



## HOMESTAY POLICY

### 1. RATIONALE

This policy applies when Billanook College takes on responsibility for approving the accommodation and general welfare arrangements for overseas students who are under 18 years of age.

It is critical that the College ensures the safety and welfare of our International students who are accommodated in homestay arrangements. This group of students are particularly vulnerable as they face a number of challenges, including significant cultural differences, language difficulties, separation may be for the first time from their immediate family and living with people they do not know.

This policy details the processes the College must undertake in screening, selecting and monitoring accommodation and welfare arrangements for our students.

It is Billanook College policy that no student less than 13 years of age will be placed in homestay accommodation.

### 2. HOMESTAY MANAGEMENT

As Billanook College issues the Confirmation of Approved Accommodation and Welfare (CAAW) letter for International students who are under the age of 18, it accepts full responsibility for monitoring such arrangements in the interests of the welfare of the student. The College cannot delegate its responsibilities for approving the accommodation, support and general welfare arrangements for an International student to a third party.

#### 2.1 Third Party Student Services

The College may engage third parties or service providers to assist with the delivery of International student support and accommodation services including:

- Providing bi-lingual support to facilitate communication between the International students, their offshore or onshore parents and the College and Homestay hosts.
- Providing emergency contact for International students and Homestay Hosts
- Assist the College International Student Program Staff in Homestay assessment, placement and Homestay orientation procedures
- Providing Homestay Hosts information and training to ensure they understand their obligations and meet the required standards of homestay accommodation;
- Assist the student and College with overseeing the day-to-day welfare, discipline and academic progress of each student.

However, the College will NOT:

- Refer students seeking homestay (via website or marketing material) to contracted accommodation agencies;
- State or imply in marketing materials that an accommodation agency exercises the School's role or responsibility in approving homestay accommodation;



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- Use accommodation agencies to verify that an overseas student's homestay accommodation is suitable for the student's age and needs, which must be undertaken by a person accountable to the Principal of the College.

And any third party 'Local Support Person' (LSP) or support service provided is:

- Not performing a 'guardianship' role and the service agency has no responsibility for the student's accommodation or welfare;
- In addition to, and not in place of, the support and counselling the College normally provides to all students;
- The service agency is not contracted to offer 'guardianship' (which can be confused with legal guardianship of a child);
- The contract with the service agency does not state or imply that the agency will have responsibility for the student's accommodation or welfare. The contract does also not state that or imply that the agreement to the additional support services is a government or a student visa requirement;
- The service agency is not contracted to become the only method of communication between the College and the parent/s or legal guardian/s or the student; and
- The service agency is not contracted to exclusively hold or retain details of communication between the school and the parent/s or legal guardian/s or the student.

The College will ensure the Staff of the third-party service provider who work directly with our students, have been appropriately screened, inducted and trained. The College will gather, verify and record the following information about a person whom it proposes to engage to perform child connected work:

- Working With Children Check card details and check its status on receipt through use of the WWCC Victoria online WWCC checking tool.
- proof of personal identity and any professional or other relevant qualifications (VIT etc);
- the person's history of work involving children; and
- references that address the person's suitability for the job and working with children.

The College will induct and educate the third-party service provider Staff, who work directly with our students, in College's *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy*, our *Code of Conduct* and process for reporting child abuse.

Procedure for third party service provider Staff screening, induction and training as follows:

- Student Pathways Manager will interview and obtain the third-party staff member details including name, email address, proof of identity documents, experience working with children, referees and relevant qualifications, WWCC or VIT etc. The same details required when the College screens any potential College employee.
- Forward these details to the Human Resources Manager who will check and verify the validity of the WWCC or VIT, identity, qualification documents and referees.



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- The Human Resources Manager will then email an invite to the third party staff member to undertake the College online *Staff Induction* course including the *Child Safe Program* and the *International Student Program – Staff Training module* via the College Staff Learning System
- Third party completes the online Induction courses and declares they have read and agree to abide by the College's *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy* and *Code of Conduct*.
- The Human Resources Manager checks that the third party has completed the Induction Course within four weeks of receiving access to the online course.
- Ongoing the Human Resources Manager will ensure that all third party staff members complete the training in *International Student Program – Staff training module* and latest *Child Safe Program* at least annually.

### 3. SOURCING AND SCREENING HOMESTAY FAMILIES

Consistent marketing and promotion of the Billanook College Homestay Program, seeking Expressions of Interest, occurs through social media channels, the College website and via word of mouth referral both within our College community and in the broader community.

Close and consistent communication occurs within the International Student Programs (ISP) Team to monitor the effectiveness of all policies and procedures in all aspects of the Billanook College Homestay Program. Communication and review of effectiveness is also undertaken in collaboration with the Deputy Principal and Chief Financial Officer.

All proposed homestay provider enquiries are directed to the International Student Programs Team for initial contact by phone or email in response.

The follow-up contact will involve extraction of basic facts from the proposed homestay provider and a request for a formal Homestay Application to be completed.

Introductory interviews must take place when all adult members of the potential homestay residence are available.

The introductory interview involves inspecting the facilities to be provided, gathering data on the nature and scope of the proposed homestay provider to be an effective match to the requirements of Billanook College homestay families. Such data is recorded on the Homestay Provision Application form. Potential families are asked to provide identification, WWC check and character referees which will be contacted as an element of assessment.

An initial assessment of potential homestay providers is made based on such factors as:

- The apparent motive for the family to be offering homestay accommodation;
- The understanding and acceptance of the key functions of the homestay family;
- Capacity of the family to provide the necessary day to day support of the International student and an effective study environment and personal space and privacy;
- Willingness and ability of the family to involve the International student in family life;
- Proximity to Billanook College and access to daily transport to the College campus;

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- Response by the potential homestay provider to points raised and questions posed on the importance of adherence to the College *Child Safety Code of Conduct* and *Child Safe Standards* and their responsibility to report any suspected child abuse.

All adult members of the homestay family are required to have a current Working With Children Check (WWCC) clearance and provide this documentation to Billanook College. In all cases an International student cannot be placed at the homestay residence until such time that all WWCC documentation is lodged with Billanook College.

The Billanook College Homestay Program Handbook (including *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy* and *Code of Conduct*) is given to the prospective homestay provider and outlines key aspects and required standards of our Program.

A record of findings from the introductory interview are lodged after completion of the initial interview. Confirmation is sent to all families in writing as to whether Billanook College shall be inviting the family to join the Program. An email response is requested from the prospective homestay provider to confirm they are willing to proceed, prompting Billanook College to place that family on the waiting list.

Centralised administrative support by the Administrative Assistant International Student Programs (AAISP) is provided in all aspects of written communication, publication and issuance of documents and maintenance of confidentiality of record keeping in line with provisions of the College *Privacy Policy*.

#### **4. SELECTING THE ACCOMMODATION, SUPPORT AND WELFARE ARRANGEMENTS OF STUDENTS (UNDER 18 YEARS)**

As part of the written offer and acceptance process, parents of International student applicants are required to submit an Expression of Interest for Long Term Homestay form. This is accessible to Billanook College for discussion as forward planning for intake of new International students arises.

If the International student is attending an external ELICOS Centre in Melbourne prior to commencement at Billanook College, an interview of the student approximately 10-12 weeks prior to the scheduled commencement date at Billanook College to explore homestay placement wishes and to extract further details on suitable matchings to available homestay families. Further information may also be extracted from the off-shore parents via the placement Agency.

The Student Pathways Manager then considers suitable families and makes a recommendation of a suitable homestay families to the Parents/Agent of the International student, inclusive of a homestay family profile.

Prior to the pre-determined date of homestay commencement, an opportunity may be created for the International student to visit the homestay family, or at very least communication is encouraged between the homestay family and the International student via email or telephone, to assist with a smooth commencement.



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On the date of homestay commencement Billanook College will facilitate either the airport greeting and homestay placement process, or the collection of the International student from their appointed ELICOS Centre homestay residence and relocation to the Billanook College homestay residence.

The Student Pathways Manager will then make an appointment with the homestay parent/s and the International Student to review the Billanook College *Homestay Program Handbook* and to facilitate the homestay orientation and signing of *Acknowledgement of the Homestay Agreement* by both the International student or their parents and the homestay parent/s. This will include clarification of arrangements for:

- Payment of homestay fees and assistance to the student as deemed necessary with such matters as activating Internet banking;
- A re-emphasis of the College's *Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy, Code of Conduct* to the homestay parent/s;
- Ensure that the International student and homestay parent/s are clear on the channels of communication available should they ever be concerned with any administrative, operational, safety and welfare aspect of their homestay placement, including;
  - Explaining to the international student the availability of the student's 24/7 emergency contacts as detailed on the Student Safety Card and information on how to speak up about suspected child abuse or personal safety issues
  - Providing the International student with the homestay parent/s accommodation address, home telephone and mobile numbers;
  - Providing the homestay parent/s with emergency contact details for the parents of the International student.

### 5. MONITORING THE ACCOMMODATION, SUPPORT AND WELFARE ARRANGEMENTS OF STUDENTS (UNDER 18 YEARS)

Billanook College endeavours to set excellent standards of service provision for College approved homestay families through publishing clear guidelines in the Billanook College Homestay Program Handbook.

These guidelines are the focus of:

- Initial discussions with prospective homestay providers
- Introductory interviews with interested homestay providers
- Orientation processes and Homestay Agreement sign-off at commencement
- Six-monthly inspection of the homestay accommodation facilities and meeting with the host family

The International Student Program staff or delegate is to undertake regular progress checks on homestay placements through phone interviews of homestay providers and through being accessible to and interviewing students within College hours. Diary notes and written records of matters of concern are placed on the student file as required.

As a minimum, a physical check of each homestay residence and meeting with the host family

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shall be undertaken every six months. This check must include checking all aspects of the homestay as per the *Homestay Checklist* document.

The International student is briefed on the importance of open communication with their homestay family by the Deputy Principal, Student Pathways Manager, International Student Program staff or bi-lingual LSP, so that constructive intervention on any concerns may occur in a timely manner.

The parents of the International student are clearly advised that the most effective means of gaining a prompt response on any concern they may have regarding accommodation, care or welfare of their child, is to channel the concern direct to the International Student Program staff. The Student Pathways Manager is then charged with responsibility for investigation and resolution, as deemed necessary.

All matters of concern or queries raised by the homestay parents are channeled for discussion and resolution through the Student Pathways Manager. Homestay parents are advised they must maintain open and honest channels of communication with the College.

Matters typically raised by homestay parents include:

- Adherence to specific homestay rules e.g. maintaining a tidy bedroom, lights out/ no technology times, curfew times, dietary issues, communication and social engagement with other family members
- Financial matters – irregularity of homestay fee payment
- Arrangements for return of the International student to their home country during term break
- Clarification of welfare considerations for International student engagement in social activities out of school hours.

Billanook College understands and accepts that in signing off on the CAAW, we are assuming full responsibility for the welfare of our International students at all times while they are on-shore in Australia, as holders of a student visa.

To this end Billanook College chooses to put in place the following procedures:

- Verifying parent awareness of travel plans by their child back to their home country for all term breaks and centralising all airport transfer arrangements from the homestay to the airport, through to flight check-in and immigration clearance. Similarly, Billanook College undertakes to co-ordinate airport greetings and transfer back to homestay residences upon International students re-entry to Australia;
- Transport Policy (Out of School Hours) for International student safety and awareness as listed in the Homestay Program Handbook.

Resolution of homestay grievances is considered a priority function of the Billanook College International Student Programs staff. Once a matter is raised by either the homestay family or by the student or their representative, the Student Pathways Manager is charged with responsibility for investigating the matter and empowered to implement action plans should the matter be deemed to be minor in nature. In the event of more significant matters arising, the Deputy Principal will be consulted, at the first available opportunity, to devise an action plan.

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Billanook College policy is to initially attempt to mediate for change in preserving the homestay placement relationship, consistent with our Homestay Program Handbook, however in the event of matters under dispute being deemed to be irreconcilable, Billanook College shall advise both parties that the homestay placement will be terminated.

### 6. ALTERNATIVE RESIDENTIAL ARRANGEMENTS

If the International Student resides with a parent either on a Guardianship Visa or for a designated period of time under an *Alternative Accommodation Agreement* (e.g. a period of parent visit to Australia), Billanook College acknowledges the continuation of its responsibility to maintain support services to the International student.

In such cases Billanook College acknowledges its responsibility to take all measures possible to inform and advise the parents of key support needs and supervisory standards required of the parents by the College. This is conducted through interview of the parent or nominated relative and through visitation to the residence of that person.

In the case, under a Guardianship Visa it is acknowledged that in the absence of a CAAW being held by Billanook College, that the College has no authority over accommodation and welfare arrangements for that student. The College does however, have the authority and responsibility to advise the Department of Home Affairs should the College form the opinion that the guardian parent, or relative is acting in a manner that may be in breach of their guardianship responsibilities and/or placing the International student at risk. In accordance with *Child Safe Standards*, *Crimes Act 'Failure to Report'*, and *'Failure to Protect'* along with *Mandatory Reporting* laws, College Staff are required by law to report any reasonable belief that a child may be at risk of abuse.

In the event that parents of the International student have a preferred family friend or relative with whom they wish the International student to reside, the standard homestay screening and acceptance process and protocols shall be followed. This includes, but is not limited to; WWCC, homestay induction and sign-up, six-monthly checks and other communication and verification as required. In such circumstances it shall be understood that Billanook College shall advise but may not mandate, the financial elements of such a placement.

If the parent of the International student requests that their child resides for weekends, holidays or other set periods of time at an alternative location, an *Alternative Accommodation Agreement* must be signed by the International student's parents and the alternative homestay provider. In these circumstances an induction and residential check must also be undertaken. Such requests will be assessed and approved by the Student Pathways Manager at their sole discretion based on:

- Location
- Suitability of adult supervision
- Duration of stay
- Reason for request

In such circumstances the International student is still expected to abide by all aspects of the Homestay Guidelines whilst residing at alternative accommodation. All alternative

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arrangements are for a defined period of time or frequency (e.g. every weekend during term time).

If the parent of the International student communicates that they shall be residing in Australia for a specified period of time on a Visitor Visa and therefore requests the student resides with the parent during that time, Billanook College shall assess the request on the basis of:

- Proposed location and suitability of residence
- Proposed adequacy of adult supervision of student welfare
- Duration of proposed stay
- Possible impact upon student meeting student visa requirements.

In such cases Billanook College shall adopt a consultative approach with parents to ensure that student welfare is treated as the highest of priorities in all such cases.

In all such cases of agreement to this temporary accommodation arrangement with the parent an Alternative Accommodation Agreement must be signed off by the parent of the International student prior to commencement of that arrangement – to be maintained on the student's file. The visiting parent shall be advised that they have access to all relevant College support personnel during the specified period.

### 7. STORAGE AND SHARING OF INFORMATION AND DATA

In line with the Billanook College *Privacy Policy* all data is stored securely.

All WWCC, Alternative Agreements and other written requests from parents are scanned and stored on TASS. Notes on homestay visits, conversations, checks, mediations and issues are recorded on TASS by the International Student Program Staff or delegate; these notes can be reviewed by the Deputy Principal or Student Pathways Manager to track and monitor progress of all issues and for reviews and audit of process and protocol adherence.

All such documents are available to the International Students Program staff as required and not shared with other internal or external parties unless instructed by the Student Pathways Manager, in consultation with the College Principal.

### 8. RELATED COLLEGE DOCUMENTS

- Homestay Provision Application form
- Homestay Program (Policy) Handbook
- Child Safety Policy
- Code of Conduct
- Privacy Policy
- Expression of Interest for Long Term Homestay form
- Acknowledgement of the Homestay Agreement form
- Homestay Checklist
- Alternative Accommodation Agreement