	2	3	4	5
g	Felt unhappy	1	2	3	4	5
h	Felt sad about having to be a boarder	1	2	3	4	5
i	Felt I hate the boarding house	1	2	3	4	5
j	Felt physically sick (sore / upset tummy, headache, tight chest) because I was so homesick	1	2	3	4	5

k	Felt a lack of confidence	1	2	3	4	5
l	Wanting to avoid school because I felt so homesick	1	2	3	4	5
m	Was not able to concentrate in class because I was missing my family	1	2	3	4	5
n	Worried about my family	1	2	3	4	5
o	Had trouble getting to sleep because of homesickness	1	2	3	4	5

(Adapted from Fisher, Elder and Peacock, 1990)

16. When you felt homesick, did you find any of the following helpful? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** for each statement)

		Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not at all helpful	I did not do this
a	Talking to my parents on the phone	1	2	3	4
b	Text messaging my parents	1	2	3	4
c	Emailing my parents	1	2	3	4
d	Going out on leave with my parents	1	2	3	4
e	Going on leave with someone other than my parents	1	2	3	4
f	Knowing when my parents would next be visiting me or taking me on leave	1	2	3	4
g	Talking to a boarding house staff member	1	2	3	4
h	Talking to friends	1	2	3	4
i	Keeping busy	1	2	3	4
j	Trying to have a positive attitude	1	2	3	4
k	Listening to music	1	2	3	4
l	Listening to talking books	1	2	3	4
m	Reading books/magazines	1	2	3	4
n	Talking to an older boarding student	1	2	3	4
o	Exercising or playing sport	1	2	3	4
p	Being able to find a quiet, private place where I could spend time on my own	1	2	3	4
q	Other (Please include anything you would have liked boarding staff to have done when you were homesick.)				

37. How do you feel about your boarding house? (please circle **ONE NUMBER** for each statement)

		Never	Some times	Usually	Always	Unsure
a	I feel close to people in this boarding house	1	2	3	4	5
b	I feel like I am part of this boarding house	1	2	3	4	5
c	I am happy to be at this boarding house	1	2	3	4	5
d	I am treated fairly by staff in this boarding house	1	2	3	4	5

(McNeely, 2002; Resnick, 1997)

39. In my boarding house, there is a staff member or some other adult who (please circle **ONE NUMBER** for each statement):

		Never	Some times	Usually	Always	Unsure
a	Really cares about me	1	2	3	4	5
b	Tells me when I do a good job	1	2	3	4	5
c	Would notice when I'm not there	1	2	3	4	5
d	Always wants me to do my best	1	2	3	4	5
e	Listens to me when I have something to say	1	2	3	4	5
f	Believes that I will be successful	1	2	3	4	5

40. For each sentence, circle the number that shows how often you feel this way. (please circle **ONE NUMBER** for each statement)

		Never	Some times	Usually	Always
a	I feel alone in my boarding house	1	2	3	4
b	I have lots of friends to talk to in my boarding house	1	2	3	4

c	It's hard for me to make friends in my boarding house	1	2	3	4
d	I have nobody to talk to in my boarding house	1	2	3	4
e	I don't have anyone to spend time with in my boarding house	1	2	3	4
f	I'm lonely in my boarding house	1	2	3	4
g	I feel left out of things in my boarding house	1	2	3	4
h	There are areas of my boarding house that make me feel scared	1	2	3	4
i	I feel there are areas of the boarding house that are safe?	1	2	3	4

(adapted from Cassidy & Asher, 1992)

Thank you for completing this survey.

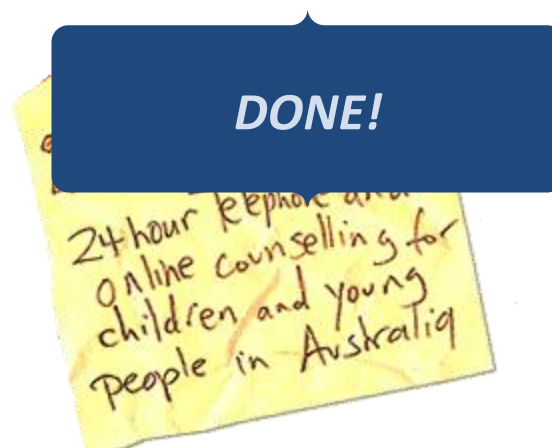
If answering questions in this survey raises any issues or feelings that concern you please talk to an adult you trust (e.g. boarding house staff member, parent, school counsellor, school nurse, or social worker).

You can also phone the Kids Help Line.

www.kidshelpline.com.au

They provide a free, confidential, telephone and online counselling aged between 5 and 18 years. leaflet with further information.

anonymous 24-hour service for young people
Your teacher will hand out a



Appendix 3

Focus group Nvivo analysis

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
Academic pressure	1	4	24/03/2014 9:58 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Academic support	11	17	24/03/2014 9:58 PM	KH	17/04/2014 6:59 PM	KH
Bullying	1	1	09/04/2014 9:38 AM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Communicating with parents	15	30	06/04/2014 7:37 AM	KH	17/04/2014 6:53 PM	KH
Communication	5	7	24/03/2014 9:55 PM	KH	17/04/2014 6:50 PM	KH
Contact with teachers	9	14	06/04/2014 7:40 AM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Day School	1	1	24/03/2014 9:57 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Educational access	3	3	09/04/2014 8:07 AM	KH	11/04/2014 9:10 AM	KH
Emotional support of boarders	1	1	24/03/2014 10:00 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Financial issues	3	10	24/03/2014 10:10 PM	KH	09/04/2014 10:10 PM	KH

Flexibility of entry age	4	6	24/03/2014 10:07 PM	KH	17/04/2014 6:09 PM	KH
Homely environment	2	6	24/03/2014 10:08 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Importance of own space	9	12	24/03/2014 10:07 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Inclusion of all years	4	5	24/03/2014 10:09 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Mobile phones and technology	19	37	24/03/2014 10:00 PM	KH	18/04/2014 6:27 AM	KH
Need for freedom	3	3	08/04/2014 1:31 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:56 PM	KH
Lack of freedom	1	1	08/04/2014 11:00 AM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Newsletters etc	4	4	24/03/2014 10:01 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Regular and open	10	16	24/03/2014 9:59 PM	KH	11/04/2014 8:32 AM	KH
Rooming structure	9	14	24/03/2014 10:07 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Separation	2	2	24/03/2014 9:55 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Frequency of telephoning	2	4	06/04/2014 7:23 AM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Going on leave	2	2	06/04/2014	KH	09/04/2014	KH

			7:36 AM		9:53 PM	
Homesickness	20	34	24/03/2014 10:02 PM	KH	17/04/2014 6:18 PM	KH
Homesickness strategies	15	45	24/03/2014 10:01 PM	KH	17/04/2014 6:24 PM	KH
Inability to support children	4	6	24/03/2014 10:02 PM	KH	17/04/2014 6:15 PM	KH
Not knowing what is going on	7	7	24/03/2014 10:02 PM	KH	17/04/2014 6:20 PM	KH
Parent strategies	21	50	06/04/2014 7:28 AM	KH	18/04/2014 6:31 AM	KH
Separation anxiety	22	47	24/03/2014 10:02 PM	KH	18/04/2014 6:19 AM	KH
Transitioning	7	11	06/04/2014 7:31 AM	KH	18/04/2014 6:23 AM	KH
Orientation day	9	12	06/04/2014 2:55 PM	KH	11/04/2014 9:14 AM	KH
Overwhelming	4	4	06/04/2014 2:55 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:58 PM	KH
Preparing children	11	12	06/04/2014 7:32 AM	KH	18/04/2014 6:21 AM	KH
Staffing	7	16	24/03/2014 9:56 PM	KH	11/04/2014 8:03 AM	KH

Call from staff or student	1	1	06/04/2014 3:12 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Contact person	9	12	24/03/2014 10:09 PM	KH	18/04/2014 6:28 AM	KH
Friendliness of staff	5	7	24/03/2014 10:10 PM	KH	09/04/2014 10:04 PM	KH
More staff needed	1	1	24/03/2014 10:10 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Structure of staffing	16	32	06/04/2014 7:47 AM	KH	17/04/2014 6:17 PM	KH
Trust	3	7	24/03/2014 10:09 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Structure	1	1	24/03/2014 9:56 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Activities offered	10	21	24/03/2014 10:14 PM	KH	17/04/2014 6:18 PM	KH
Community involvement	1	1	24/03/2014 10:13 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Considering boarder parent needs	2	2	07/04/2014 8:29 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Development of life skills	6	9	24/03/2014 10:14 PM	KH	09/04/2014 10:11 PM	KH
Keeping busy	5	6	24/03/2014 10:13 PM	KH	11/04/2014 8:31 AM	KH

Mentoring programs	16	22	24/03/2014 10:12 PM	KH	17/04/2014 6:54 PM	KH
Organisation	4	4	24/03/2014 10:12 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Structured study time	1	1	24/03/2014 10:12 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Transitioning activities	2	2	24/03/2014 10:11 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Transition issues	2	2	06/04/2014 7:39 AM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Transitioning	3	4	24/03/2014 10:06 PM	KH	09/04/2014 9:53 PM	KH
Understanding parent perspective	4	6	08/04/2014 1:33 PM	KH	11/04/2014 9:13 AM	KH

Appendix 4

Parent focus group interview questions



**child
health**
Promotion Research Centre
Research for the Future

AUSTRALIA
ECU
UNIVERSITY
EDITH COWAN

Child Health Promotion Research Centre
School of Exercise, Biomedical & Health Science
Edith Cowan University
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Phone: (08) 9370 6350
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<http://chprc.ecu.edu.au>

Parent focus group questions

In this phase adult representatives of boarder parents, staff and administrators will be approached to answer questions relating to their unique experiences. The framing of the questions will vary slightly depending upon the interviewee.

1. What are the major **challenges** you face with regard to boarding?
2. From your perspective what are the major challenges faced by young people who board?
3. In your experience how difficult has **transitioning** into boarding school been? Does your child experience difficulties after every holiday or was it only when they first began boarding? What has made this experience better and/or worse? Did your child access help from someone at school? If so whom and did this help?
4. Has your child experienced **homesickness**? How debilitating was it to your child's ability to learn? What made it better and or worse? What strategies were implemented and did they work? Did you child ask for assistance from someone at school and if so whom? Did that help?
5. When your child has experienced difficulties what has been the best and/or worst way in which the school has **communicated** with you about any issues? How do you communicate with your child? How do you use **technology** to interact with your child and the boarding house staff?
6. What **activities** did your child participate in as either a part of the transitioning process or after they transitioned into boarding and were these helpful?
7. Do you feel there are any areas of particular importance to this study that we may have overlooked?

Appendix 5

Parent Information Letter



Child Health Promotion Research Centre
School of Exercise, Biomedical & Health Science
Edith Cowan University
Bradford Street
Mt Lawley WA 6050

Phone: (08) 9370 6350
Fax: (08) 9370 6511
<http://chprc.ecu.edu.au>

Boarding Family Information Letter

Project Title: Boarding, the Future

Dear Parent / Career

The Child Health Promotion Research Centre (CHPRC) at Edith Cowan University has recently received funding from Healthway to conduct a world first study which seeks to **understand the unique challenges faced by boarding students, parents and staff**. In addition this project aims to **inform effective policy and practice** in schools as well as aid in the **development of an intervention** to assist students to gain the necessary skills to manage the very unique challenges within this context. Your child's school principal has agreed for your child's school to participate in this study.

We are asking for your permission for your child to participate in a **focus group** about his/her experiences as a boarding student. This focus group aims to strengthen our knowledge and understanding of the key research gaps. The focus group should take one hour in total. The topics we wish to discuss include: challenges faced by boarders, transitioning, homesickness, bullying / cyber bullying, communication, physical layout of boarding houses and anything else they feel is important to this project. The analysis of these focus groups will be synthesised with available literature in the field and will inform the design of the staff, student and parent surveys.

Support services

This discussion in the focus group may raise sensitive issues for your child. Participation in the focus group is voluntary and if at any time your child wishes to stop participating they may do so immediately. This will be explained to your child prior to the focus group discussion beginning. The session will be conducted by Kate Hadwen who has been a boarder, has worked in boarding for over 15 years and who has 3 children of her own.

Your child's Head / Dean of Boarding (add name), School Counsellor (add name) and Health Centre staff (add name) have been made aware of this focus group and are willing to discuss with your child issues this may raise. Your child will be made aware of this and also supplied with a list of support services available to them (see attached). Should you, as the parent, need to access support to discuss with your child any issues which may arise please use the contact details on the sheet attached, alternatively the following web link allows you to search for Health Practitioners who may be of assistance in your local

area (<http://info.beyondblue.org.au/MAHP.html>). Please contact us if you have any questions regarding support services available.

Important Information

We will ask your child's permission to record the focus group so that we can make sure that we capture all of his/her ideas. These tapes will be transcribed after the meeting and no person will be identified in these recordings.

Your child's answers will be kept confidential. Only the researchers will have access to your child's information which will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Child Health Promotion Research Centre at Edith Cowan University. All electronic data will be stored on a private computer which will be password protected. All information will be kept for 7 years before being destroyed. We anticipate that the results of this study will inform future boarding school policies and resources and will be submitted to peer-reviewed scientific journals for publication.

Providing consent for your child to participate

Should you be willing to allow your child to participate in the research associated with the Boarding, the Future Project as outlined above, **please complete the attached 'Parent/Guardian' consent form and post it to ECU using the reply paid envelope provided for you no later than (date added here) 2010** or as soon as possible after this date. *If the consent form is not returned by this date, students will not be able to participate.* An information letter about this project has been delivered to your child along with a consent form for him/her to sign. Your child will only be consented into the project if both you, as parents and your child consent to take part. Please discuss this with your child.

Withdrawing Consent

Participation in this study is voluntary, you may withdraw consent for your child or your child may withdraw at any time, without prejudice, by contacting Ashley Adair on a.adair@ecu.edu.au or Kate Hadwen on k.hadwen@ecu.edu.au or by phoning 08 9370 6848.

Further information

If you would like clarification or further information about this project or other research conducted by the Child Health Promotion Research Centre, please contact Kate Hadwen, on the details above.

Yours sincerely

Kate Hadwen

Senior Research Fellow

Child Health Promotion Research Centre

Edith Cowan University

Ph: +61 8 9370 6848 | **Fax:** +61 8 9370 6511

Email: k.hadwen@ecu.edu.au | **Web:** <http://chprc.ecu.edu.au>



Appendix 6

Parent focus group guide



Phase Two Focus group topics for discussion

1. Generalised question around experiences of boarding and any challenges experienced
2. Transitioning into the boarding house
 - a. Helpful activities
 - b. Strategies parents used
3. Homesickness
 - a. Help-seeking
 - b. Supporting your child
 - c. Supporting yourself
4. Communication
 - a. With your child
 - b. With staff
 - c. Using technology
5. Bullying / cyber bullied experiences
6. Questions about making friends in the boarding house
7. The physical layout of the boarding house
8. Accessing help in the boarding house
9. An opportunity will be provided for students to discuss topics which they feel are relevant and useful to the survey being created for students in Phase three of the project

Appendix 7

1 Parent focus group

- Dates – **need** to be clear. Where to students and parents need to be and when
- Clear processes dates, formats of pre-school
- Orientations
- Clear understanding of the processes
- Those parents who had boys starting in 2010 had a workshop
- Protocol surrounding laptops
- Parents like the hardcopy planner with all the dates
- Brochure = good
- School handbook is useful for the parents
- Contact list/family directory of all families in boarding is very useful for parents

Physical

- Vehicle access for drop off and pick up (which they have got)
- Trolleys
- Luggage, need good car park to house access
- Disabled access
- Toilet for parents – there is always boys in the mothers room
- Parent amenities
- Specific luggage access could be a good idea – luggage lift
- Not go through admin entrance, always people standing and talking and it is difficult to get past
- Robust construction
- Natural lighting and ventilation
- Health – ventilation, reduce spread of illness etc
- Light switches are all master switches from 7am to 10pm – boys should get the chance to be able to switch off and on if they want to go to bed earlier or sleep in on a weekend.
- Veranda/courtyard for shelter so can get into the door without it being a scramble for everyone to get through door and out of rain
- Have a courtyard for recreation and is very popular
- Have house mothers in each year group section
- Family environment – inclusions, mates – inclusive, need own space also
- Maturity
- Younger years good to be forced to be with others
- 4 to a dorm to start and then reduce the number from there

Homesickness:

- problems if kids won't ask
- need to make house masters aware – they don't always pick it up themselves

- welfare – need trust in house master as they are the parent figure
- need a go to person
- Parents should know the things they feel are normal and everyone goes through it
- Boys call and offload, then you are worried about it, but they are ok
- Technology – very useful for staying in contact
- Mother figure in the house makes a big difference

Bullying:

- Physical
- Pecking order
- Pick on him for doing homework
- Lack of follow up
- Mothers had to go down hard on the school, as house master couldn't see it and wasn't doing anything about it
- Being bullied for doing nothing wrong
- Early identification and addressing the issue is essential
- Important to have activities to keep them busy over the weekend – reduce homesickness and bullying
- Need to increase rec officer time
- House mother only there in morning and afternoon – this also needs to be increased
- Lack of sleep from no supervision at night time
- Stuffing around at night

Activities:

- Kitchen participation – how to prepare food
- Washing and ironing
- Boys always wanting to go out, is that from lack of activities?
- Got facilities (i.e. pool) need to use them
- Won't go to activities – have made some compulsory
- Kids concerned about cost of activities, a suggestion has been to bill parents directly for activities, this would be a good idea
- need better school organisation efficiency, parents where all invited to attend and BBQ or similar event, so they plan to come down and to watch sport also, then to find out that it is a school bye.
- School needs to allow for more effective use of weekends in Perth

Technology:

- Young students on games and computers too much – set times for electronic games or they never get outside.
- Mobile phones – collection and night, good in younger years, but they all have ways to get around it, have a dummy phone, or a shared group phone (which causes problems for downloading/viewing inappropriate things also)
- Collect 7, 8 and 9's.

- Have to control mobile phone abuse somehow

Staffing:

- Need someone full time in boarding house in the night, need someone to be easily accessible
- Full time mums
- Too macho manish – ‘be responsible for yourself’ mentality from school and house staff
- Rec officers 16 hrs a weekend – need to be busy doing something, cost issue for extra rec time
- 1 duty officer on weekends is not enough – they can’t do enough with the boys
- Organise something outside the doors
- 24/7 house mother (one parents suggested they would like this)
- Rec officer – need them everyday after school
- Study help
- Broader spectrum of staffing would be good
- Make boys do household chores so they grow up to be capable at living out of home
- Cover all aspects of home life – though the parents acknowledge this will never replace home life
- Need enough exposure to be able to look after themselves after school ends
- Years 7 -9 neutering, home economics
- All aspects of growing up need to be covered

There were four issues one parent wanted to raise

1. Pre-boarding transition
2. Access parents need to boarding house
3. Building design
4. Activities

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