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Utah State University Residence Life Behind Closed Doors New RA 2015

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Sofia Rodriguez
Logan, UT
November 2018

Behind Closed Doors
Occupational Rite of Passage

Informant:

Sofia Rodriguez is the graduate residence director over Snow Hall in the Student Living Center at Utah State University. This is the third unique position that she has held for university residence life. She has just completed her degree in psychology. Sofia currently lives on campus with her husband whom she met during the resident assistant class her freshman year.

Context:

Sofia sent me a digital version of how going through Behind Closed Doors was for her. She is sometimes anxious and really self-conscious about her words in the moment. Sofia does not often contribute her stories about BCDs in group conversations about them unprompted. RAs do tend to ask Sofia about her experiences as a newbie and as an actor because she has gone through several of them as a returner and now has a different perspective as prostaff.

Because Sofia is very busy, I had made arrangements to meet with Sofia to have an in-person discussion and recording several times, but due to illness, mis scheduling, and being the person who waits for the other person to act first, we continued to not have the interview. Out of respect for both of our schedules and needs, we agreed to have this written version.

Text:

As I was applying to become a Resident Assistant a few years ago and was attending the Spring semester RA training class, I learned about Behind Closed Doors (BCD's). It was about half-way through the semester and I was too caught up with other things to truly notice. At this point, we'd had hours of lectures, activities, and meetings to learn about the position and prepare us to become the best RAs we could be. Talk of BCDs went in through one ear and out the other without a second thought. At the end of the semester, I was selected by a Prostaff, assigned to my building, and I went off to spend 3 months away for the summer.

When I returned to campus, I couldn't remember much of anything from the class. We were then quickly thrown in to 40+ hours of intensive training, team bonding, and community development. Suddenly I realized that BCDs were just around the corner. But what were BCDs

anyway? I was so sleep deprived and emotionally drained that I couldn't even bother finding out. This turned out to be a big mistake.

Of course, BCDs are conveniently scheduled at the end of long week. As a first year staff member, I was paired up with a fellow newbie and given limited instructions. All I knew was that I was supposed to go on a set of rounds in a building across campus I had never been to. I looked down at the paper instructions and noted the USU campus police number written in bolded text. I began to wonder, what kind of situations I may come across? *Was I equipped to handle all of this?* My partner and I began walking around looking for any sign of trouble.

We came across some evident bulletin board vandalism, a pretty manageable situation. Then, we heard the sounds of loud music and chatter from inside an apartment. Was this part of the scenarios? I wasn't sure. I timidly knocked on the door and was suddenly caught in a situation I was not prepared for. Bottles of alcohol and red solo cups covered the living room. I stumbled over my words as I tried to gain control of the situation. The acting RAs watched my every move. There was an overly-intoxicated resident on the ground, her slurred speech and delayed response told me that this was a bad situation. In that moment, I froze. I had no idea what to do or what to say. It seemed like all the hours of training had not prepared me for this.

I was able to gather my thoughts and proceed with the situation. Finally, a senior RA interrupted the scenario and began the debrief. Thankfully, I had done a decent job. We discussed the scenario and what it might look like in real life. My partner and I went through several more scenarios all just as intense as the last.

At the end of the day, as we were returning to our area, I remember thinking about my experience and wondering what types of real life crisis situations I would have to encounter in the coming year. I was excited and anxious to meet my residents and respond to their needs. After BCDs, I felt that I was ready to take on my job and my community.

I definitely would say that BCDs are incredibly helpful in assessing how you respond to high-stress situations. They also force you to stay focused and apply all of the knowledge that you took in during training. I think I will always remember the way that I felt that year as I went through BCDs for the first time.

Texture:

The typed version that Sofia has had the chance to edit and refine does feel like something Sofia is more likely to share with other people. It does not read in the way that casual discussions and sharing of most BCD stories go, but it does sound like Sofia. From other interactions with Sofia, both prior to and after the sending of this, I know that this is a story that she laughs about when she tells it.

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