MRS Approach to Fostering Safe and Respectful Interpersonal Relationships

Purpose:

The purpose of this dossier is to articulate the suite of current strategies employed by Monash Residential Services, in ensuring that all residents are able to foster safe and respectful relationships particularly with a focus on the role of consent in all types of interpersonal interactions. Through highlighting strengths, shortcomings and opportunities for change in current practice, this synthesis is designed to be an ever evolving approach to meet the continuing needs of the residential community at Monash University.

A truly objective analysis of work in this space must acknowledge the increasing media coverage and public scrutiny sexual misconduct within tertiary institutions and associated student accommodation providers has received within the past 24 months. This has culminated in a University Australia initiative which has resulted in a national university student survey on sexual assault and sexual harassment, which aims to provide an accurate picture of the nature and extent of assault at universities.

The findings of the report and the individual university data was published in August 2017, and it has once again received increased public interest and awareness. Historically, MRS has been active and at the forefront in our approach to fostering safe and respectful interpersonal relationships, never tolerating sexual violence or assault of any kind.

As media cycles and public focus shifts away from this issue, MRS will remain committed to ensuring that every residential environment for all residents is free from sexual assault, harassment or misconduct. MRS will continue to support the University to be a leader within the sector.

Context:

Ensuring respectful relationships and where relevant, responsible and safe sexual behaviour, within the residential community is an area of important focus for MRS. The unique composition of the majority of residents aged between 18-24, combined with the considerable diversity of cultural backgrounds, sexualities and life experiences, necessarily requires that appropriate safeguards and supports are in place to create a safe, respectful and healthy environment for all.

Due to the vast range of policies and support infrastructure in place, MRS is contextually different to other residential environments across Australian and international settings, and therefore, grapples with different types of issues than found in these other environments (i.e. absence of a culture of fraternisation). However, as with any other University student accommodation service, MRS is not entirely immune to some of the risks posed to safety and wellbeing of residents as they form relationships with one another and in particular, when they engage in social settings.

In accordance with Recommendation 9 of the AHRC’s report, ‘Changing the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities 2017’, Monash University will commission an independent, expert-led review of the factors which contribute
to sexual assault and sexual harassment within our setting. Implementing the recommendations that may come from such a review is integral to Monash University’s steadfast commitment to eradicating this issue from our residential environment.

**Current landscape of offerings:**

- **The MRS Conditions of Residency** – Articulates the policy obligations set by MRS to residents to demonstrate safe and respectful behaviour in all forms. Whilst covered in the previous policy, MRS has updated its Conditions of Residency in 2018 to explicitly reference ‘hazing’ and to make clear that it is not tolerated within our community. These conditions also make reference to the scope of the Director of MRS, the College Head, more broadly the Residential Support Team and the involvement of other University staff where appropriate, in the provision of support and responsibility to ensuring the safety of all residents. This policy, and more broadly Monash University’s responsibilities in this space is situated within the broader legal frameworks that govern behaviour, including that of the [Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C1984C00266).

- **Partnerships and access to services** – A critical component of the MRS response is in ensuring strong relationships with the University’s health services (Medical and Dental; Counselling and Mental Health and includes the availability of specific support through the [South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault and Family Violence](https://www.secasa.org.au) [SECASA]). Further, the well-established link with the Safer Community Unit in identifying and supporting individuals impacted by at-risk behaviour is critical in mitigating any problem behaviours that may arise. In 2016 MRS partnered with the [MSA Women’s Office](https://www.msa.net.au) to produce and circulate posters on consent, and continues to develop this partnership.

- **Orientation and Transition approach** – Given the critical role of Orientation and Transition in the student lifecycle, MRS devotes a significant amount of time and resources in ensuring all students have a shared understanding of MRS’ expectations and standards of behaviour.
  - Offer and Acceptance process - all residents must view the Monash University Consent video before they are able to accept their offer within one of our residences.
  - Arrival Presentation – compulsory viewing by all residents prior to collection of their keys, this informational video contains information around general safety and behavioral expectations, including alcohol.
  - ResStart – through an online portal, and coupled with compulsory in-Hall sessions delivered by residential support staff, every resident is exposed to specific key messages around consent and safety through the [ResStart initiative](https://www.msa.net.au).
  - Sexpectations – originally developed by student leaders, the Sexpectations workshop is an interactive forum for residents to explore themes of sexuality, consent and community expectations. Residents responsible for the delivery of Sexpectations undergo a ‘Train the Trainer’ workshop, delivered by staff from the Safer Community Unit. Additionally, SECASA reviewed and approved
Sexpectations to ensure that the workshop would effectively develop our residents’ knowledge and understanding of consent, and the skills and behaviours required to navigate sexual relationships.

- Alcocups – closely aligned to issues of safety in interpersonal relationships is ensuring that all students living on campus are able to consume alcohol in a responsible fashion and in line with the MRS Alcohol Policy. MRS, in collaboration with leading alcohol education provider, Alcocups, deliver an annual workshop on this topic for all residents. All of our Residential Advisors who lead this peer-led training are UniCan accredited.

- **Safe and Respectful Communities Cards (Reporting and support framework cards)** – Before arrival, every residence was fitted with reporting and support framework cards which outline MRS’ standards, expectations and commitment to providing a safe environment for all residents. The card details the process of reporting and support services available for students who have experienced sexual assault, harassment, misconduct or any form of inappropriate behaviour. These cards are also promoted to residents through our printed Orientation collateral to ensure that their purpose is understood and that the broader support network of services in place becomes known by our residents.

- **Ongoing training and programs** – With the purpose of strengthening the capacity of student leaders to challenge poor behaviour where it may arise, RAs are required to complete a range of mandatory training programs. These include (but are not limited to) First Responder training (delivered by SECASA), Vicarious Resilience training (delivered by Mental Health First Aid accredited nurses), the Respectful and Responsible Moodle module, Respectful Communities Initiatives Training (RCI), White Ribbon Training and Equal Opportunity Training. Additional non-compulsory training is also offered and promoted to Resident Advisors wishing to extend their knowledge and personal development for the betterment of the residential communities. Further to this, a range of training is currently in wide effect among the residential community around the areas of responsible alcohol consumption, bystander behaviour and identity and inclusiveness – as these priorities connect intimately with enabling a safe and healthy sexual environment for all. All training is available for residents, irrespective of the RA status. Additionally, Hall Society Executives are required to undertake mandatory training in RCI, Queer 101 and Leadership and Engagement training (previously known as Grievance Officer training). Hall Orientation teams are also offered this suite of training.

- **Campaigns and events** MRS continues to promote the University’s *Respect.Now.Always.* campaign. As active contributor to the campaign’s messaging, MRS champions the determination of the University to ensure that staff and students are safe from sexual assault and sexual harassment, promoting safety for all at Monash. Specifically, the Respect. Now. Always. app is promoted through our in-hall screens in the first 4 weeks of each semester.
- **White Ribbon Australia Campaign** – MRS is a proud champion of the White Ribbon initiative to tackle male violence against females and actively promotes the White Ribbon Ambassador initiative across the organisation. Over the past three years, this initiative has continued to grow in size and scale. The committee is made up of RAs from all of our residential halls who are responsible for organising a White Ribbon Dinner night to raise awareness of the issue as well as implement smaller campaigns and initiatives within halls. [MRS White Ribbon video](#)

- **Sunday Supper events and their review** – In 2017, all residential halls featured a series of Sunday Supper events focused on respectful interpersonal relationships. This included a residence specific screening of the Hunting Ground. Though different in context, MRS recognises that this documentary features several messages that affirm and reinforce the Conditions of Residency and programming in this area. The Sunday Supper Series proved a successful avenue for keeping the Respectful Relationships messaging constant throughout the course of the year. The events offered proved to be a successful means of engaging residents on this important topic. The Sunday Supper series will be renamed in 2018, and will be known as the Respectful Relationships engagement series. The events offered proved to be a successful means of engaging residents on this important topic. The Sunday Supper series has been renamed in 2018 and will be known as the Respectful Relationships engagement series. MRS is committed to offering two events per semester in this space as a means of maintaining the message throughout the year.

- **Surveys** - MRS routinely surveys its residential cohort on a range of issues relevant to the student experience of life on campus. All First Year Residents are interviewed in Week 4 of their stay and specifically asked, ‘Do you understand MRS’ intent and policies around sexual consent and interpersonal conduct?’ and ‘Do you have any comments regarding MRS’ intent and policies around sexual consent and interpersonal conduct?’

In the MRS Orientation Evaluation Survey, new residents are asked to rate the following: ‘I found my residence’s Sexpectations seminar/activities to be helpful and useful’ and ‘I found my residence’s Alcocups seminar/activities to be helpful and useful.’ Additionally, new residents to MRS are asked if ‘The program helped me to understand MRS’ expectations around appropriate behaviour (esp. alcohol & consent)’.

Every two years, all residents undertake our Alcohol Survey in order to gain further insight into the drinking behaviours of our cohort. The results help to inform both MRS policy and approach to alcohol.

All residents are also asked in the annual Exit Survey about how safe they feel; in their room, their hall and on campus at night. Further to these three questions on safety,
MRS is going to add the following questions to its 2018 survey in light of the University’s response to the 2017 AHRC’s 2017 survey findings. It is hoped that the results from these additional questions will provide an understanding of how successful various initiatives have been, so that the University can understand how best to communicate such vital messages to its residents.

- Are you aware of Monash’s Respect.Now.Always campaign?
- Do you know where to go within Monash if you witness sexual assault and or sexual harassment and want to make a report?
- Do you know where to go within Monash if you experience sexual assault and or sexual harassment?
- Are you aware of the support and referral services provided by Monash’s Safer Community Unit?
- To what degree are you aware of the support services within Monash for victims of sexual assault and sexual harassment?
- Are you aware of the Monash Respect Now Support App?
- Have you downloaded the Monash Respect Now Support App?
- Have you used the Monash Respect Now Support App?
- To what degree was the information on the Monash Respect Now Support App helpful?

In terms of the training undertaken by our Resident Advisors at their annual training summit in November, the MRS Resident Advisor Training Experience Evaluation survey asks RAs to rate their level of satisfaction for the following training activities: ‘First Responder training’ and ‘Vicarious Resilience training’. In addition, RAs are asked to rate the following: ‘I feel my residence has a clear & consistent approach to consent/respectful and appropriate interpersonal relationships.’ Indeed, Residential Advisors are asked to rate the effectiveness of all of the mandatory training previous outlined in this document.

Efforts such as the surveys and the interviews of first year residents act as a safety to ensure that all residents have an understanding of the expectations incumbent upon them as members of the MRS residential community.
• **Continuous improvement and the resident perspective** – MRS recognises the need to continuously strengthen and innovate practise in this area, as informed by the experiences of residents. The Community Conversations series has been embedded into organisational practice and provides a forum where engaged residents come together and identify opportunities for improvement in MRS’ practice. Where appropriate, these focus group sessions provide opportunities to listen to resident feedback and perspectives with regards to fostering safe and respectful interpersonal relationships.

**Future directions – 2019 and beyond:**

Having established a clear awareness of the current landscape, it is evident that MRS has a comprehensive range of strategies in place which promote safe and respectful interpersonal relationships within our residential communities. It is essential that these practices are frequently reviewed, always considering the experiences and voices of our residents.

• **Review of compulsory training** – Identifying which training provides the greatest outcomes for residents and what knowledge and skills are most appropriate for RAs to develop must continually be evaluated. Additionally, the processes by which MRS monitor mandatory training must be revised and streamlined as this is currently an incredibly time consuming task.

• **Continued support of University initiatives** – MRS will continue to support faculties and divisions within the University in a collective attempt to eradicate sexual assault, harassment and misconduct from the experiences of students, with an uncompromising determination to ensure that Monash University is a safe environment for all.

• **Implementation of Recommendations** - in adhering to Recommendation 9 of the AHRC’s report, Monash University will engage in an independent, expert-led review of the contributing factors towards sexual assault and sexual harassment within our setting for completion by August 2018. MRS is committed to implementing any recommendations that stem from this review as part of its core commitment to providing a safe and supportive residential environment that is free from sexual assault, harassment and misconduct.

Given that these issues are very much grounded in the complexities of human experience and broader social forces, MRS will continue to develop and mature its responses as appropriate. Although underpinned by core principles of safety, respect and inclusion, MRS will continue to drive its practice in this area with a spirit of innovation and proactive effort.