

# Fatherhood

## Research Bulletin *Special ATSI Edition*

Australian Fatherhood Research Network Bulletin 46, Special Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Edition

*"If you want to build a better future for our young men, we need to start with young men now."*

*- Craig Hammond*



Malakye Walford, (Walgett, NSW) and Edward Foote (Armidale/Moree, NSW) filming for the sms4ATSI project at Kirinari Aboriginal Hostel, Newcastle, NSW



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NEWCASTLE**  
AUSTRALIA

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Craig (Bourkie) Hammond, Richard (Richard) Fletcher, Darren (Charlie) Faulkner planning the sms4ATSI Dads project

## INTRODUCTION

Craig Hammond & Charlie Faulkner



We have been working with fathers, uncles, pops, brothers and young men who will be fathers for many years now, in clinical work, in prisons, in schools and hospitals and with communities in every state. We know that men's caring for family is important for everyone in the community. We see that non-Aboriginal laws and ways of doing things have been imposed on our men and made it harder for Aboriginal men to bring up their kids with good support. Our old people had kids taken from them, they were punished for speaking language and practicing culture and had their authority to be fathers, uncles, brothers and pops taken away by governments.

We know what the young men in our communities need. They need respect, good information about their job as a father and connection to older fathers from the community.

This special edition of the Fatherhood Research Bulletin aims to do three things:

- Raise the profile of programs and research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers
- Map some of the programs for ATSI fathers across Australia
- Point to the gap in support for young ATSI fathers that needs to be addressed

We are Kamilaroi and do not wish to speak for other communities however we do see the need for bringing support to ATSI fathers wherever they are. Our vision is to link the Stayin on Track Website with sms4ATSI dads text messaging and men's and fathers' group from each community. This program will not meet all the needs of young fathers but it our best idea for getting started.

# sms4ATSI Idads



Connecting young dads to information, support and mentors



**Father texts wherever you are**

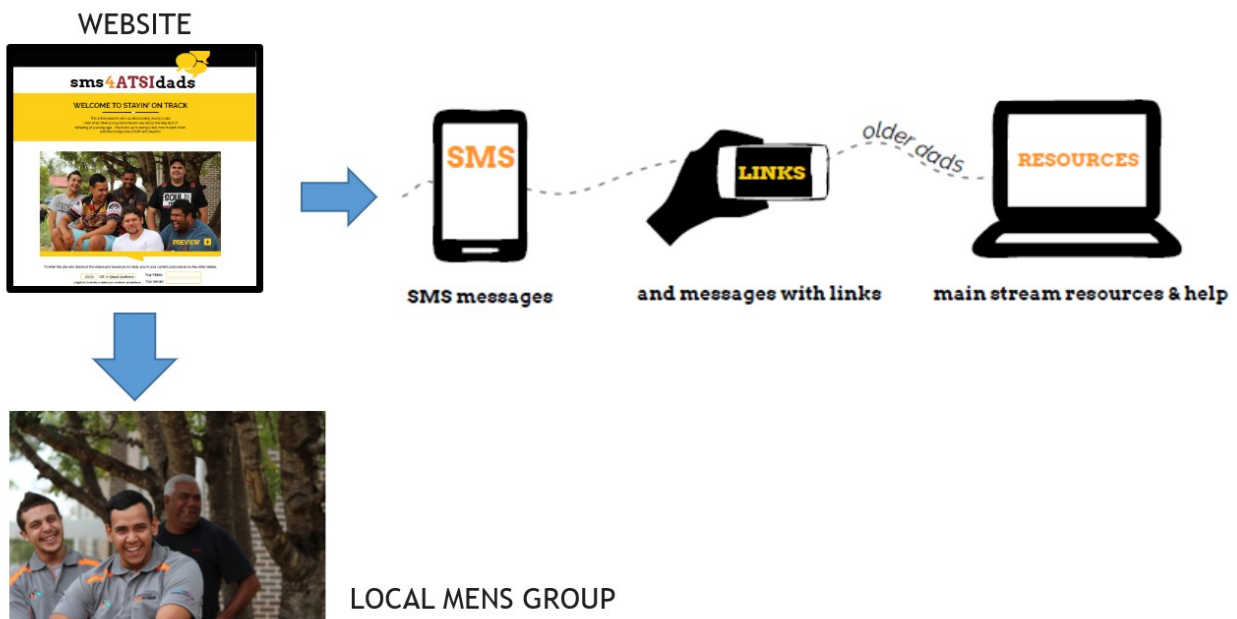


**Distressed dads called**



**Connected to local men's groups**

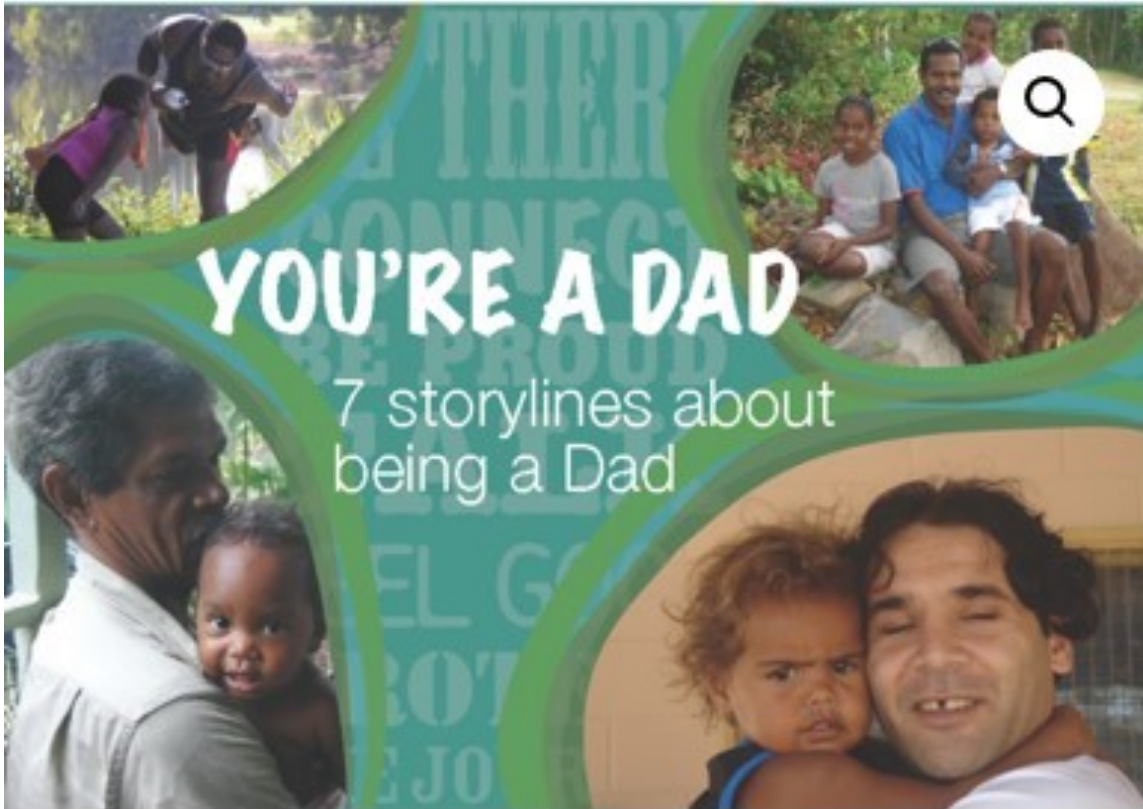
## HOW IT WORKS



## Resources

### “You’re a Dad” booklets – SNAICC

“You’re a Dad” is a set of 10 booklets, composed of seven storylines about being a dad. This resource is great for highlighting the strengths that Aboriginal dads have, and also teaches Aboriginal fathers how to communicate, protect, teach and love their children, as well as reminding them about their responsibilities to their children. The set of booklets is currently available on SNAICC’s website for \$20.



### Quop Maaman: Aboriginal Fathering Project

Final report of activities.

July 2016

Len Collard, Uncle Mick Adams, Dave Palmer, John McMullan

‘Nidja Noongar boodjar gnulla nyininy’

This is Noongar country we are sitting in.

Being a Noongar maaman (man and father) involved in raising koorlangka (children) brings lots of happiness and excitement, along with many challenges. Noongar maaman have always helped one another learn about the fathering role and how to be effective in the role. Indeed one of the key features about Noongar traditions is that our moort (family) help out so that men are not alone when it comes to looking after kids. Many changes imposed on us by Wedjela (non-Aboriginal people) have made it hard for Aboriginal men to bring up their kids with good support.

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## ABORIGINAL FATHERING - Language

Our old people had kids taken from them, were punished for speaking language and practicing culture and had their authority to be maaman as fathers, uncles, brothers and pops stripped by governments.

Despite this, our history is also full of maaman who have quietly maintained their status as boordier (leaders and bosses) and who have been inspirational as maaman (fathers, uncles and pops). They have allowed the old karla mia (home fires) to continue to burn for many moorditj maaman (strong men). Today this karl (fire) for kaarnya maaman (respectful fathering) is heating up again and many Noongar maaman (fathers) are getting together to support young men as they step into roles that involve looking after koorlangka (children).

The program has finished but the videos and resources are still available on this website: <https://thefatheringproject.org/research/aboriginal-program/>

## Stayin' on Track - A user-designed website for young Aboriginal fathers

**Craig Hammond, Charlie Faulkner and Richard Fletcher**

"I would never have thought that I would've been a dad. But now that I am a dad, it's the only thing that I want to do" It is statements like this, from young Aboriginal fathers, that surprise those viewing the Stayin' on Track video clips. The straight out truthfulness of these young dads is powerful and compelling.

The men on the screen look to be, and are, just blokes from the community. Some are big men, some are skinny, a few are trim fit sportsmen. They go to work, play football, drink, smoke (some of them) and joke around. They all have babies that they care deeply about. It's the everyday look of the men speaking directly from their hearts that seems to make women viewing the 3 minute films dab their eyes. Aboriginal men nod their heads while watching and make comments like "deadly" and "it's good".

The films titled simply Before the Birth, After the Birth and The Big Day were shot in Newcastle and then in Tamworth with dads from around Tamworth and Moree. Each dad was filmed alone against a plain black backdrop with just a respected Aboriginal mentor asking the questions. With no prompting and no one to impress the men spoke of uncertainty "I didn't know what I was doing.." and being scared of the unknown and the responsibility of a being a father to their own baby.

Not all of the men had their own fathers to look to, behind the joy of seeing the ultrasound image "We got to see him before he was even here" there was sadness too for some at what they had missed out on.

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But having started life on the rough side they wanted to be “a better dad”. The arrival made a shift in their priorities “I was the type of person that would be out drinking and stuff all the time and yeah, and smoking and that. And it just really, it was like a wakeup call”

Having young Aboriginal men speak candidly about their becoming a father is unusual, but the Stayin’ on Track project has other unique features. Funded as a joint venture between the University of Newcastle and the Young and Well Research Cooperative the project deliberately engaged the young men as co-constructors of the website.

The Stayin’ on Track website is designed to draw young Indigenous men from around Australia with the up-front, warts-and-all account of life before and after the big day. Links to parenting information and support are there too. Anyone can watch the 60 second introduction but to see the films requires entering a post-code. The project software will track clicks from each postcode to give a picture of the usage of the website.



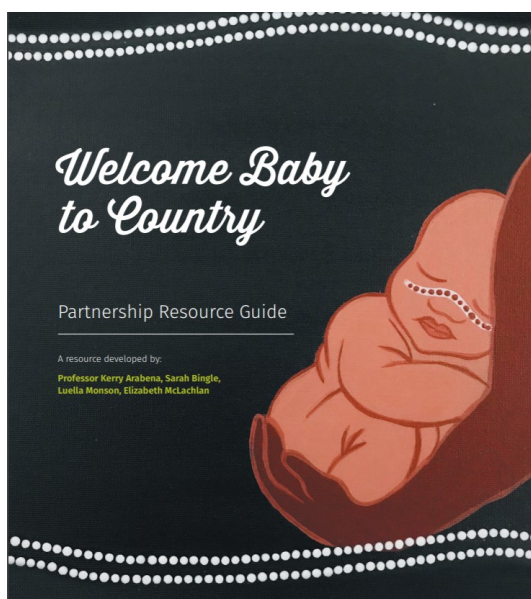
[www.stayinontrack.com](http://www.stayinontrack.com)

## Welcome Baby to Country: Partnership Resource Guide

**Author: Kerry Arabena, Sarah Bingle, Luella Monson, Elizabeth McLachlan**

October, 2018

For thousands of years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have held Welcome Baby to Country ceremonies to acknowledge an infant’s connection to the traditional lands on which they are born. First 1000 Days Australia recognises the important role that Welcome Baby to Country ceremonies have in meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and connecting children to community, Country and Elders.



This resource honours the cultural contributions of our partners in reviving Welcome Baby to Country ceremonies in their communities, and puts forward ideas on how future partners can create and renew these ceremonies for families in their regions. A Welcome Baby to Country ceremony is safe for all families when they are led and informed by local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community knowledge.

This resource is also available on website at: <http://www.first1000daysaustralia.org.au/welcome-baby-country-partnership-resource-guide>



## OUR MEN, OUR SHIELDS Messages of Belonging and Hope



There is a consensus among many First 1000 Days Australia Short Course participants that, for far too long, men and their roles in families and communities as fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, sons, partners, friends and leaders have been underrepresented in discussions about the early years. This underrepresentation is recognised as having taken a toll on our relationships, our cultural ways, and our societies and negatively affected our future wellbeing. As a response to this, in November 2017 Townsville Short Course participants wrote messages of hope to men about the importance of their position in both the family and the community. They wanted to acknowledge the crucial role that men play in ensuring that the goals and aspirations of families and infants are met during the first 1000 days of life. In all our Short Courses we now write messages of hope, encouragement and belonging to our men. These messages are then shared with men's groups around the country, and are powerful reminders for those who receive them that they are valued and worthy of love.

All men have cultural responsibilities to attend to in the first 1000 days of their child's life. This role includes being a teacher, protector and nurturer, an involved and compassionate carer, a knowledge holder, an ancestor for future generations and an everyday provider. Critical to fulfilling these responsibilities is for our men to choose to become fathers at a time when they are resourced and supported to give our future Elders the best start in life.

2017 Townsville Short Course participants wrote messages of hope to men about the importance of their position in both the family and the community:

*Let our men know they are loved, they are worthy, they are valued, and they are supported to have the highest standard of relationship with themselves and each other, and with their families and communities.*

*Use strengths-based language in policy documents, programs and entrepreneurial activities that describes, acknowledges and empowers men's contribution to our households.*

*Facilitate and support men to become aware of how their behaviours impact on their families through the first 1000 days, and encourage sustained behaviour change that affirms their contribution to providing loving, safe homes.*

*Provide space for men to support each other in healing, ceremony and developing a capacity to care.*

*Facilitate men's leadership in connecting children to their Country, their kin, and their totems, song lines, dance and language.*

*Prepare men for their journey into fatherhood, recognising their skills, capabilities and the cultural obligations needed for active participation in the first 1000 days of their child's life.*

*Pay critical attention to and are inclusive of Indigenous masculinities in Australia; especially those that have been defined through our own knowledge systems and by our own academics.*

*Engage men in relationships that equip them for a life filled with love, companionship, connection, meaning, purpose, stability, prosperity, celebration and joy.*

*Facilitate gender equity approaches to raising children, supporting single fathers and debunking the colonial mission that set out to erase and disregard our men's contribution to our families.*

*Ensure their child is carried in a pristine pregnancy and can spend their early years in supportive environments.*

*Resource men to provide good quality nutrition and early life supports for their women and growing child.*

*Celebrate and acknowledge our men's contribution to the health and wellbeing of our families through their nurturance, protection and stewardship of resources that support their families thrive and flourish*

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Adapted from: Starr, M.; Bulman, J. and Arabena, K. (2018) 'Our Men Our Shields: Messages of Belonging and Hope' Council Ratified Position Statement on Including Men in the work of First 1000 Days Australia, dated 26th April 2018.

Available from [www.first1000daysaustralia.org.au](http://www.first1000daysaustralia.org.au)

The resource is available on website at:

<http://www.first1000daysaustralia.org.au/our-men-our-shields>



## PROGRAMS AND FATHERS INCLUSIVE PRACTICE

### NEW South Wales

#### KARI – Fathers and Sons Camp

The Fathers and Sons Camp, developed and implemented by KARI, is a community-based program that is run once a year, generally around September. Although KARI is based in Liverpool, they also service areas surrounding the Fairfield, Bankstown and Campbelltown areas in New South Wales. The camp runs over a two-day period – typically weekends at select locations, previous locations has included sites, such as Myuna Bay Sport and Recreational Centre. Over the course of the weekend, Aboriginal fathers and sons take part in a range of bonding and cultural activities, for example the camp frequently has guest speakers who come and teach the dads and kids about Aboriginal tools and artefacts, the fathers and their children are then given the opportunity to learn how to scar a tree and then make a Coolamon out of it. KARI is also partnered with Fisheries NSW, who educates the fathers and their children through teaching them valuable skills, such as; learning about fishing and bait; how to set up a fishing rod and reel; discussing tides and fishing spots, and; they also hand out free show bags, which includes a range of resources, such as legal fish limits. At the end, Fisheries NSW allows the fathers and their children to keep the fishing rods and bait, which enables them to continue to bond over fishing activities, post camp. This program really highlights cultural practices, as it understands the importance of connecting Aboriginal fathers and sons back to their culture and creates those bonding experiences between a father and his son, which may be

missed during everyday life. The Fathers and Sons Camp is also great for forming friendships between other fathers and sons, which creates a good support framework for fathers, it enables them to connect and communicate with other fathers and share their experiences with one another. Depending on the venue, KARI can take up to ten Dads with two kids per father, however this requirement is flexible. To register for the Fathers and Sons Camp, you can contact KARI directly on:

Ph: (02) 87820300

Email: [Anthony.horley@kari.org.au](mailto:Anthony.horley@kari.org.au)



Picture of KARI's Fathers and Sons camp

## TASMANIA

### Aboriginal Elders Council of Tasmania – Red Dust Healing Program

Red Dust Healing, created by Tom Powell, is a program that aims to encourage participants to reflect on their own life experiences of either feeling or being hurt, and then examine how these feelings may be linked to patterns of violence, abuse or neglect. It is built around key areas, such as: identity; family dynamics; relationships; elders; men’s business; Aboriginal history; family violence; drugs and alcohol; mental health, and; grief and loss. Red Dust Healing lives by the motto “When the dust is settled in our lives, all we get to keep and take back with us is our dignity. Our integrity and the love and respect we share with people”. The program identifies that suppressed feelings of rejection and grief and loss from white colonisation is a major cause pain and can make it difficult for Aboriginal men to build relationships and show emotions with their loved ones, families and in their communities. These quotes by a past participants demonstrates this:



“Even with um, my father, not being able to show his true love towards his children. I can only imagine that, that was passed on from his father to him and no doubt he felt a lot of that rejection because his father left him. His father left him and his mother and went back to Sydney. I never had an opportunity to be able to ask Dad about those things”.

“What I didn’t realise was the negative things that I’d have in my life that I’d pass onto my kids. Things like fights with the misses in front of them, swearing and the little things. I’ve seen that passed onto my kids”.

Since the program began, it has had around 11,000 participants. The Red Dust Healing program is a three day program that has two parts: the first three days is the healing phase, structured around four target areas: healing, pro-social modelling, professional development and cultural awareness. Participants complete exercises, such as taking turns of being the victim being hurt and then them doing the hurt. After this, the men are then asked to identify the emotions they felt in both of the positions and reflect on these feelings in their own lives. The second phase is completed within four-six weeks after the initial phase and completes the same exercises, however this time the focus is for the participants to learn and pass on the skills that they have learnt to their families and community. The program has had a high level of satisfaction across participants. The program works by peeling back the layers and looking at the origin of the men’s problems, which can provide lasting changes for the lives of Indigenous men and can also be beneficial for their families and community. Caritas evaluation of the program states:

“Red Dust Healing is a culturally respectful program aimed to have ‘a positive impact on the lives of participants, who consistently describes the significant positive changes in their social and emotional health as a result of using the Red Dust Healing tools. In particular, they report increased skills to bring about conflict resolution in the family and community settings; enhanced ability to deal with grief and loss; and a stronger sense of cultural and spiritual identity”.

For more information please contact:

Clyde Mansell, Aboriginal Elders Council of Tasmania

Ph: (03) 63343 138 or Mobile: 0475 736 963

## VICTORIA

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for males – Stand up Dads (VIC)**

The Stand Up Dad's program is located in Melbourne, Victoria and has around six-seven events per year, which has about 70+ families participating. The program is flexible in who it takes, as there could be both an Aboriginal father and child, or even a non-Indigenous parent with an Indigenous child. Their aim is to give Aboriginal Dad's and their children the right opportunity to bond over a day out and strives to help Aboriginal fathers get their life on track, whether that be drugs and alcohol, unemployment or mental and/or physical health issues, so that they are able to be in a good mindset and good health so they can be a part of their child's life moving forward. The programs generally are filled with fun activities, for example past events have taken place at Geelong park, had movie days or at water parks. The program also takes the opportunity to interview families to see what type of enjoyment level the child is getting out of the program and also if the parent needs referrals to any other services for assistance, for example the program closely works with the Northern and Western Family Violence Regional Action Group.

Stand Up Dads is also in planning stages for a weekend trip to Queensland, in which they plan to take the families to adventure parks, such as Dream World and Movie World, and also expose them to culture programs in Byron Bay. Chris Egan comments "The goal for this particular program is to show to the Fathers that if they can work hard enough for certain things in life, then they will be able to reward their children with these types of things". The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for males was developed a number of years ago from an identified need of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and provides services for the Western and Northern suburbs of Melbourne. However, if the centre is able to receive more funding, they have expressed a desire to expand their services further to the West of Victoria, as they realise there is still limited resources for the Indigenous population in that direction. Overall the Stand Up Dads program strives to create the right opportunities for Aboriginal Fathers to bond with their children and provide the fathers with the right resources to be able to take responsibility throughout both theirs and their children's lives.

For further information about the Stand Up Dads program, please contact:

Chris Egan, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for males

Ph: (03) 9487 3000

E: [chris.egan@vacsal.org.au](mailto:chris.egan@vacsal.org.au)

## QUEENSLAND

### **Carbal Medical Services – Strong Fathers (QLD)**

The Strong Fathers program is an education based program from a book, which was developed by Charlie Rowe in 2012. The program was initially inspired by the 2011 government initiative "Strong Fathers, Strong Families", until funding for this was retracted in 2014. Fortunately by this point, the Strong Fathers program was recognised under the Australian National Benchmark, and was able to self-fund the program through the Carbal Medical Services. Since then, around 500 fathers has completed the program. The development of the program took around four months to complete and involved communicating with the elders in the community to identify the needs for fathers within the community and what type of role models they needed to be for their children, families and community.

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The Strong Fathers program aims to provide Aboriginal Fathers with the resources and skills to become a positive role model for their children, families and community. The program consists of eight sessions, running one day a week. Some of the sessions include: violence, the men watch the video "Call me Dad, can a violent man change?" and then are asked to discuss this, taking into account not only their perspectives, but their partners and children's perspectives as well; role of a Dad, this session gets the men thinking about the type of fathers they want to be and how to get there; communication with children; connecting with children, this session gets the dads to realise what bonding is and how powerful it can be, for example you want to create good memories for the child and also create a strong relationship with that child so that they are able to have someone to talk to; Behaviour and discipline, this teaches fathers how to discipline their children without the use of force, such as yelling and smacking and instead teaches the father to talk things through with their child; stress and anger, this session provides the fathers with the tools that allows them to identify and deal with stress and anger, such as the 'traffic light system', and; personal growth, this is the final session that enables the fathers to set goals they want to achieve in the future. Upon completion of the program, a graduation ceremony is held and the fathers are given a certificate, shirt and bag. Charlie provides the following statement for our fathers:

"Walk strong and proud, head up and be a good role model"

The Strong Fathers program allows Aboriginal fathers to connect with other fathers, provide one another with support and also referral to other services if needed. Throughout the years Charlie has seen a number of positive stories, a few of these are: a father that was in and out of jail his entire life, has now gotten an apprenticeship and has gotten his children back from child services, he puts it all down to this program; one family have been reunified with their children, and; an Aboriginal father who came along to support his friend, was on drugs and alcohol and wasn't close with his children – he has now stopped taking drugs and alcohol, is taking care of his children and is currently purchasing a new house.

The Strong Fathers program is based in Toowoomba, however sometimes Charlie travels down to Warwick to implement the program. The program is also in development stages to expand on the type of delivery; the program is planning to deliver the program via video method, so they can reach further areas that may not be able to receive these services, throughout jails and Charlie is also mentoring others so that they are able to implement this in their community. The Strong Fathers program is heavily inspired by the quote by Frederick Douglass (1855):

"Why repair broken men when we can build strong children".

For further information, please contact:

Charlie Rowe, Carbal Medical Services

Ph: (07) 4633 9500

E: [crowe@carbal.com.au](mailto:crowe@carbal.com.au)



*Developer of Strong Fathers, Charlie Rowe pictured left at graduation for Strong Fathers participants*

## NORTHERN TERRITORY

### Mums Can, Dads Can - Project Alice Springs (NT)



The Mums Can, Dads Can Project is a family, domestic and sexual violence primary prevention pilot project being developed by Town Camp community members and is being delivered in Alice Springs. The Mums Can, Dads Can Project aims to challenge rigid gender stereotypes regarding the roles of men and women in regards to parenting and will build on the work that is currently being carried out by the Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program.

This project has been funded by the Northern Territory Government as part of the “The Safe, Respected and Free from Violence Prevention Fund” which is supporting localised projects, including pilot programs, which employ good practice evidence-based prevention and early intervention strategies to break the intergenerational cycle of domestic and family violence. This project was granted funding in July 2018 to The Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program for its pilot project Mums Can, Dads Can.

National and International evidence demonstrates that gender inequality and rigid gender stereotypes are a significant predictor of violence against women. Gendered violence is a serious issue in Australia and there is no doubt that children are being exposed to violence and that stereotypes are being reinforced. It is understood that parents have a large influence on the gender role socialisation of their children and it is hoped that the Mums Can, Dads Can Project will influence parents in their modelling of the next generation of parents.

The Mums Can, Dads Can Project is working with community members through workshops to identify unhelpful stereotypes and is developing and promoting key alternative messages that are culturally appropriate and that truly resonate with the Alice Springs Town Camps communities.

The feedback that we have been getting from the participants in these workshops has been really positive and we are collecting this feedback and evaluating along the way. “What we are hearing is that these ideas of what it means to be a man and what it means to be a women, these rigid gender stereotypes, they are not working for anyone.” Says Maree Corbo, Program Manager of the Tangentyere Family Violence Prevention Program. “The men and women that have been working on this project are talking about how hard it is as a man to ask for support and how conditioned women are to take on the role of doing most of the child rearing, cleaning and cooking for the family. If men are not asking for help and women are doing most or all of the domestic work, this is not healthy for anyone. This project aims to challenge some of these ideas and look for ways that there can be more equality and support in a parenting relationship between mothers and fathers. What the research is telling us is that when there is equality in a relationship, there is less likely to be family violence.”

The Mums Can, Dads Can Project is strength based, fun and enjoyable, and builds on community strengths. It is sending a powerful message to community members about gender stereotypes particularly in the context of mothers and fathers.

For further information:

<https://www.tangfamilyviolenceprevention.com.au/mums-can-dads-can-project>

## Young Aboriginal Fathers Program at the Larapinta Child and Family Centre in Alice Springs (NT)

The Young Fathers Program at the Larapinta Child and Family Centre in Alice Springs is in the development stage arising from the Department of Education's reform through the Indigenous Education Strategy 2015-2024, which is a long term approach to improving Indigenous student outcomes. During consultation with senior members of the community, current young fathers and possible stakeholders, their concerns reflected that there is minimal to no support for young fathers and that young fathers do not feel they have the capacity to participate in their own educational development let alone that of their children. The objective of the project is to support Young fathers in positive, productive activity and community involvement through mentoring and to develop a safe, supportive and culturally inclusive environment that works to engage young fathers in health, education, employment and positive parenting pathways.

Major objectives of the program will be to develop culturally appropriate ways of working with Indigenous fathers, establish firm partnerships with both government and non-government organisations, develop health, educational and employment pathways for young fathers and have evidence based data to reflect that a program of this nature can provide positive effects on fathers involvement of the well-being of their children.

The program is being developed slowly so that it can be responsive to the best outcomes for the families, their kids and their future. Young Fathers is planned to be fully running from February 2019, the coordinator Scott is currently working with five (5) dads with twenty eight (28) interested in the program. Other locations for the program are Palmerston in Darwin and Ngukurr which has two (2) young father coordinators, this program is run a little differently as a response to community needs and Ngukurr is a remote community. Future planned sites are Maningrida and Yuendumu, both awaiting suitable locations within the community to run the fathers programs from.

Current participants have stated that "I want to be a better dad than my father was".

For further information contact:

Scott Weily, Young Dads Program Coordinator

Larapinta Primary School/Larapinta Child and Family Centre Department of Education Northern Territory Government

tel: (08) 8958 5175

e: [scott.weily@ntschoools.net](mailto:scott.weily@ntschoools.net)

w: [www.education.nt.gov.au](http://www.education.nt.gov.au)

## WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### 'Hey, Dads!'

'Hey, Dads!' is a program for Aboriginal Dads, Uncles and Pops in the Kimberley Region of Western Australia provided by the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Unit SEWB in the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services. The program was adapted for Aboriginal fathers from the Hey Dads Programs in NSW and was initially ran for inmates in the West Kimberley Regional Prison near Derby Western Australia. It acknowledges that being a Dad, Uncle and Pop is one of the most important things that you will ever do. You are invited to come together with other dads and to yarn about your kids. The program covers; discovering how valuable you are to your children, developing new skills to help make being a dad easier, is an opportunity to get together with other Dad's to share your experiences as a Dad and explores new ways to enjoy being with your kids.

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Whilst speaking with Michael who facilitates the program I had the sense that the program has been designed as a question hey dads? look around you. This is an opportunity for Aboriginal men to empower themselves as men whether they are a father or not they still have a big influence in their communities. Participants are encouraged to look back, look at themselves and learn about their behaviours, look at where they are today and how it is affecting the ones they love, then what can they do into the future. Common comments from participants are, "I didn't really know that I was doing this", this is the awareness that the program is designed to create for Aboriginal Fathers.

Comments from past participants include; "Things like this are needed" "Great support for dads" "Very enjoyable".

The program is offered by the Social and Emotional Wellbeing SEWB Unit at the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services, delivered in the prison by request and flyers are regularly sent out to community organisations to seek interest in running the program in their services.

For more information about the 'Hey, Dads' Program in the Kimberley contact Timena James, SEWB Administration Officer, via email to [sewbadmin@kamsc.org.au](mailto:sewbadmin@kamsc.org.au)

You can contact KAMSC directly Phone 08 9194 3200

<https://kams.org.au/training-employment/hey-d>

## SOUTH AUSTRALIA

### Dad Factor (SA)

Dad Factor began as a six week program for Aboriginal dads to address the way they communicate with their children and explore ways in which, as dads, they can encourage physical, mental, social, and emotional development in their families. The group aim is to provide opportunities for Fathers, Grandfathers, Uncles and male carers to get together and discuss their roles and build supports around parenting. The program was adapted from the Dad Factor Health Program and is au spiced through Goolwa Children's Centre. As they began the six week program,



following the prescribed modules they decided to adapt the program to what was useful and relevant to them as Aboriginal fathers. At the completion of the six weeks program they made a decision to continue Dad Factor because they wanted to continue to support each other and encourage new members and continue to meet weekly after xxx months/years???. The changes in the program have evolved by being responsive to the needs of the group. Dad Factor remains an opportunity for fathers to provide information and encourage interaction on a range of issues relating to fatherhood through open discussion and exploring ideas relating to their role as Fathers. When new dads join the group the dad's share their worst story of parenting and the things in common emerge, shared stories and it acts as a leveller within the group. The group has regular Dads and kids dinners, camps and the group appreciates that the dads group allows for the continuation of their Aboriginal cultural practices.

The groups projected future for Dad Factor is that the membership will continue to grow by them encouraging other dads to join and that there will be more kids involved in future events.

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## PROPOSED—NSW ABORIGINAL MEN’S GATHERING ON FATHERHOOD

Talking recently with Roy Ah-See Councillor & Chair Sydney/Newcastle Region NSWALC about his personal journey and his vision for Aboriginal fathers in NSW. Roy talked about his personal experience as one of eight children growing up in a single parent family raised by his mother and adds, that this is a common scenario for Aboriginal families. Roy is passionate about being there for his partner and children as he understands what it was like not growing up without a father. Growing up from a boy into teenage years and then into adulthood without a male role model has been difficult and he understands the importance of having a father figure to have the important conversation with to guide you through this journey.

Roy suggests that the solutions are with the men and there needs to be a space to unpack the issues. Aboriginal Men’s Groups are a starting point although he would like to see a NSW Men’s Gathering as an opportunity to have a state-wide discussion to identify solutions. The priority would be to being there as husbands, fathers and as role models for the kids.

For further information Roy can be contacted on;

Roy Ah-See

Chairperson & Councillor

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## RESEARCH

### Interview with John Maynard

Professor John Maynard is Professor of Indigenous Education and Research (Indigenous History) at the University of Newcastle. He was interviewed by Richard Fletcher for the Fatherhood Research Bulletin.

**FRB:** As a historian I wonder if you could make some comment about the position of Aboriginal fathers, uncles, pops in the research area?

**JOHN:** For me it’s the historical devalued position of Aboriginal men and that’s as fathers, uncles, brothers and grandfathers. From the time the British got here, I have to say their patriarchal way of looking at the world was entrenched. Which placed the male in the dominant role. The people they wanted to speak to when they first got here were Aboriginal men and they dismissed completely Aboriginal women. Where this was a completely different culture altogether and leadership was a shared responsibility in our traditional society. And then there was the overall, how can you say, destruction of the Aboriginal male, the emasculation of the Aboriginal male historically and that was an ongoing process and certainly by the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Aboriginal male was seen and portrayed as dirty, drunk and of little value and this was the dismissive approach of white Australia and white Australian history.



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And certainly, I have to say that Aboriginal men had, you know, sunk to a very low position of self-esteem through the whole process of racism and prejudice and oppression. And we were lucky, certainly through the Protection Board years that women stepped up to the plate through those difficult years. But again, that's just a small aspect of history which overlooks that there were Aboriginal men, particularly with the impact of the stolen generations, where we know that thousands of Aboriginal kids were removed from their families, where Aboriginal fathers were trying to get their kids back. They were writing letters to the Protection Board and those are in the record. And I think there was a comment about one of the Aboriginal men camping outside an institution and trying to see his daughter, you know, and he'd refused to leave that particular space. This is the history we need to promote.

I'm aware of an incident up at Grafton in the 1920s where the police came in and removed Aboriginal kids and it made a big impact in the press up there which spread to Sydney because of my grandfather's role as an activist and a lot of this stuff was being released into the mainstream press down in Sydney as well. The father and the mother went to the police, were pleading you know please bring our kids back, and even the police officer said look they're a good family, you know I can't understand what the Board has removed these kids for. And then the response came back that the father was devalued and attacked. He was a no-good drunk and this was all false. And the kids were taken and they were shipped to Sydney and institutionalised. And again it was this, how can you say? Fictitious you know portrayal of the father which was instrumental in being used against the family to say that no they, the kids couldn't stay with this particular family despite the police officer himself saying they're a good family.

**FRB:** Do you, in your mind divide the history into pre-colonial but then the early colonial stories about men as warriors, as fighting wars around Australia. And then the Protection Board?

**JOHN:** Well I'd just like to say that for me that's a misconception of the warrior male, you know there's been a lot of stuff written about Aboriginal people were war-like and we weren't.

Aboriginal people did not go to war with neighbouring tribes. There were disputes but there was a very strong law in place across this continent which people had to abide by. The stories of cannibalism and battles and wars were complete fantasies. I was asked by the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Age* to do a review Geoffrey Blainey's latest rendition of *The Triumph Of The Nomads*. I did a fairly positive review, but it included a view of Aboriginal people as warlike and there were these great battles. There was something like a group of 400 Aboriginal people that come into contact with another group of 170 Aboriginal people and there was a massive battle. And this was the account that Blainey refers to but what I question about that is there were only three people killed in this huge battle. When you go back to the original material you've got 570 people in a pitched battle and yet only three people died, very strange.

What actually transpired there was a breaking of law and as I said the Aboriginal way of dealing with law was that the guilty party had to stand out with a shield and then a group of men would come up and throw spears at the perpetrator if he'd committed a crime. And if he managed to survive he wasn't guilty and if he was killed he was obviously guilty so that was the incident. It was about social control of laws, strict laws to be abided by but there were no bloody pitched battles and wars.

**FRB:** Right so that was, you're just correcting me about this idea of warriors. So how do you describe, before the Protection Boards and the wholesale removal of people, how do you describe fathering in that period there, the men's role?

**JOHN:** Well the men's role was alongside the women's role. There was a joint role of leadership and then, this is my perspective and take on this and it's backed up certainly by a lot of accounts around the country, is that this was a joint leadership role and a shared responsibility.

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And certainly, up in Worimi country there is the catfish dreaming story which is an important initiation ceremony and groups of stone circles are still on place in the mountains up there in Port Stephens. And what happened is the women would bring the boys through for initiation ceremony and then they'd hand them over to the males who would place them into these stone circular formations, and then it was on through the initiation ceremony. And that fits with the catfish dreaming. A catfish built circular stones in the riverbeds as well ... and the female lays the eggs and it's the male's role to then step in and oversee the process. So and look after the eggs until they hatch. So that is the fathering role in that process and that was the same for Aboriginal people in that role. For Aboriginal people before 1788 it was a very loving family environment. I mean they were brought up with, and there was also basically you had many other fathers. I mean your father's brothers were also your father, you know. You had other mothers, so it was a very loving, nurturing, cared for, shared parenting environment and even after 1788 and through the 19<sup>th</sup> century despite invasion, occupation, dispossession, cultural destruction through disease and violence we still survived.

The Protection Board started in 1883 in New South Wales. 1860 I think for Victoria. The different time periods round the other states. And one of the great missing aspects of history is the understanding of the period before the heavily controlled reserves from the 1930s where all Aboriginal people were thrown onto these bloody worthless stations where you couldn't eke out a living and you were basically being thrown food that was bad for your health and inadequate clothing, limited education, limited working opportunities.

But prior to that, from about the 1880s and I'm talking about New South Wales here, there's a great slab of 50-year odd history which is pretty much unknown and what happened during that period is Aboriginal people began to you know come back together again, still on country, the remnants of Aboriginal people who were still maintaining language and cultural norms. I mean in some aspects that had changed because of the dramatic loss of life, people were crashing back on top of one another and reforming into groups on country. Now some had, through whatever means gained some sort of education or understanding of English and there were letters written to the Protection Board. There is a number of these letters still held in the archives. Aboriginal people either writing in or were assisted in writing in letters to the government and the Protection Board asking for land, 30, 40, 50 acres.

Now in those days there was no manager out in the country, I mean it was the police so the Protection Board would ask the police to inspect the land that Aboriginal people were asking for. And again, these letters are in the archives that the police would go out, send a letter back to the Protection Board and say it's heavily worthless timberd scrub, give it to them. And the Board did. So during this period something like 27,000 acres was handed back to Aboriginal people. Now in the space of 18 months to two years the police accounts, the Board's asking how Aboriginal people are doing on these independent farms which at this time were only one and two families on their own plots of land. 30, 40 acres, 50 acres, in some instances up to 500 acres. So these independent farms with one or two families the police reports come back, you know within 18 months to two years and say the land's all been cleared, it's been fenced, they've planted crops, they've built homesteads, they've got livestock. Now again in the records Aboriginal people are winning the blue ribbons in the local agricultural shows on, and a lot of this land is up on the north coast, prime coastal beautiful land on the rivers. A lot of the records state they're clearing 100 pounds, up to 500 pounds annually. That was a massive amount of money. One Aboriginal family had their own piano, they were prospering on this land.

But by the 1920s the titles to 27,000 acres of land had been revoked, particularly with the impact in First World War, the soldier resettlement scheme was brought in. There was envy first off from other white settlers who were writing into the Board and saying we want this land, move them somewhere else and then the soldier resettlement scheme comes in where basically soldiers were handed over the Aboriginal farms. They were never paid anything, Aboriginal people, again in the records, were thrown off after four and five decades of doing all the work on the land with nothing more than the shirts on their back and kicked into the bush and were paid nothing for it.

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**FRB:** And that hooks up with Fred doesn't it? Your grandfather.

**JOHN:** My grandfather, yeah. That was the fight that came up then, it was the catalyst for the rise of the first united organised Aboriginal political movement in 1924 in Sydney led by my grandfather. There were two key elements to Aboriginal political revolt in the mid 1920s. One, the revocation and attacks on Aboriginal land. And two, the acceleration of taking Aboriginal kids from their families. They were the two prime motivators for the formation of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) forming to rise up and to confront the Board, in the public space for nearly five years before they were hounded out of existence by the police acting for the Board.

**FRB:** Right, and that was something I wanted to ask you about your grandfather. There was the risk, he had children and family and the pressure from the police. What I was wondering about is that pressure didn't just amount to roughing him up and stuff like that but the threat to him as a dad and the threat that his children would be taken?

**JOHN:** It's interesting I only uncovered last year an account from him in the interview in the paper where he said he'd been warned on many occasions that the doors of Long Bay Gaol were opening for him but he said I will not stop speaking out on the atrocious act that is in place that is impacting onto Aboriginal lives. Despite during the 1930s the AAPA organisation had been forced underground by the police, it was still active. Now my father was born in 1932 and he said at the age of five or six he and another young Koori boy were picked up and taken to Canterbury police station. He said, "we were just playing on the street." And my father recounted that day in that police station for him and this other little boy, was the most frightening experience of his entire life. They were terrorised in that police station. When they were finally let go, he never realised at the time what was going on. He raced home and ran into his bedroom and he never said a word to his mum or dad about what had happened. He thought "I must have been in serious trouble to be treated the way I was", and he wasn't going to draw any attention to it. And he did not realise until many years later what it was all about. It was simply the police getting a message through to the old man, which he never got, [laughing] that we can pick up your kids anytime we like and take them and there's not a damn thing you can do about it. And that was the, the threat. So there certainly were threats against not just my grandfather but Sid Ridgeway, my grandfather's close friend and secretary of the AAPA and the others, Dick Johnson who also had young families. I mean the threat against them was real with their kids and they were seeing it happen all across the state.

**FRB:** Could you comment on this whole business about the intervention in Northern Territory? People are saying that it's an atrocious way to target a group, but it's the fathers that seem to be suffering.

**JOHN:** Absolutely, I mean it's the whole process, Aboriginal men in that space are branded as either paedophiles or they're committing domestic violence constantly. Everyone's thrown into the one bucket, there's no escape from that. You can't be innocent.

**FRB:** Do you see effects here? Where we're not in the Northern Territory?

**JOHN:** Look the situation for an Aboriginal male in any situation is still the same, I mean for me. Probably not as extreme as on the street up there as it is through what happened with that intervention but certainly in the position of police and the way that you may be perceived and looked upon in the public space is very much a part of this space as well. Real estate's another one where the Aboriginal male would rather send the wife or the girlfriend to deal with that sort of thing than him going into that space. Because of discrimination and racist behaviour and it's the way the Aboriginal male is being portrayed and placed in society.

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**FRB:** And in terms of the future?

**JOHN:** For me you've got to have that national focus, and this is a positive thing, , brothers far as the position of the Aboriginal male is portrayed to the wider white community, the prominent role that Aboriginal men take in caring for their kids and their family and positives instead of the negatives, we can educate wider white Australia on a lot of these stories. But certainly, in my grandfather's time the pan-Aboriginal approach with a national agenda was their directive. They even had international connections and that goes back to even Malcolm X in 1964 saying just before he was assassinated that oppressed people around the world are beginning to come together and compare notes because we're realising that racism isn't localised, we have to fight it internationally. So, there's those big picture things in regard to that but when you look at the big impacts that we've made politically I would say it's because we've made a national approach or impact. Again, really promoting Aboriginal men in their father's role in the family role and I mean I think that really should be promoted and certainly brought out and rolled out across the country.

## ENGAGING FATHERS IN FOOTPRINTS IN TIME

Department of Social Services

Fathers' voices matter. Footprints in Time: the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children is keen to gain a complete and balanced picture of the lives of Indigenous children. It is important to hear from fathers as well as mothers. Footprints in Time works hard to encourage men to participate in the study, although achieving a high level of participation remains a challenge.



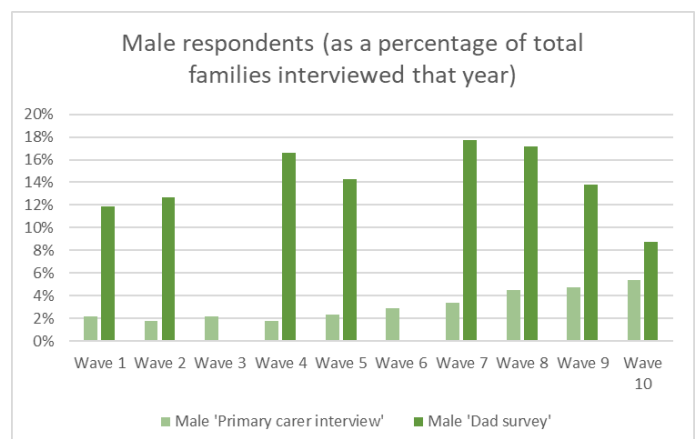
There are many barriers to fathers taking part in interviews, such as:

- difficulty lining up suitable times to catch the whole family at home
- the study uses self-complete surveys which usually have a much lower response rate compared to face-to-face interviews
- nearly half of fathers don't live with the mother. Mothers provide permission and current contact details to facilitate participation.

Around 3 per cent of fathers responded in each wave as a primary carer with 14 per cent doing the shorter 'Dad' survey. Not all of the participants were the biological fathers of the study children. Some were step, adoptive, foster fathers, grandfathers or uncles.

Fathers in Wave 8 were more likely to respond if:

- they live in the same household as mother (six times more likely)
- they were present when the mother was interviewed (three times more likely)
- the mother had a university level qualification (25 per cent response rate compared to 17 per cent without)
- the child lived in a more advantaged area by SEIFA decile (Socio-economic indexes for areas)
- the child lived in major cities (32 per cent response rate compared to 18 per cent rate elsewhere).



Characteristics of fathers who were more likely to respond in Wave 8 (2015)

There was no difference in response rates in Wave 8 if fathers were working or not.

### How has Footprints in Time tried to involve fathers?

The primary carer interview is conducted with the person who spends the most time with the child. In 93 per cent of cases this was the mother. In the first two years a shorter survey was offered to 'secondary carers', referred to as 'Parent 2'. These included other relatives living in the home or living elsewhere but involved with the child's life.

In reality, these were mostly fathers, and the term 'secondary carers' didn't really work when both parents were heavily involved in raising the child. In Wave 4 in 2011 the response rate improved a little after the 'Parent 2 survey' became specifically a 'Dad survey' to focus on the important role fathers play.

Footprints in Time has also offered a choice between face-to-face or phone interviews, online surveys and paper based surveys to try to increase the response rate.

Fathers are also given an incentive to participate, including Footprints branded t-shirts, towels, singlets and caps. Currently fathers are offered a \$20 grocery card to thank them for participating in the Study. Mothers (Primary carers) and Study Children are offered a Footprints branded t-shirt or a \$40 grocery card in appreciation of their time.

Footprints in Time interviewers, who are all Indigenous, suggested that fathers would be more likely to engage if barriers to participation were reduced, relevant feedback was provided for fathers and positive action-focussed language used.

Including the perspectives of fathers in the Study gives a multidimensional and nuanced way of understanding the development of a child in the context of their relationships with the people involved in bringing them up. Footprints in Time values the responses of the fathers who have participated to date and encourages them to continue. Their voices matter.

### So why do participating fathers say they want to be involved?

In 2015, fathers were asked: "Why do you want to be part of Footprints in Time?" and

"What do you hope Footprints in Time will do?"

Fathers talked about contributing to a positive future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their child's development, culture and identity, and informing programs and services.

These are some of their thoughts:

- "It's very important that surveys such as these are done for our people to support and empower future generations."
- "To help get the right information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into the community."
- "This is a need in our community and it is our voice being heard."

## FOLLOWING IN THEIR FATHERS' FOOTPRINTS: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE FATHERS OF LSIC KIDS?

Department of Social Services

Footprints in Time: the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) has followed the development of two age groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children for the past decade.

Initiated in 2008 as an annual interview of parents with infants and children up to four years old, the ongoing study has many aims including to increase understanding of what helps Indigenous children grow up strong and the important role that fathers play in their lives.

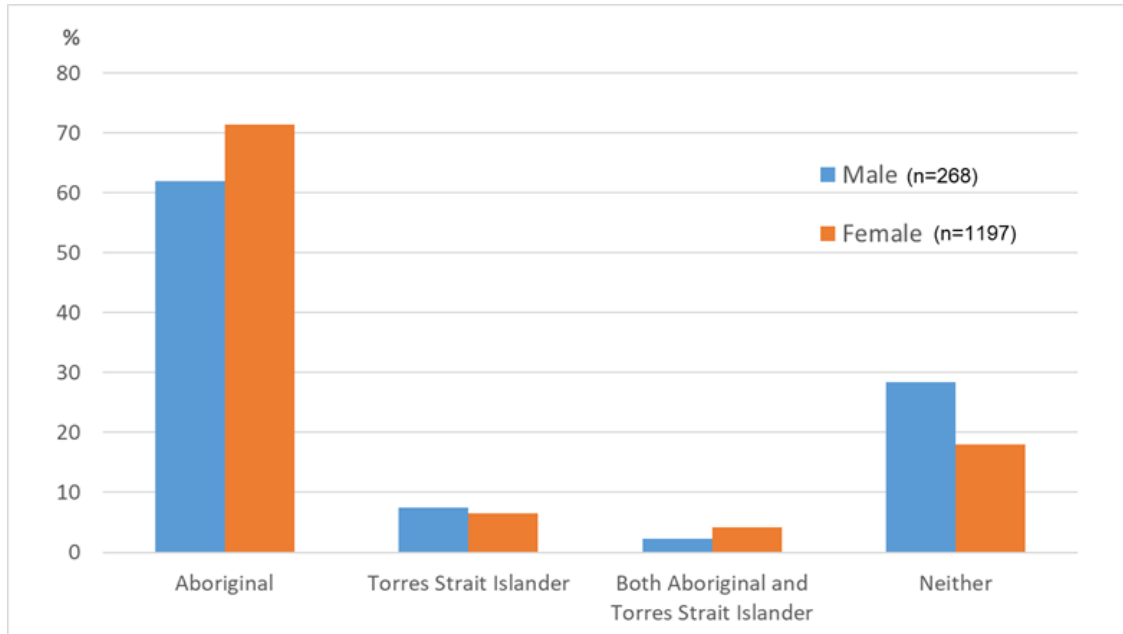
Footprints in Time is overseen by a steering committee, chaired by Professor Mick Dodson AM. The study focuses on children from urban, regional and remote areas across 11 sites in Australia. The Department of Social Services manages the study, employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers to conduct the interviews.

Only a small proportion of respondents to the primary carer survey are male. Men comprised only 4.5 per cent of primary respondents in Wave 8 in 2015. In addition, fathers or men who have a father like relationship with the study child were asked to complete a separate 'Dad survey'.

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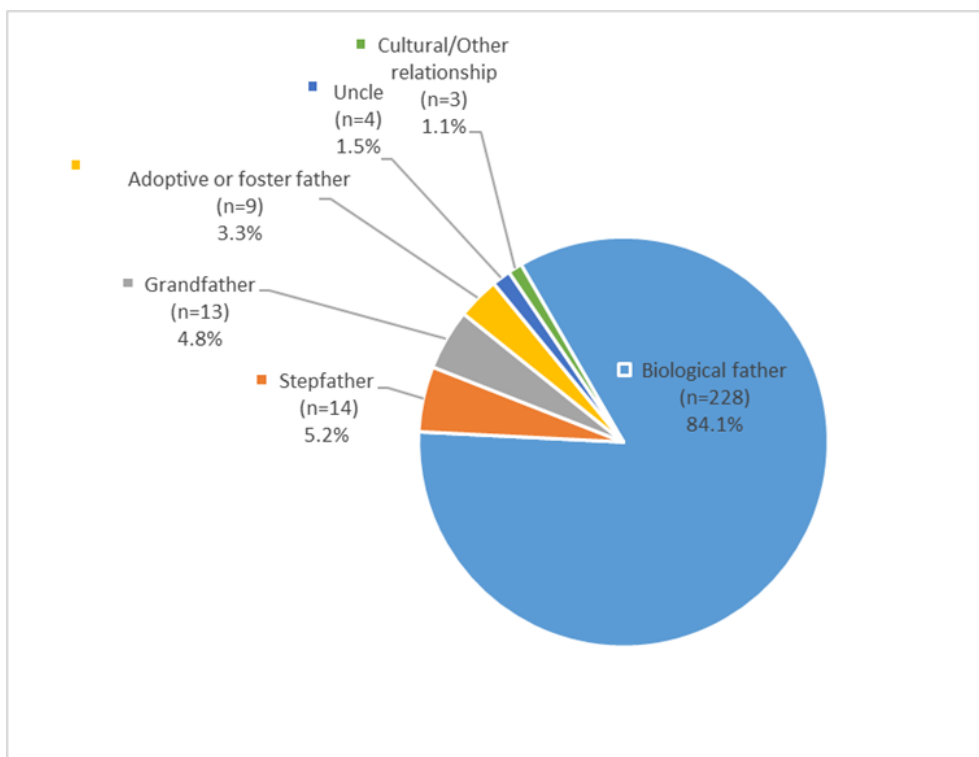
More than 1,900 survey responses were collected from fathers through these two questionnaires over the ten waves of the study. The characteristics of all responding parental figures who were interviewed in 2015 are summarised in Figures 1 and 2.

**Figure 1: Indigenous status of male and female parents/carers in Wave 8 (2015)\***



\*Small number of 'don't know' and 'refused' responses excluded from this chart.

**Figure 2: Relationship of male parental figures to Study Child in Wave 8 (2015)**



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However, they also reported regularly involving them in household chores or cooking (66 per cent) and assisting their children in getting ready for bed (70.2 per cent). Further analysis revealed that fathers' involvement in both play and study (e.g. helping children with their homework) was associated with lower social and emotional difficulties in the study children ( $p < 0.05$ ).

You can use the data. The data from the LSIC is publicly available to approved researchers. Further information about the LSIC study and how to access the data is available at [www.dss.gov.au/lxic](http://www.dss.gov.au/lxic)

## STRONG FATHER STRONG FAMILIES—SUMMARY

The Strong Father Strong Families program was launched in May 2010 and was a component of the Building Strengths of Australian Males measure. The Australian Government committed \$6.8 million (GST exclusive) from 2010-11 to 2013-14 for the program.

The program aimed to promote the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers, partners, grandfathers and uncles and encourage them to actively participate in their children's and families lives. The overarching objectives of the program were to:

- increase access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males to culturally appropriate health services and antenatal, parenting and other related programs and health messages;
- improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males' ability to contribute positively to the health and wellbeing of the mother's pregnancy and a nurturing and supportive family environment for the infant; and
- support the developmental needs of children by encouraging fathers, uncles and grandfathers to be healthy role models and engage fully in the child's life as early as possible, within the context of local community needs and cultural practices.

The program was implemented in 13 sites across the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales (table 1). A variety of services and activities were provided under the program, such as education courses/workshops, health checks, men's groups and yarning sessions, cultural camps and community-wide barbeques and fun days.

The program was not formally evaluated. In 2013, a descriptive analysis was undertaken by Urbis, which indicated a number of positive outcomes for men participating in the program, including:

- increased self-esteem;
- improved health outcomes and health literacy;
- improved access to services;
- increased education, training and employment opportunities;
- increased connection to community and willingness to share issues and concerns; and
- increased connection to culture.

The Strong Fathers Strong Families descriptive analysis report is available at: [https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/0B45B5011865395FCA257D090006FBEB/\\$File/Final%20Report%20Strong%20Fathers%20Strong%20Families%20Programme%20Descriptive%20Analysis.PDF](https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/0B45B5011865395FCA257D090006FBEB/$File/Final%20Report%20Strong%20Fathers%20Strong%20Families%20Programme%20Descriptive%20Analysis.PDF).

In 2014, the program ceased, as it had been developed as a time-limited program. The expansion of the New Directions: Mothers and Babies Services program and the development of the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023 were other Commonwealth activities seen as supporting fathers.

Strong fathers, strong families



## Recent published research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers

**FRB comment by A/Prof Richard Fletcher, Family Action Centre, The University of Newcastle.** Journals reporting on mainstream fathering carry few articles addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers, uncles, pops, brothers. In the abstracts below, which were found with a Google Scholar search of 2017 & 2018, research with specific groups of Indigenous men is described. **Reilly & Rees (2018)** include men from Mornington Island, Doomadgee and Normanton in Queensland. **Faulkner and colleagues (2018)** interviewed young fathers from Moree, Tamworth and Newcastle while **Rossiter and colleagues (2017)** interviewed men in NSW prisons. The men's strengths and the central role of culture in their fathering identity are common themes. The needs of Indigenous fathers are also addressed in the community through men's programs where fathering issues are dealt with as part of the male role in families and community. Men from far north Queensland and South Australia interviewed by **Catuno and colleagues (2018)** were motivated to attend preventative health care but services should be gender-specific to be culturally appropriate. The final paper by **Spillman (2018)** describes a culturally based response of men to the Northern Territory Emergency Response which was so damaging to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers (See the comments by John Maynard in this issue).

## Fatherhood in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: An examination of barriers and opportunities to strengthen the male parenting role



Traditional Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies value men's role as parents; however, the importance of promoting fatherhood as a key social determinant of men's well-being has not been fully appreciated in Western medicine. To strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male parenting role, it is vital to examine current barriers and opportunities. The first author (a male Aboriginal health project officer) conducted yarning sessions in three remote Australian communities, two being Aboriginal, the other having a high Aboriginal population. An expert sample of 25 Aboriginal and 6 non-Aboriginal stakeholders, including maternal and child health workers and men's group facilitators, considered barriers and opportunities to improve men's parenting knowledge and role, with an aim to inform services and practices intended to support men's parenting. A specific aim was to shape an existing men's group program known as Strong Fathers, Strong Families. A thematic analysis of data from the project identified barriers and opportunities to support men's role as parents. Challenges included the transition from

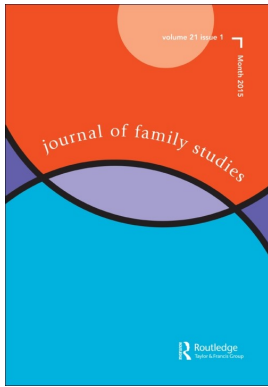
traditional to contemporary parenting practices and low level of cultural and male gender sensitivity in maternal and child health services. Services need to better understand and focus on men's psychological empowerment and to address shame and lack of confidence around parenting. Poor literacy and numeracy are viewed as contributing to disempowerment. Communities need to champion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male father role models. Biases and barriers should be addressed to improve service delivery and better enable men to become empowered and confident fathers.

Reilly, L., & Rees, S. (2018). Fatherhood in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: An examination of barriers and opportunities to strengthen the male parenting role. *American journal of men's health*, 12(2), 420-430.

## How do young aboriginal fathers in Australia “stay on track”? – Perspectives on the support networks of aboriginal fathers

Scholarship dedicated to documenting the roles and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian fathers is scarce, with most works focusing on rural and remote areas, with little dedicated to Aboriginal fathers living in regional and urban areas. Utilizing and building upon the preliminary research undertaken the University of Newcastle's 'Stayin' On Track programme, which seeks to provide online support and assistance to young Aboriginal fathers, this paper brings to light the unique challenges and sources of support afforded to young Aboriginal fathers from regional and urban New South Wales.

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It finds that, contrary to prevailing stereotypes, Aboriginal fathers respond favourably to the demand for paternal responsibility, which can take on meanings of masculinity as well as respect towards Elders. Furthermore, these fathers demonstrate a keen awareness of their Aboriginality, referencing the benefits of large, close-knit families and their tendency to support fathers and co-raise children.

Faulkner, D., Hammond, C., Nisbet, L., & Fletcher, R. (2018). How do young aboriginal fathers in Australia 'stay on track'?—Perspectives on the support networks of aboriginal fathers. *Journal of Family Studies*, 1-14.

## “Learning to become a better man”: Insights from a fathering programme for incarcerated Indigenous men



This paper reports a qualitative study of incarcerated Indigenous fathers in Australia, using a framework of generative fathering. Researchers interviewed 28 imprisoned Indigenous men about their experiences of parenting and their responses to a parenting programme. Participants identified how the programme supported their learning and their capacity to embrace the role of parenting the next generation. Responses indicate that the programme's format and content were relevant to their experience as Indigenous fathers, and enhanced by the skills of the facilitator, and provision of a safe learning environment. It facilitated their growth as individuals and as parents through acknowledging their cultural identity and roles.

Rossiter, C., Power, T., Fowler, C., Jackson, D., Roche, M., & Dawson, A. (2017). “Learning to become a better man”: Insights from a fathering programme for incarcerated Indigenous men. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 52(1), 13-31.

## “I feel more comfortable speaking to a male”: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men’s discourse on utilizing primary health care services



**Background:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have the highest morbidity and mortality rates, and lowest rates of health service utilization in Australia. There is a current perception that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are disinterested in their health. This study aimed to identify the perceived motivators, barriers and enablers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men’s utilization of primary health care services, explore their experiences and obtain suggestions from them as to how services could be modified to improve utilization.

**Methods:** This study utilized the principles of Indigenist Research Methods. Semi-structured interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (N = 19) took place in South Australia and far north Queensland. Participants were asked about their experiences with primary health care services, including what they could remember as a child. A thematic analysis of the qualitative data was completed without the use of computer software.

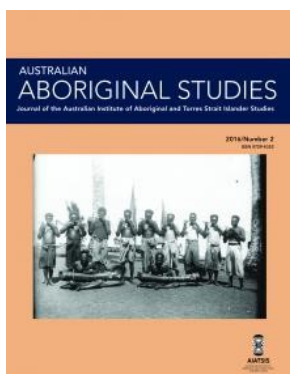
**Results:** Feelings of invincibility, shame, being uncomfortable, fearful, along with long waiting times, having a lack of knowledge, and culturally inappropriate staff/services were all found to be barriers to service utilization. Enabling factors included convenience, the perceived quality of the service, feeling culturally safe and/or a sense of belonging, and having a rapport with staff. Motivation for attending primary health care services included going when feeling sick/unwell, attending a particular service (dental or sexual health), visiting for check-ups and preventative health and family encouragement. This study also highlights strategies surrounding logistical factors, promotion of services and improved communications, having culturally appropriate services and providing gender specific services all of which were suggested by the participants to improve service utilization.

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**Conclusion:** Contrary to common misperceptions, this study demonstrated that most of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men participants were motivated to engage with primary health care services for preventative health care. Even though there were men that fitted the stereo-type who avoid doctors, there were usually underlying reasons and barriers accounting for this reluctance. This study suggests that if primary health care services commit to better understanding the barriers, enablers and motivators their cohort of men face, then utilization could be greatly improved.

Canuto, K., Wittert, G., Harfield, S., & Brown, A. (2018). "I feel more comfortable speaking to a male": Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's discourse on utilizing primary health care services. *International journal for equity in health*, 17(1), 185.

### **The brumby dance episode: On the value of cultural continuity within the localised complexity of remote Indigenous education**



The brumby dance episode occurred as a Warlpiri-inspired response to an emotionally charged conversation regarding the Northern Territory Emergency Response. It took place during the Cross-Cultural Collaboration Project, undertaken in the Northern Territory Department of Education, Employment and Training in 2008. This paper contextualises, describes and analyses the brumby dance episode, examining the perspectives and intentions underlying its enactment. This analysis proposes the brumby dance episode as an exemplar of the great value of cultural continuity processes in bringing traditional Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being to the localised complexity of contemporary Indigenous education in Australia, particularly in remote settings. Such strongly relational, strength-based approaches are juxtaposed with those of the currently dominant standardisation policy agenda in Indigenous education, critiqued as over-simplistic (one size fits all), deficit-focused and relationally impoverished.

Spillman, D. (2018). The brumby dance episode: On the value of cultural continuity within the localised complexity of remote Indigenous education. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*, (1), 19.

## CURRENT RESEARCH

### Bush Adventure Therapy

Bush Adventure Therapy takes a holistic approach to health, allowing individuals to connect with their environment by taking part in a variety of activities, such as kayaking, bushwalking and cultural practices. Jacob Prehn is currently undertaking a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) investigating the effects of Bush Adventure Therapy and the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. The research was inspired through an identified gap in the research body around Bush Adventure Therapy, there was none specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.

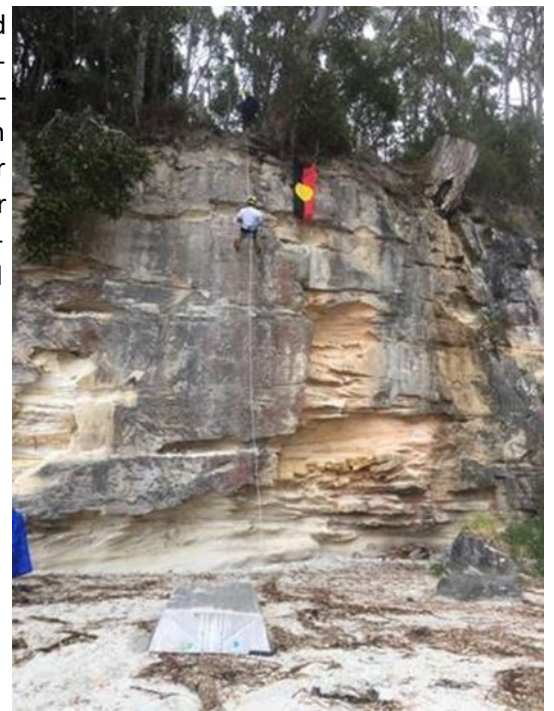
Prior to undertaking the research, Jacob was coordinating an Aboriginal men's program in Southern Tasmania through a community-controlled organisation. Funding was received to undertake 6-12 months of Bush Adventure Therapy which saw many Aboriginal men from the community participate. Examples of activities include walking in the bush to collect cultural materials, which would then be used to make spears, clap sticks and waddies; other times there was a camp that ran for a period of around three to four days. The camps that incorporated Bush Adventure Therapy involving activities, such as kayaking, abseiling and diving for Abalone – a traditional Tasmanian Aboriginal food.

Although there are reported improvements in physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing amongst those who take part in this therapy, full explanations regarding these outcomes are yet to be published. Bush Adventure Therapy can be incorporated into current programs or a program on its own. This therapy specialised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men works to connect our men back to Country, create a platform for community-controlled health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – with a focus on preventative action, and educate them about cultural practices, which may have been lost.

The Aboriginal fathers who take part in this therapy with their children have been seen to strengthen their bond with activities in which they can take part in quality father-child time. A special case was between a father and child that had entered the Bush Adventure Therapy and not only strengthened their bond but taught their child about cultural activities. The story emphasises the importance of culture and Country to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and sharing these stories with other men.

For further information about this, Jacob can be contacted on:

E: [Jacob.prehn@utas.edu.au](mailto:Jacob.prehn@utas.edu.au)



*Participant taking part in a cultural activity as part of the Bush Adventure Therapy*

### Tell My Story: Hearing from the Dads in the Indigenous Birthing in an Urban Setting (IBUS) Study

There is little research about the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men supporting their partners through pregnancy and as they become new fathers. Health services often target 'mums and bubs,' sometimes at the exclusion of men. This project aims to:

- explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's experiences, dreams, aspirations, needs and challenges during their partner's pregnancy to 6 months post-natal
- identify their social, cultural and psychological +strengths as a partner expecting a baby and as a father.

This research project sits within the framework of the IBUS Study, a longitudinal cohort study with four core partners: The Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service (ATSICHS), Mater Health Service and the University of Queensland (UQ). The IBUS study employs an overarching Participatory Action Research (PAR) Framework that enables responsive, proactive action in relation to findings.

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The methodology will employ in-depth, semi-structured and focus group interviews with a sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men whose partners are pregnant or have recently given birth. Interviews will chronicle men's experiences during their



partner's pregnancy through to the 6-month post-natal period, including their parenting experiences, role in their partner's pregnancy and antenatal care, their preparation for parenting and their dreams, aspirations, needs and challenges associated with becoming a new

father. The social, cultural and psychological strengths that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men exhibit in their roles as a father and a partner will be identified from their accounts of everyday experiences.

This work will contribute to the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce in two key ways. Firstly, Dr Yvette Roe, an early career Aboriginal researcher, will take full responsibility under Prof Sue Kildea's mentorship for leading, conducting, reporting and acquitting the whole project. Secondly, Mr Ike Fisher, an Aboriginal community researcher for UIIH health services, will conduct qualitative interviews with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and be mentored to develop skills in qualitative data analysis and writing for publication.

**Dawn Conlan and Emma Gifford tracked down the programs, researched and wrote up the PROGRAMS AND FATHERS INCLUSIVE PRACTICE section. Their comments on the process are here:**

In looking for Aboriginal Fathers Projects nationally to include in this bulletin we have faced numerous challenges. Those challenges included, websites that had not been updated and programs or services that no longer exist. During the search a common comment was that there are lots of services for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander mums and bubs and nothing really for dads. Although, after speaking directly with organisations, it was discovered that programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers is in fact an identified need within communities, however these organisations have either had the funding for it removed, or they have not received funding at all. Often resulting in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers being left behind, as organisations struggle to create enough of their own funding around the need. What we did find was a rich diversity of Young Aboriginal Father Programs, either adapted by Aboriginal Communities from mainstream programs or developed and delivered by community that take a holistic approach that are both relevant and meaningful to young Aboriginal fathers.

Emma & Dawn