

# Charlie Jensen

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## Overview

Charlie Jensen is an energetic and extraordinarily dynamic Hospitality Teacher in the School of Education and the Arts at CQUniversity's Rockhampton campus. Charlie's office is the highly respected Willby's Training Restaurant, a busy training environment that typically serves between 80 – 120 paying customers in a single sitting. Charlie's infectious passion for 'front of house' hospitality and impeccable service culture is passed on to more than 100 vocational students each year. These students come from a wide variety of backgrounds, including; disadvantaged youth; students with a disability; disengaged kids; dysfunctional kids referred from places like PCYC, Headspace, and Durrambal Community Group; right through to students from elite private schools looking to upskill before heading off to the capital cities to support themselves in hospitality while studying at university.

Charlie has been a hospitality teacher for three years, and came straight from an extensive, global career in hospitality where she worked at leading establishments in London, Israel, Germany, Switzerland and Australia. Charlie holds qualifications in Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training (and upgraded), Certificate III in Hospitality (Operations), Certificate IV in Hospitality (Supervision) and is currently studying for a Diploma of Hospitality (expected completion in 2018). Charlie teaches numerous courses, including; Certificate II & III in Hospitality; Basic & Master Barista short courses; Responsible Service of Alcohol; and Responsible Gambling Services.

*"When your office is a restaurant, you have to think on your feet and be prepared for anything. I have students eager to break into the industry but come with challenges like physical disability, learning difficulties, behavioural problems or criminal convictions. I teach with respect, and identify areas of strength in each student, regardless of where they are in life, and work with what they've got. My job requires patience, discipline and a whole lot of love."* – Charlie Jensen.

## Criterion 1: Excellence and innovation

Charlie's strong background in front-line hospitality sees her equipped with all the necessary technical skills to impart on students to prepare them for a career in industry. However it is the unique and challenging student cohorts that Charlie often works with that forces her to work well outside her area of expertise. Charlie is continually required to innovate creative strategies of instruction and communication to reach out to students who present with a complex blend of behavioural or dysfunctional backgrounds.

One of Charlie's most demanding challenges in her role is often also her greatest source of pride and fulfilment – working with students from "Project Booyah". A police-run leadership and mentor program, Project Booyah seeks to help responsible decision-making of 15-16 year-olds who are at risk of, or who are already involved in, the criminal justice system. It is an initiative being trialled in Rockhampton in a partnership with CQUniversity as a pilot model. These students present to Charlie and Willby's Training Restaurant under police supervision to receive hospitality training, with the aim of opening learning opportunities and career pathways.

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Charlie has success in reaching out to this unique student group and making connections through her personal philosophies of respect and enthusiasm. \*"I try and be a positive, enthusiastic influence in the lives of these kids, who aren't necessarily exposed to such qualities otherwise. Enthusiasm is infectious, so if I can't be excited about working in the hospitality industry, I can hardly expect the Booyah kids to be either. That enthusiasm comes through in my teaching, and I get to watch it translate to the students."

\*"Most of the Project Booyah kids are made to come to my class, and very few of them arrive with a view that a career in the hospitality industry is a realistic outcome for them. But I work closely with them to celebrate their achievements and to attach a sense of pride in progress. It's hard because their starting point is so far behind what you'd see in a 'typical' student. They have been put down their whole life, have very little self-confidence, virtually no ambition, and quite frankly, low prospects of being able to make a positive contribution to the work force."

"I never imagined that working with kids like this was ever something I would do, but it has become such a positive influence in my life and my teaching career. I am able to create what is perhaps one of the few safe, respectful places in these kids' life, and I work hard to fill them with confidence, self-esteem, and a realisation that nothing is out of reach from them through hard work, persistence and enthusiasm. They have taught me patience and understanding, and in return the kids let me into their lives so I can see what their individual strengths are, and how we can bring those strengths into the world of hospitality."

"It gives me no greater joy as an educator to watch the confidence grow in the Project Booyah kids, and the pride they get in their personal progress is my reward." \*

## **Criterion 2: Student focus/outcomes**

Charlie has developed a suite of innovative strategies and learning methodologies to engage challenging student groups – including those with physical or mental disabilities, or those from dysfunctional backgrounds. The sheer diversity of students that Charlie engages with means she has to employ a variety of communication methods, and liaise constantly with her colleagues and industry contacts to establish the most effective on-the-job training opportunities to suit individual student needs.

Charlie has learnt that her students with disadvantaged backgrounds respond most effectively to repetitiveness, opportunity to prove themselves, and a clear understanding of workplace expectations. *"Repetitiveness and consistency is a big deal for the hospitality industry, and these characteristics actually work well for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. I set a culture of routine by ensuring that every day starts the same way; the whiteboard comes out and we begin our group briefing session spelling out exactly how the day will play out, what the task lists are, and who is responsible for what."*

*"Within this framework of repetition and consistency lies plenty of scope for students to leave their comfort zone and take on new responsibilities. It is so important that every student gets the opportunity to prove themselves. Yes the students spend a lot of time following orders, but I ensure the students take turns in leading their colleagues on tasks too."*

*"I see my restaurant as a place where students come to gain confidence and feel empowered. I love watching them gain a skill - and once it's clear that they are comfortable in executing certain tasks - watching them go on to take on more responsibility and more autonomy in the restaurant. I get to see kids who don't arrive with a lot of confidence grow into people who can not only 'cut-it' in the hospitality industry, but have the ability go on to run their own businesses or become industry leaders."*

A big challenge in Charlie's role is constantly finding new ways to keep the challenges she sets for her students interesting and engaging. She spends many hours each week strategizing with her training colleagues and her extensive industry contacts to develop new learning challenges and opportunities for her students. This would often include taking her students away from the familiar and predictable environment of Willby's Training Restaurant to engage in meaningful community work or corporate functions.

One example in 2017 involved Charlie reaching out to her contacts in the catering industry to secure an event for her Project Booyah students providing hospitality services at the Rockhampton Black Dog Ball. This is an annual black tie gala dinner involving dignitaries and local community/business leaders. It was a free, extracurricular learning experience that Charlie initiated because she felt the Project Booyah students were ready to be taken out of their comfort zone and given the responsibility of a larger challenge. *"The Project Booyah students were quite apprehensive about the Black Dog Ball. You have to understand that because of their backgrounds, a formal gala dinner with politicians and business leaders is like an alien planet to them. It was like nothing they had ever experienced before. But they stepped up to the challenge. They absolutely nailed it. I was so incredibly proud of them - the entire room was too. And the students themselves took such pride in their work on the night. That sense of accomplishment that they walked away with that night is something that can never be taken from them."*

*"I am so blessed to have a job that lets me watch such a profound impact unfold on the lives of kids with disabilities, or from dysfunctional backgrounds."*

### **Criterion 3: Professionalism and commitment to VET teaching and learning**

Since becoming a VET Hospitality Teacher in 2015, Charlie has placed great importance in her own professional development, undertaking various training and upskilling. Charlie is currently studying a Diploma of Hospitality.

Charlie also places tremendous significance on the currency of her skills, the reach of her industry contacts, and in maintaining adoption of the latest trends and directions of the global hospitality industry. Outside of CQUniversity, Charlie remains working part-time in hospitality to ensure that her skills and industry contacts are maintained at levels that allow her to perform her training role more effectively. Maintaining her integration with the local industry players also helps with ensuring her students gain employment outcomes from their training at CQUniversity.

Charlie's phone is always "ringing off the hook" from her contacts in the hospitality industry looking for well-trained, hard-working students to fill job vacancies. Charlie has an extensive view of her local hospitality industry, and is always matching student learning opportunities with real-world industry needs. An example in early 2018 would include matching an 'on-the-job' learning opportunity for a group of her students to provide hospitality services at the opening of the Capricorn Rescue Helicopter hanger opening in conjunction with a local caterer.

Charlie also keeps herself exposed to the latest global trends in hospitality, and attends many industry conferences and events as part of her professional development. Charlie has just returned from New York city to learn about the latest developments and trends in the Barista industry. Charlie has also recently attended the Melbourne International Coffee Exhibition, and travelled to the Brisbane Hospitality Expo, bringing the latest industry trends back to Willby's Training Restaurant.

In 2017, Charlie and her colleagues invited a large delegation of chefs from China to spend time at Willby's Training Restaurant to learn about Western cuisine. Charlie used this opportunity for herself and her students to learn to adopt front-of-house practices for different cultural groups. This saw her students learning different cultural hospitality practices, dining customs, décor and learning Cantonese phrases. Charlie has also spent considerable time improving training systems and contributing to the professional development of others through her involvement in the expansion of the Project Booyah pilot model into new locations. Such was the success of the Project Booyah pilot model at CQUniversity's Willby's Training Restaurant, that the initiative was expanded across the state in 2017.

Charlie played a key role in expanding the project, travelling the state setting up programs and lesson plans in Logan and Pine Rivers, and later in Cairns, Townsville and Mt Isa. Charlie spent months establishing the new programs which she helped develop, mentoring the new teachers, and putting support resources in place for trainers to prepare them for the challenges of a highly challenging student cohort under police supervision.

#### **Criterion 4: Links with industry and/or community**

Charlie has built up an extensive network of hospitality contacts in the Rockhampton region from more than a decade of work in the industry based in the community before joining CQUniversity as a Hospitality Trainer. However since starting her role at CQUniversity, Charlie has made a determined effort to maintain these industry contacts, along with the currency of her skills and exposure to emerging industry trends, by continuing to work part-time in hospitality roles. This maintenance of industry networks, skill currency and hospitality dynamics underlies much of Charlie's effectiveness as a Trainer.

Charlie's depth of current industry contacts continually returns dividends to her students. She has been able to link scores of students with direct employment outcomes, given the continual volume of requests for quality students that Charlie fields from industry. Charlie routinely matches her students with vacant positions at local hospitality businesses.

Charlie also uses her industry contacts to secure large group training opportunities for her students outside of Willby's Training Restaurant. For instance, Charlie has formed a partnership with the Rockhampton Grammar School that sees all her students provide the hospitality for the school's formal each year, an event which hosts 400-600 people. Charlie also projects her influence internally within her organisation, securing both front-of-house and back-of-house hospitality roles for her students at the annual CQUniversity Christmas Ball, an event that regularly attracts 500+ guests. These are incredibly important training opportunities, as it pushes students outside of the comfortable and familiar environment of the Willby's Training Restaurant and into a real-life hospitality learning experiences with new pressures, responsibilities, clientele and pressures.

Perhaps one of the most successful applications of Charlie's utilisation of industry linkages is the partnerships she has formed with local aged-care and/or assisted living facilities, such as the Benevolent Home, Lyons Club, "60's and Over" social group, and Primus. These partnerships see large, groups of seniors attend coordinated bookings at Willby's Training Restaurant. Charlie has found that this unique clientele group are a highly effective training resource that help bring out the full potential in her student groups, especially students from disadvantaged or culturally diverse backgrounds.

\*"I have so much respect for the way in which our elderly clientele work with our students. Our seniors show so much patience towards young people whose skills are still under development. They give honest, but kind feedback. They engage well with the students by initiating conversations, helping our students build their social confidence – which is a big deal for students from dysfunctional backgrounds. The seniors are generous with their advice, and they teach our students respect for their elders, manners, and humility. They have a calming effect on students, and help set good attitudes for kids with behavioural issues.

\*"I have found that the students from disadvantaged or dysfunctional backgrounds often struggle with aspects of front-of-house hospitality such as making eye-contact. But our seniors have a wonderful way of breaking through these barriers and making connections with such students. I suppose many of these kids usually only have 'confrontational' encounters with adults; teachers, police, social workers, school principals etc... This creates a dynamic that is really incompatible with being an effective, employable hospitality graduate. But these students let their guard down around seniors, and I have experienced so many 'break-through' moments with these kids connecting with the elderly, and it changes their entire outlook and their training journey.

"In return these partnerships with aged care/assisted living facilities help our seniors too. It gives our elderly clients company and purpose. I have a fantastic collection of these industry partnerships and I don't know where I'd be without them!" – Charlie Jensen.

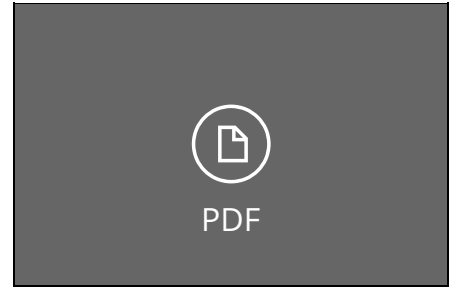
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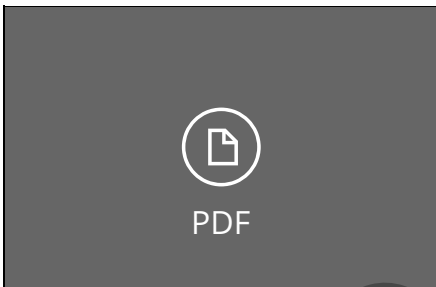
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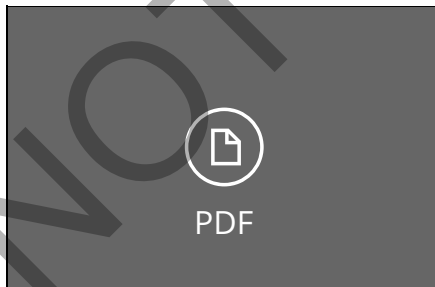
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