

A presentation given by *Boarding Recovery* to the Boarding Concern Conference

London 12th May 2012

Roads to recovery an introduction to the work of the Boarding Recovery network of counsellors and psychotherapists

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In 2005 Nick Duffell and Joy Schaverien ran an in-depth professional training for counsellors and psychotherapists. This one year long training explored the dynamics particular to the Boarding School Experience.

Eight of us undertook that initial training which was both academic and experiential. The training developed our understanding and experience in working with what Nick Duffell calls the Boarding School Survivor. We explored the emotional impact of early abandonment, institutionalisation, the interpersonal and intrapersonal consequences then and now of the Boarding Experience from different perspectives including psychodynamic and attachment.

Some of us have gone on to work with Nick and Helena running the Boarding School Survivors Workshops and all of us are working regularly with ex-boarding clients.

In 2006 the eight of us formed a peer supervision group to support our work with ex-boarders. This group continues today and provides us with professional support to our individual counselling and psychotherapy practices and group-work.

We found that clients were reporting how difficult it was to find a therapist with the appropriate knowledge and awareness of the boarding school survivors issues. From this group we began to look at how we could build a resource for ex-boarders seeking psychological and emotional support. This led to the creation of Boarding Recovery. Primarily website based we provide a central reference point for people looking for help for themselves or often their partners. We offer advice by telephone and through email, there are articles and information about counsellors and professionals with understanding of the Boarding School Experience. Currently those listed are the initial group that undertook the training seven years ago.

Since the sites inception we have had a steady stream of inquiries and people taking steps towards recovery. Several enquiries from overseas both ex-pats schooled here and those schooled abroad wanting to make sense of their own particular boarding experience. Many enquiries are initiated by partners of boarders who are so concerned about those close to them that they will seek advice in order to make sense of their behaviours, these

include over work, withdrawal or a fear of their having a psychiatric breakdown.

There have been several media enquires through the website. We will try to make a comment for the group to the press or more often refer them to Boarding Concern.

What we have noticed is that it appears there are more people coming forward looking for help to make sense of the impact of the boarding experience. The split life, the emptiness, the lack of joy and hope, the outsider looking in on everyone else's world, the deep longing, the driven workaholicism, the aggression, competitiveness and the impact on any meaningful relationship. We find that many have had experiences of counselling and psychotherapy but come reporting that they often felt that there was a secret part that was never reached, that boarding schooling is often overlooked or dismissed (possibly from their own boarding, their children's or the privilege).

Clients will often come with deep suspicion of the worth of counselling and psychotherapy beneath which lies the question "is there any hope or point to looking at this" "should I not get on with life and let

these feelings go, grow up" the very question reveals the trauma of the child sent away, still to this day struggling to make sense of it all. They want to know if therapy works or do they just have to keep live like this, is this how everyone feels? Is it just me and if so there really must be some thing wrong with me. It is saddening to sit with a 70 year old man and be asked if there is any hope of joy, relationship, of coming home!

We have noticed over the last few years growing media attention around the boarding school experience, its impact on the developing child, its hold on the present and the future. This means more people are taking the abuse and abandonment of children seriously and it appears there is more and more debate. Hopefully this will lead to change.

The abandoning of children as young as 5 and 6 years old to institutions in the name of education and privilege needs to end, ex-boarders in their 20's report the same experiences of abandonment, homesickness, bullying, confusion, of trauma as those who went to schools in the 1940's, 50's and 60's. The environment may have changed but the trauma continues, this is common to all ages.

Boarding Recovery can be contacted at:
www.boardingrecovery.com

Boarding Concern can be found here:
www.boardingconcern.org.uk

Boarding School Survivors can be found here:
www.boardingschoolsurvivors.co.uk