



**MATTHEW
FLINDERS**
Anglican College

Leading Men at Flinders Program

Leadership Retreat, Mt Russell, Qld
25-27 April 2025



EVENT REPORT | FLINDERS DISCOVERY INSTITUTE



**LEADING
MEN** *at Flinders*

FLINDERS
**Discovery
Institute**

“Research tells us that young men’s decisions about life, learning and leadership are typically informed by a complex mixture of social myths and socioeconomic, academic and cultural factors, along with observing how other men navigate these dynamics.

“We want to connect our senior boys at Flinders with authentic role models who can support them at this crucial time of their journey into adulthood when they are establishing their identity and exploring their place in the world.

“Our mentors on retreat had incredible insights to share from their diverse life experiences, and were eager to challenge our boys to explore ethical questions and set goals for themselves to become positive role models.

“It’s proven that a core group of strong young leaders who demonstrate integrity, fairness, empathy and respect for others can have a powerful positive impact on their peers and set a standard for how students should treat one another; that’s the culture we seek to develop at Flinders.”

DR LOUISE MCCUAIG
FLINDERS DISCOVERY INSTITUTE, DIRECTOR

Matthew Flinders Anglican College

2025 Leading Men: April 25-27

Event Summary

Senior boys at Flinders experienced modern farm life and learned about positive masculinity from mentors on this inspiring three-day leadership retreat.

Twelve 17-year-old boys from Matthew Flinders Anglican College on the Sunshine Coast spent two nights camping under the stars and three days engaged in mentoring with inspiring men and women on a 3,000-hectare agricultural property in Mt Russell on the Darling Downs from 25-27 April.

The three-day retreat experience was part of the broader “Leading Men at Flinders” program, a Flinders initiative designed to address in practical ways the concerns in society about ‘toxic masculinity’, violence, matters of consent and respectful relationships.

During the leadership retreat, the Year 12 students, guided by four staff at Flinders, were hosted by Ash and Kirsty Butler on their family-owned property, Yambeen, located west of Toowoomba.

The Butlers generously opened their home and property to help support and mentor the students.

They were joined by guest mentors Spencer Lavers, a squadron leader in the Royal Australian Air Force, and Tom Healy, the Improvement Process Manager at Pinata Farms, the largest pineapple producer in Australia, and son to cricketing great, Ian Healy.

Over the course of the weekend, the mentors gave a unique insight into how they live their lives and explore challenging careers while being mindful to support their own mental health and act ethically and respectfully through situations of uncertainty, risk, overwhelm, change and opportunity.

College Principal Michelle Carroll said schools had an important role to connect students with high-performing role models who demonstrate what it looks like to be an “ethical leader”.



College Principal Michelle Carroll said, “At Flinders, we want to empower our boys and girls to learn how they can step up in their communities as positive role models.”

“Our Leading Men at Flinders program is one of the ways we are supporting our Senior boys to learn about positive masculinity and grow through fun, challenging and practical experiences with inspiring leaders.”

Event Purpose and Introductions

Mentors

ASH AND KIRSTY BUTLER:

The Butlers own their family business, Yambeen Farming Company, a 3000-hectare broadacre property that is dedicated to sustainable farming practices and determined to utilise the latest machinery and technologies.

The farm specialises in the production of a variety of high-quality grain and cotton on basalt soils formed through the volcanic erosion of the Toowoomba Range.



ASH BUTLER:

"I'm a 3rd generation farmer (and I still have no idea what I'm doing!). I called Dad halfway through my university degree and I can still hear Him saying "That's fine, if you make "that" decision you won't be working on this farm" to me that was the kick up the arse I needed and something I worked out years later.

"A few things I can relate to from a young age and fully understand, is the hesitation facing challenges and making the right (calculated) decision. Very relatable to farming, which is what I have learned from previous experiences with varying job titles and in different countries.

My only goal/aspiration is to continue bettering this farm's efficiencies and mitigating as much risk as possible. All the while enjoying this lifestyle, what it provides and doing it with family.

"Something I hope to inspire is that you "the leading men" walk away from this experience with an open mind to risk and change."

KIRSTY BUTLER:

"I was a city girl, who was drowning (lost) in the pressure of going to a private school, with the expectation that I would go to university and get a degree. Having no idea what I wanted to do, I landed on physio, as I loved running and coaching. Not having the OP score to get into physio I ended up in human movement studies.

"After 6 months I realised it was not for me, and I changed to a double degree in psychology. After the 3 years undergraduate and doing some work experience, I realised this also was not for me at this stage of my life. I wanted to travel, but I didn't have the money, so I thought why not become an air hostess. And for the next 5 years that's what I did and loved it.

"Long story short, Ash invited me back to the farm in 2015 to be part of a 10,000 T sorghum harvest. Having struggled with anxiety and depression for the last 10+ years, I thought the farm was the right place to be. I ended up falling in love with Ash and the farm and here I am today.

"I want the boys to know that their path forward isn't always visible but with a couple of turns, they can end up in a place where they truly can find their passion in the unlikeliest of places."

Event Purpose and Introductions

Mentors

MENTORS cont'd

TOM HEALY: Project Manager - Process and Technology,
Pinata Farms

“As a city fella growing up, my good friends were school boarders and that meant holidays in the bush being kids! Great fun. I had a senior school teacher that poked me down the path of pursuing a career in agriculture, and here I am today—very early in my career but loving it.

“Since completing an Ag Business degree (and retiring the dream of becoming a professional cricketer), I have chopped & changed roles in various Ag industries, including 18 months working at Yambeen. I never really wanted this winding path to happen but looking back this has already been invaluable!

“I learnt so much under all of the Butlers at Yambeen & that experience alone helped me identify my strengths, weaknesses and things I liked doing. I explored opportunities, built a network and decided on the lifestyle I want to live my life. Some pretty big-thinking stuff!

“This has helped me form my 10-year goal of hopefully becoming the CEO of an Australian Agribusiness one day.”



SPENCER LAVERS, Fighter Pilot and Instructor
(image - Spencer (on left) with colleague

Squadron Leader Spencer Lavers is a fighter pilot and Fighter Combat Instructor in the Royal Australian Air Force with over 1500 hours flying fast jet aircraft, including on operations.

He is currently the course director of F-35 conversion training for new pilots transitioning to their first front line fast jet. His previous roles include squadron tactics and training officer, integrated tactics development, and chief instructor of Air Warfare Instructor Course.



Spencer shared insights into the extraordinary leadership skills he has developed over his career, and the importance of ‘followership’ as well as ‘leadership’.

Event Summary

Staff Reflections

FLINDERS STAFF

Flinders staff who guided the boys on retreat included:

Dr Louise McCuaig, the Director of the Flinders Discovery Institute;

Mr Duncan Greenbank, the Head of Senior School;

Mrs Sanette Janse van Rensburg, the Head of RAVE (Religious and Values Education); and

Mr David Cameron, Secondary Teacher.

EVENT REFLECTION: By Dr Louise McCuaig

“All of the Flinders young men who attended this camp did themselves and their families proud.

“They were engaged, thoughtful, adventurous, cheeky at times, but also extremely respectful to all staff and adults who worked with them across the retreat. We received many compliments regarding their behaviour.

“We are looking forward to supporting this group of Year 12 students as they mentor a new team of Yr 11 Leading Men and work towards the capstone Leading Men’s Fathers Day Breakfast in September.

“But for now, we believe it is important to acknowledge these students’ positive performance and their own investment in the success of our Leading Men program.”

Event Summary

Student Reflections

STUDENT REFLECTIONS

Naish Roberts, the Year 12 Flinders College Captain, thanked Dr Louise McCuaig for the opportunity to participate in the retreat.

Naish reflected on some of the memorable moments:

“I’ll remember learning how to change a tyre as a group; sitting in a farm machine with so many buttons I wouldn’t know where to start; sitting around the campfire under the stars, playing guitar and singing with mates; hearing the experiences of people who, like us, don’t have it all planned out but are doing the best they can; and shooting down a balloon using a makeshift catapult with poles and a tyre tube, only to be congratulated by a circle of cheering friends. We couldn’t have hoped for a more memorable camp experience; thank you.”

All the students on the retreat shared their insights gained during the retreat. Here are some of their reflections.

What take-home messages about life in general did you gain from the retreat?

- Take the opportunities presented to you and see them through.
- Don’t take food for granted - there is so much that goes into growing food from the earth and getting it to the shelf!
- Every person leads a different life.
- Working as a team will get you a lot further than working on your own.
- You’re as fast as your weakest link, so bring others along with you.
- You need to know when to stop and step back in a group.
- The importance of mitigating risk.
- There is so much automation in farming. It’s big business!



Event Summary

Student Reflections cont'd

What insights did you gain about ethical leadership, respectful relationships and positive masculinity?

- 'Followship' is just as important as 'Leadership'. You need to have both for leadership teams to work.
- Mental health is a real issue; it's important to talk about it.
- Communication really is key.
- Positive masculinity can exist; you won't find it in the stereotypical macho man but in a leader with integrity, humility and respect.
- One person should take the leadership role to ensure effective and efficient task management.
- The farmers we met are "men's men" and are respectful and loving men to their families.
- Your mental health isn't something to be ashamed about.
- That some people struggle in silence.

What brought you the most enjoyment on retreat?

- Being outside in the cotton fields and amongst the farm produce.
- Learning to change a tyre.
- Hanging outdoors with the boys, away from the stressors of school and life.
- Meeting new people and learning about farm life on Yambeen from the Butlers.
- Getting outdoors and exploring a new environment.
- Having a crack and getting involved to learn some life lessons.
- Noticing the small moments with friends, which are really the big moments.
- Watching the problem-solving challenge, which involved everyone trying to pop the balloon together!
- Experiencing the night stars and the incredible sunsets.



Event Summary

Student Reflections cont'd

What retreat experiences challenged you?

- Changing a tyre: I didn't think I could do it, but I could and then we even changed one that happened after the challenge was over!
- I usually despise camping, but I put up a tent, cooked a meal and had a good time!
- Trying to lead in a group of leaders was a difficult but necessary challenge to experience.
- I liked being puzzled by the challenges and activities across the farm.
- Having my swag completely soaked through—and sleeping the night through it!
- Setting up my swag with one arm! (fractured wrist...)

What goals do you have through the 'Leading Men at Flinders' program?

- To learn to work with a team of leaders, even if the dynamics can be difficult.
- To become a competent leader in any situation.
- To be able to lead others to take risks and have a try at new things.
- To remove taboos from conversations around men's mental health.
- Become a better leader and enjoy time with friends before I finish Year 12.
- Help the Year 11s to become better leaders in preparation for their Senior year of leadership.
- Help the Leading Men Father's Day Breakfast to run smoothly this year.



Event Summary

Student Reflections cont'd

Events in the “2025 Leading Men at Flinders” Program

The 2025 Leading Men at Flinders program features a series of experiential events for boys at Flinders in Years 10, 11 and 12.

The program is comprised of several components:

- Leading Men at Flinders, Year 12 Retreat, 25-27 April:

Our Year 12 student leaders attend a 3-day leadership and mentoring event with inspiring role models conducted over the Anzac long weekend at Yambeen Farming Company at Mt Russell, the Darling Downs, Qld.

- Guided Tour Through Supreme Courts and Dinner with Flinders alumni at St John's College, University of Queensland, May:

Participating students in Years 11 and 12 visit the Queensland Supreme Courts in May for a guided tour and conversations with Honourable Justice David Boddice, followed by a dinner and panel conversations with alumni residing at St John's College

- Leading Men Capstone Event - Father's Day Breakfast, September:

Our current male Year 12 student leaders and participating Year 11 students have been charged with the coordination of our Leading Men Father's Day Breakfast on Thursday, 4 September, featuring inspiring capstone speeches by two Year 12 leaders to share their personal learnings through the program.

The events are guided by high-performing role models and designed to be fun, challenging, practical and positive, with the goal to address concerns in society about 'toxic masculinity', violence, matters of consent and respectful relationships.