

The Pioneering Journey



I have been at Brighton Le Sands Public school in Sydney for exactly a year so far. They have never had a chaplain in their school before until I came along. With that knowledge there was a lot of foundations to build within the community. There are approximately around 750 students and additionally parents and staff. This of course was a daunting task, building trusting relationships with those within the school community and educating as many people as you can about who you are and what you do. For those of you chaplains out there in a similar situation I would suggest to be Seen, Invested and Heard to be the keys to building relationships with others. The many different avenues in how I achieved that is by being SEEN....and being assessable by others whether it is at assemblies, cooking sausages on a BBQ, starting up a parent's morning tea, being at the school gate in the morning and afternoon, I went and introduced myself to all 32 classes within the school, or being on the playground at lunch. When the community starts seeing you in different capacities within the school they understand that you are there to serve the school. As a chaplain you have to be INVESTED in the task of connecting with others, this is a skill that I am continually working on, to walk up to a stranger (parents and staff) and introduce myself and pluck up a conversation. I think if you are not continually moving past your own comfort zone then you are not pioneering into something new. This quote has always helped me in my journey as a chaplain.

"We step over the confidence line, when our cause or conviction grows bigger than our fears."

We need the cause of chaplaincy to be greater than our own insecurities and fears. Because we know that we are on the frontlines of battle in family breakdowns, children that struggle with mental health is on the rise, and many more issues facing students today in Australia. But don't be fooled into thinking that it won't cost a bit of yourself when serving others in this capacity. But the benefits far outweigh the cost, when you start to see small victories every where you look because of your "Presence". The last point is being HEARD and this is an important one. I always believe that over communication is better than not at all. Whether it is making a chaplain report that you send to your supervisor every week explaining what you have been doing and keeping that communication line open. Sometimes it is being a bit assertive and initiating in your role with making things happen and finding ways to move forward.

The important thing is, is that when you are communicating that you are open, honest, genuine and have a teachable heart. You will find that after being at a school for a year that the referrals for chaplaincy is always on the rise, as you have established trusting relationships with people and they start to understand more the role that you play within the school. You will find that all the issues or problems in students come to the surface and that you are supporting families in need as that trust grows. Also you able to build and expand on some of the programs that you have started.

The first parent's morning tea that I organized when I first came here was daunting, I sent a newsletter article out to invite parent's and I also invited parent's by word of mouth, plus I got the executive to send out a text message to all parents the day before (as that was proven the best form of communication). I was expecting a small maybe a few parent's to turn up but I thought wrong...35 parent's turned up and after they got their cuppa and biscuit they all looked to me in silence and I remember thinking what did I get myself in to? The executive came by and said "wow" we haven't had so many parent's turn up to something...and they left me to it.. Then they asked me questions about chaplaincy and I answered them all. I was shaking in my boots and totally out of my comfort zone.

Because I have held two morning teas a term, I have established trust and genuine relationships with parent's. Also my school is very multicultural so I have many cultural communities represented through parent's. We focus on a parenting topic every time we meet to discuss how to instill this in the home. Plus I have a sign on sheet so I have the parent's name, how many children they have at the school and whether they have been previously to a morning tea. To be able to reveal data about the program, plus if things are discussed that as a school need to be supported than I am able to pass it on to the executive team.

I hope that this has encouraged you as a chaplain or even if you are a principal to hear of what chaplaincy can be in your schools. Chaplains remember that pioneering means that you are starting something that hasn't been done before and that sometimes you have no one to follow as you are paving a new path. It may mean trudging through mud to establish foundations before you can build. Be patient with the journey of building the foundations as it will prove strong when tested.

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