



Approved.....
Executive Director
Date:/...../.....

COUNSELLORS

HANDBOOK

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Operation Flinders is a unique wilderness therapy program. It provides a wilderness experience for young people at risk which acts as a circuit breaker for disruptive and anti-social behaviour.
- 1.2 As a counsellor you are likely to be experienced and qualified in dealing with adolescents at risk but your dealings with them will have been in surroundings that are familiar to both you and them alike. Eight days in the bush, dealing with negative behaviors, feeling physically and emotionally challenged gives another perspective to the counselling role. You, like the participants, will be on a steep learning curve and perhaps on day five you will begin to wonder why on earth you are there.
- 1.3 This information gives a broad perspective, understanding and advice for your survival and hopefully it will be as useful to you as your sense of perception, humour and tolerance.

2. Pre-Operation Preparation

- 2.1 As a counsellor you will need to prepare yourself so that you are physically and emotionally able to complete the exercise intact and contribute to positive changes for the participants whilst in the bush. To do this you need to :
 - read and think about the cause, mission, objectives and values of Operation Flinders
 - understand the role of the counsellor and do not confuse it with that of the team leader
 - understand the role of the team leader
 - be physically fit, preferably with knowledge, enjoyment and experience in the bush and bush walking
 - make sure that you have comfortable and appropriate equipment
- 2.2 Prior to the exercise you will be contacted by the New Directions Manager, who is responsible for coordinating follow up opportunities for the young people attending the exercise. The New Directions Manager will endeavour to visit your area and where appropriate meet with you and/or the students. If you wish to initiate earlier contact with the New Directions Manager please call (08) 8242 3255.

3. Liaison with the Team Leader

- 3.1 The team you will operate with is in fact two teams, the adult team (team leader, counsellors and perhaps an assistant team leader) and the participants, (6 to 10 young people). It is likely that you will know and have worked with the other counsellor, however, you will probably not know the team leader. Team leaders can be past or present members of the Defence Force or the Police Force who have had leadership and remote field/wilderness experience.
- 3.2. Time spent with the adult members of the team **prior** to the exercise is **VITAL**. It will give you the opportunity to talk over issues, devise strategies and agree on ground rules by which the team is going to live with for the next eight days and allay some of the concerns you may have.

3.3.1 New counsellors should be in touch with their TL but can also speak with experienced counsellors if they would like additional information about the role of a counsellor. Please contact Operation Flinders on 8242 3233 and we will put you in contact with an experienced counsellor who will be willing to answer any questions you may have.

3.4 If you have any concerns about the level of fitness required it is vital that you address them with your team leader early. Issues regarding equipment to take etc should also be addressed early so that arrangements can be made to procure the appropriate equipment.

4. Participants

4.1 Prior to the exercise, information on the participants will have been supplied by the school/client organisation. As a counsellor it is likely that you will have been involved in this process and may have even worked with the participants and know them quite well. This information is important for the team leader to know and needs to be as accurate and detailed as possible. However, be aware the behaviour of the participants does change during the exercise. The difference in the environment causes different reactions and unexpected behaviour.

4.2 The participants, for most part, are urban dwellers and as such may be very street-wise. On the streets they know all the answers, what to do, how to behave and who is in the know. Even though their behaviour is unsafe they are safe because they know the surroundings.

4.3 Being in the bush, surrounded by space with little recognisable features and without the familiar noises, sounds, smells and rituals of the familiar, puts them immediately in a dependence situation and they are compelled to make choices. The choices to be made are limited, impersonal, imposed by the situation and the environment but with consequences which are personal and the effects relatively immediate. Participants quickly learn that relying on others, cooperation, sharing and trust are much better for them as well as the group, rather than going it alone.

5. The Counsellors Role

The Operation Flinders instructions in relation to the role are contained in Standing Orders. It states :

STATEMENT OF DUTIES AND ACCOUNTABILITIES

POSITION:	Counsellor
ACCOUNTABLE TO:	Team Leader (TL)
REQUIREMENTS:	Be medically fit and must have submitted a Medical Disclosure Form
ACCOUNTABILITY:	The counsellors are to accompany the team on the exercise circuit and whilst en-route, assist the team leader and participants in achieving the exercise objectives.

DUTIES

a. The counsellors are to monitor and record team behaviour and keep the TL informed of issues, paying particular attention to those human factors which may lead to unsafe or dangerous situations.

- b. The counsellors are to provide advice to the TL on matters of team management.
 - c. The counsellors are to provide individual support to those team members in need.
 - d. The counsellors are to maximize opportunities to interact with the participants with a view to normalizing behaviour.
 - e. The counsellors should participate in all activities carried out by participants.
- 5.1 The first step should be to become acquainted with the role of the team leader and other team staff if deployed. This is vital, as the counsellor needs to understand how they as individual operators will contribute to the achievement of the team objectives. Uncertainty over respective roles will cause confusion for the participants and can undermine positive team building and long-term outcomes.
 - 5.2 This advice is also applicable to the team leaders. The roles are quite different but complimentary. Team Leaders, often become heroes in the eyes of the participants and as such take on the role of tutor, mentor and leader none of which should interfere with the counsellor tasks.

6. The Counsellor as a team member

- 6.1 The counsellors model behaviour which is to be expected from co-operative team members. As stated before 'the team' is in fact two teams, the participants and the adult team. This team needs to be strong, together and present a united front. There has to be agreement and consistency in how the group is to be handled and the counsellors are to show that they agree with and are the first to implement the team leader's rules. It is assumed that discussion has already taken place between the team leader and the counsellors so that there is agreement on behaviour and rules. If debate is to occur, it is to happen out of ear shot and eyesight of the participants.

7. Counsellors to model appropriate bush walking behaviour

- 7.1 The bush walk you will be on will test your physical and mental endurance. You will be tired, fed up and sore. However, that is the nature of bushwalking and it is expected that you have some experience of bushwalking and you know what to expect, what to take and how to prepare yourself.
- 7.2 If you are inexperienced, you need to ask advice on what to take and how to prepare yourself. This includes getting physically fit. You need to take in the information on safety, water and food rationing and first aid. It is expected that the participants will be inexperienced and may do some foolish things. It is not expected that the counsellors will.

8. Monitoring the Group and Individual Performance

- 8.1 This important role of the counsellor cannot be over rated. In this role counsellors use their skills to observe behaviour of individuals as well as the group to gather information to predict and plan for events which may occur. This information may be used preventively in that potential negative situations can be avoided for the individual or the group, or for planning and controlling a manufactured situation to gain positive outcomes.

- 8.2 Positive improvement in individual and group behaviour is incremental and often small. This is important to remember and can sometimes be lost as time goes on and energy flags. The ability to keep perspective and re-enforce the positive is essential for not only the group's moral but also for your own.
- 8.3 Observation and monitoring of behaviour is also applicable to the adult team. Fatigue and discomfort of an extended bush walk take their toll and the individual is not always the best in gauging their ongoing performance. It is important that integrity and efficiency of the adult team is maintained in order to optimise the team's success.
- 8.4 Ensure that sufficient and regular time is given so that observations and information can be exchanged. Strategies such as 'time out', positive re-enforcement and debriefing are important for all members of the team, adults as well as participants, and are ongoing responses.

9. Group Dynamics

- 9.1 In the pre-course training session, information is given on the basic stages of group dynamics of The Honeymoon Period, Disintegration, Re-assembly and Termination with the sub phases of Forming, Norming, Storming, Performing and Mourning. These stages are not defined and delineated as starting and stopping at predetermined times, rather they are ongoing and are often re-visited during the exercise. However, the actions and behavior of the participants can be identified as belonging to particular phases.

10. The Honeymoon Phase

- 10.1 *Forming*. This stage begins on the drive up and continues well into the exercise. In fact, there are always sub groups forming depending on different situations, so what initially forms as a group will not be the only one nor will it be the permanent one. It will take some time before the group has its pecking order worked out and the roles of the participants defined within it.
- 10.2 In this stage anticipation, excitement and energy is high. There is also a great degree of insecurity felt by the participants and this shows itself in behaviour which ranges from bombastic to withdrawn.
- 10.3 Much of this stage can be left to sort itself out as long as it does not greatly interfere with the agreed expectations of behaviour for the group.
- 10.4 *Norming*. This phase will begin when the team is packing their packs and preparing to leave on the walk. The phase is part of the Honeymoon period and it is the optimum time for the team leader to inform the team of the safety rules and expected group behaviour. It is also a time to initiate the ideas of rituals which establish the group's identity and uniqueness.

11. Disintegration

- 11.1 As the exercises progresses, tiredness and discomfort take their toll. Reality dawns and the participant's security blanket of known behavior and actions no longer work. They will test limits of tolerance and patience. They will act impulsively, selfishly and immediately. They will be manipulative and have low tolerance levels and coping skills.

- 11.2 Conflicts can escalate and get out hand and counsellors need to be particularly vigilant. Look at the actions rather than the words. As this stage participants may be saying a lot, but may or may not be doing anything. If the actions are still safe then little needs to be done except a well timed positive or an injection of humour or a resorting to a group ritual to defuse the situation. If more needs to be done then make sure that the team leader is kept informed of the situation and the action taken is united and planned.

12. Re-assemblage

- 12.1 *Performing*. Various behaviour is seen ranging from sullen compliance to positive cooperation and camaraderie. Not all participants will be performing at the same level but then it is opportune to reflect on what positive steps have been made since the beginning of the exercise. There will be some behavior and actions which can be positively reinforced. The team will be working at its optimum. Challenges have been overcome, fears have been beaten and achievements made. Despite themselves, the participants have succeeded and it is time to enjoy the feeling of group cohesion and cooperation. The rituals established at the beginning of the exercise will have been built upon and can continue to be used to reinforce the group's uniqueness and achievements.
- 12.2 Very rarely a situation may occur whereby the group does not seem to have progressed beyond the initial storming stage. In these cases it is a matter of battenning down the hatches, assisting the team leader in maintaining group safety and working on individual participants to achieve what they can.

13. Termination

- 13.1 *Mourning*. Farewelling is a hard thing for the participants to do and it is important to handle this stage sensitively and positively. They have lived intensively through a unique experience and survived. Make an opportunity for the participants to formally finish **their** Operation Flinders. Acknowledge their achievements and the feelings they are experiencing. They will have changed, but they will be going back to a home, a school or an institution that has not. Prepare the participants for this and do not leave it to the last night.
- 13.2 Participants do not always handle this stage well and you may find that some resort to behaviour that is more fitting to the *forming* or *storming* phases. This may be for the reason that they do not know how to say good-bye or thank-you, but they do know how to get attention. Thus they may resort to a former attention seeking behaviour which has worked for them in the past.

14. Handling Problems

- 14.1 It is very rare that a team does not have a problem so expect that yours will. Problems range from violence and rebellion to non-cooperation and running away, either as an individual or as part of a group. Many of the strategies which you use every day will be effective however, sometimes they will not. At such times Kearney's Law, "*don't just do something, stand there*" will work. The wilderness of the Flinders Ranges imposes many restrictions and constraints on the usual actions participants use to get their own way, so allow the wilderness to be the teacher. Be aware of and understand the inevitability of conflict games and tantrum performances and maintain watchful non-intervention. Observe and react to what is being done and not what is being said. Take action when safety issues are involved or when it is deemed appropriate by the team leader.

15. Other Tools of the Operation Flinders Trade

- 15.1 *Rewards.* Rewards such as minties, jelly babies etc can be used to great effect. Use these rewards fairly and after a job well done or when you want to introduce a positive when nothing seems to be going right. Also there may be times when their issue as a random factor is appropriate because they are **just there**. However ensure that the rewards are not anticipated payment. Make sure you take lollies that are your favorites so that you can also enjoy the treat.

16. The Mascot

- 16.1 Each team is given a mascot to carry on the exercise. The challenge for the mascot to see, experience and participate in each and every activity the team undertakes. The mascot is to be cared for and must survive the trip.
- 16.2 The mascot can and does serve an important role in that it is something the team must take responsibility for. The mascot is passive and dependent and the team has to incorporate it into their experiences and challenges. It can be used by the staff in team deliberations thus causing the team to pause and reconsider actions. The mascot can also be used for comfort as a cuddly toy but because of its role it is not seen in that light and thus it is OK to carry and cuddle it.

17. Recording

- 17.1 Carry a notebook to write down information on participant and group behaviour, experiences, events and impressions of the field activity and organisation and suggestions for improvement. You will be used in the following ways:
- Towards the end of the exercise the counsellors and team leaders will be required to write individual reports on the participants' performances whilst on exercise. This information is for the agency which sent them on the exercise and used for the New Directions follow up program.
 - Information on individual and team performance is also fed back to base camp so that decisions can be made for the awarding of various trophies which are part of the Operation Flinders exercise.
 - Prior to your departure from the field, you will be taken into base camp for a debriefing session. During this session you will be asked for your impressions and opinion of the exercise and where and how improvements can be made
- 17.2 You will also find that your notebook will act as a memento of your Operations Flinders experience.

18. Staff Contact

- 18.1 During the first three days in the field you will be visited at least once by either the Exercise Commander or Executive Director. This is to check that the team is "bedding in" during the early stages. The visiting member will speak individually with the adult members of the team. This is likewise for him/her to gauge if the adult team is "bedding in". You will be spoken to on a couple of occasions during the exercise. Whilst obviously any issues or matters should be resolved at team level, if this is not possible then please bring the matter to the attention of the Exercise Commander or Executive Director when speaking to either of them.

19. Conclusion

- 19.1 Immediately after the exercise you will experience a ‘high’, mainly because you have survived. Within the next few days you will experience a “let down” after effect. This is part of your own mourning phase from Operations Flinders, expect these feelings.
- 19.2 When reality dawns and the blisters heal and the sore muscles stop aching, you may wish to thank the team you went away with because I have always felt that the adult team members get as much out of the exercise and learn as much about themselves as do the participants. You may even wish to go again because Operation Flinders can become addictive.

19.3 Enjoy the experience.

20. Post Exercise Follow up events/activities

- It is important that the success of the team and individuals is celebrated in their community to engage the support of parents and other significant people in their lives. Start to think about ways to encourage the participants to take responsibility in organising a celebration and who will be invited. Liaise with Operation Flinders so that the Team Leader and a staff representative are aware of the date, time and location and can attend the celebration.
- Operation Flinders will present Certificates that also are recognised as SACE points so ensure a copy of this certificate is given to the school SACE coordinator for immediate registration or alternatively a copy can be stored in the students file so they can use this extra point when undertaking SACE.
- If the students also wish to count their Operation Flinders exercise as a Duke of Edinburgh Award expedition the New Directions Manager can coordinate this and when the award is completed it counts as an additional SACE point for the participant. If the participant is over 15 they can start at Silver level of the Award.
- Students recommended as Peer Group Mentors will be sent official invitation letters and asked to attend training weekends throughout the year. Where possible encourage recommended participants to follow through with this unique leadership opportunity. In certain cases, a few months after the exercise, counselors have recommended students or individuals have requested to join the PGM program, this can be addressed through the PGM committee by contacting Operation Flinders.
- The New Directions Manager will be working collaboratively with you and other coordinators from your school/ organisation to support participants and provide links to services and activities in your region post exercise. Please contact them on (08) 8242 3255 if you have any questions.

Annex A: Operation Flinders Foundation Cause, Mission, Objectives and Values Statement

Annex B: Packing List – What to bring, what not to bring