

Research Support Grant Program – Final Report

Section 1: Project and Report Details

Project Title:	Assessing mobile phone access to child development, parenting and mental health information for young Aboriginal fathers
Chief Investigator:	Associate professor Richard Fletcher
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Site(s) Project is conducted:	Mid north coast
Grant Code:	2015-03

Section 2: Summary of Progress against the Objectives

Please summarise the **purpose** of your research (including background and rationale).

Purpose: To assess the way that mobile phone and internet technology can be used to engage young Aboriginal fathers to provide them with information and support.

Background and rationale

The current research base demonstrates that Young men from the Aboriginal community in the Mid North Coast.

- Are likely to become fathers at a young age without necessarily having experienced a father themselves who was a good role model (Hammond C, Lester J, Fletcher R & Pascoe S 2004).
- Face the task of developing a strong Aboriginal male identity in a culture which includes racist attitudes and structural barriers to Aboriginal men's participation in family life (Tsey & Every 2000).
- Live in communities with inter-generational high levels of unemployment, high burden of poor health, reduced life expectancy and the death of family members at comparatively young ages (AIHW 2011).
- Are at risk of adopting health-damaging behaviours including high alcohol and substance use, unprotected sex and involvement in violent confrontation which also impair their parenting (Wenintong 2006).
- Tend not to access mental health services

Young Aboriginal fathers frequently feel out of place in female-oriented maternity and perinatal services (Hammond C, Lester J, Fletcher R & Pascoe S 2004). Historically, mainstream health services have been designed without sufficient consideration to culture and gender influences on access to health care. This situation has resulted in a high degree of exclusion of Aboriginal fathers from the birth and subsequent father-child experience. The marginalisation of fathers from these early experiences of parenting has a profound impact on public health and on the life of Aboriginal families, with particular impacts on child development outcomes. Evidence of this problem is summarised in section vi. Becoming a father is a critical period in the life of a family and there is a growing body of research documenting the critical importance of engaging with, and supporting new fathers.

A summary of relevant findings published by the UK Fatherhood Institute concluded: The father's functioning as a support person is key, since depressed new mothers are more likely to turn to and receive support from their partner than from any other individual, including medical staff (Holopainen, 2002). New

fathers' depression rates have been found to be double the national average for men in the same age group in Denmark (Madsen et al, 2006) and also in the US (Paulson et al, 2006) A meta-analysis (43 studies) found an average 10.4% of fathers depressed both pre- and post-natally, with the peak time for fathers' depression being between three and six months after the birth (Paulson & Bazemore, 2010). Fathers' depression puts at risk the quality of the relationship between the parents (Phares, 1997); and better couple relationship quality has been linked to lower infant fussiness scores (Dave et al, 2005). It is known that marital conflict and parental depression are causally related and connected with elevated adjustment problems in children, but relatively little is known about fathers' depressive symptomology, marital conflict, and child development (Cummings et al, 2010). A 3-year study of first-time fathers in Australia found stress negatively affecting fathers' attachments to their infants (Buist et al, 2003). Poor father-child attachment has been linked, among other things, to problems in children's peer relationships (for review, see Lamb & Lewis, 2010)

Contributing to the problem is a lack of knowledge regarding how and by what means health services can best engage with Aboriginal men during critical periods in the life of Aboriginal families.

Summary of project **design**. (eg: details of intervention, allocation to groups)

The *Stayin on Track* phone-optimised website has been constructed with funding from The University of Newcastle and The Young and Well Research Cooperative. It contains short films of young Aboriginal fathers describing their reactions to finding out that they would be fathers and to the birth of their first child. The fathers also describe "what's it like" being a dad. These films can be viewed on mobile phones. Each short film links to a web page with links to parenting and mental health information.

Local young Aboriginal fathers will be interviewed and their photos and commentary on becoming young Aboriginal fathers will be added to the *Stayin on Track* website in order to give a local point of reference for community members to view the website.

Health and welfare services supporting Aboriginal families (mainstream maternity services, Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Services (AMIHS); Aboriginal men's programs via ACCHSs, Child and Family Health Nursing Services; Child and Family Counselling Services; Drug and Alcohol Services) will provide *Stayin on Track* information brochures to young Aboriginal men who are, or may become, fathers. The brochures will feature the local Aboriginal fathers and direct interested community members to the website.

Software will be installed on the website to allow tracking of the following information: postcode, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, male or female. The project will aim to assess the increase in hits on the website from postcodes in the Mid North Coast Area (Kempsey, Coffs Harbour and Port Macquarie).

Summary of original **objectives** of the project. Have these changed during the course of the project, if so explain.

Original objectives:

Liaise with Aboriginal Medical Services in Kempsey, Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour to identify young fathers who may agree to be interviewed for this project.

Place images and text from the local young fathers on the *Stayin on Track* website.

With newly installed software, record the number of hits from each specific region over a 12 months period.

Changes:

Discussions were held with Durri Aboriginal Corporation Medical Service, Galambila Aboriginal Health Service and Werin Aboriginal Corporation on the most effective way to progress the research. As a result it was decided to focus on Coffs Harbour and recruit young fathers from this area to be represented on the Stayin on Track Website and on the flyer to be circulated advertising the words and photographs of the local fathers.

What **achievements and disappointments** have been encountered since the last report?

Achievements

1. Photographs and commentary uploaded

Photos and comments from the young fathers in the Coffs Harbour regions were added to the *Stayin on Track* website and their images have been incorporated into a promotional flyer advertising the availability of the Stayin on Track website for young fathers. It is understood that mothers, female relatives, other members of the community and non-Indigenous professionals and community members may also wish to visit the site.

While the placing of the images on the website was the key marker, the visits to Coffs Harbour by Craig Hammond and the numerous telephone conversations with individuals from services and the community was part of the intervention to raise awareness of the needs of young Aboriginal fathers and to increase curiosity about what the local fathers might say on the website. The research project also depended on the input and guidance from Galambila CEO Christine Garrett, Galambila staff Tyson Morris, Dave Hart, Dave Reid, Paul Fernon, and Leon Avuri-Williams and Mid North Coast Local Health District staff Tristram Morris and Ruben Browne as well as Rob Curry, Operational Manager with the Mid North Coast Aboriginal Health Authority.

2. Software developed and integrated

Software was integrated into the Stayin on Track website to track the number of hits on the website and to provide a record of originating postcode; whether the person accessing is Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or other; and, whether they are male or female.

3. Community consultation

A discussion group comprising young fathers and staff from Galambila and Mid North Coast Aboriginal Health Authority was held to discuss the applicability of the Stayin on Track approach to supporting young fathers.

Main points from this discussion were:

- There was general agreement that young Aboriginal dads in the Coffs region could benefit for more information and support around their fatherhood and parenting roles. Both Dave and Tyson advised that they themselves would have benefited from culturally appropriate support around the time of birth of their first child. There is very little support currently available to these men and they can be pretty much on their own. There are a lot of services and supports for young mums, but very little consideration for dads and their issues on becoming a father.
- It was agreed that the birth of child can be an exciting time, but also stressful for young dads, and that advice and strategies to deal with these stresses might be helpful. It was noted that many new Indigenous dads are only teenagers and can be a bit out of their depth when they become a father. Advice on how to think about their new responsibilities and understand the issues of their partners would help.
- It is important that any supports offered are culturally safe and appropriate, otherwise guys are unlikely to take them up. Dave noted that there was a mainstream support group meeting offered to him after the birth of his first child, which he attended, but it was a one-off event and a lot of Aboriginal guys might be hesitant to attend such a socially mixed group. There also discussion about the 'Dads in Distress' program, but it was noted it was unlikely that Aboriginal dads would seek support from this program as it is very full-on and they wouldn't feel safe.
- Several people noted that there a camps held for Aboriginal men in the Coffs region. For example, the MNC Regional Aboriginal Men's Group hold camps for Aboriginal fathers and sons at a cultural site at Arrawarra. Stayin on Track should consider running camps to address this fatherhood issue. Two ideas were put forward:-
 - Stayin on Track to could leverage off men's camps already organised by others and make presentations at these camps
 - Stayin on Track could organise its own camp for young dads to focus on fatherhood issues. Senior men would be important contributors at such camps.
 - It was suggested that the men could bring infant children to such a camp.

- It was suggested a useful linkage could be made between the Regional Aboriginal Men’s Group and the Stayin on Track program – it might be good to link the young dads with the more experienced hands in the Regional Group.
- Everyone has found the Stayin on Track website to be interesting and useful in its profiling of young Aboriginal dads and their stories of becoming a father. All agreed it would be useful to develop the site further by making it an interactive tool to provide more interaction and support.
- Several ideas were put forward for a more interactive Website, including:-
 - There needs to be capacity for a one-on-one consultation service where a man from the community can get on the Website and get some confidential advice and assistance for the issues they are confronting.
 - Chat rooms on the site for men to be able to raise issues and get responses would be useful. But it was also noted that such chat functions would probably also need to be managed/moderated to make sure it flowed okay and people all got useful responses to the issues they raised.
 - A broad interactive Facebook function where men could communicate with others in whatever way they find useful

Conclusion

The men in attendance felt that Stayin on Track has a useful role to play in support of young dads and it could develop into a relevant resource for Aboriginal men in the longer term.

4. Data collection analysis demonstrating impact

Postcodes for the areas surrounding Galambila were identified as:

Nambucca Heads- 2448

Sapphire beach- 2450

Sawtell & Toormina- 2452

Bellingen- 2454

Urunga- 2455

Emerald Beach & Woolgoolga- 2456

Hits from these postcodes were tracked over the period from 28/8/2015 to 24/7/2017. The total hits for each postcode over this period are shown in Table 1. As can be seen the number of hits from the areas vary widely however it is clear that males are the ones going onto the site.

Table 1 Total hits 2015-2017

Postcode area	Hits	ATSI*	Gender*
Nambucca Heads - 2448	5	-	-
Sapphire beach- 2450	34	9/18 ATSI	16/18M
Sawtell & Toormina- 2452	9	1/9 ATSI	9M
Bellingen- 2454	2	1/2 ATSI	2M
Urunga- 2455	1	1/1 ATSI	1M
Emerald Beach & Woolgoolga- 2456	0	-	-

*Before the intervention in 2017 ATSI and Gender were not recorded

Impact of the intervention

Placing images and comments from local Coffs Harbour fathers on the *Stayin on Track* website appears to have resulted in an increased number of hits recorded (see Table 2). While there was some interest when the

original *Stayin on Track* project was launched in 2015 the intervention with local fathers [in 2017](#) clearly boosted interest and resulted in hits on the site.

Table 2 Hits recorded over 2015, 2016 and 2017

Postcode area	2015 Hits	2016 Hits	2017 Hits
Nambucca Heads - 2448	5	0	0
Sapphire beach- 2450	12	4	18
Sawtell & Toormina- 2452	0	0	9
Bellingen- 2454	0	0	2
Urunga- 2455	0	0	1
Emerald Beach & Woolgoolga- 2456	0	0	0
TOTAL	17	4	30

Disappointments

The process of identifying and meeting up with young fathers was delayed. While young fathers are clearly valued by the community the lack of father-specific services and the novelty of engaging with this group meant that arranging contact was often delayed. When young fathers are not the specific focus of staff job descriptions and programs it can be difficult to arrange for contact and follow up with the fathers.

Due to an administrative error the security certificate for the *Stayin on Track* website expired and for a period during May anyone linking onto the website was warned that the website was insecure and unavailable. This meant that hits could not be recorded during that time.

Future research directions

The *Assessing mobile phone access to child development, parenting and mental health information for young Aboriginal fathers* project has demonstrated that with local content and promotion, young Aboriginal fathers and community members will access online parenting, child development and mental health information.

This result supports the idea that developing local content for the *Stayin on Track* website is an effective way to begin to build support for young Aboriginal dads. In the next month we will be adding stories of Aboriginal fathers from Dubbo to the *Stayin on Track* website demonstrating the many ways that fathers see their role and their place in the community.

The Coffs Harbour community consultation also identified areas where services and social media could be integrated: one-on-one consultations via the website, chat rooms for men to raise issues and get responses and interactive sites such as Facebook where men could communicate with others in whatever way they find useful.

Developing these approaches would require involvement of community stakeholders such as Men's Groups, services such as Galambila, Durri and Werin, health promotion staff and researchers who can provide rigorous design and assessment expertise.

As the developers and managers of the *Stayin on Track* website we would welcome involvement in further developing the support for mid north coast Aboriginal fathers, their children and families.

Select the **category(ies)** that best describe the outcomes of this research

Increased the capacity to do further research		Informed policy or practice	X
Production of new knowledge	X	Improved health outcomes	
Improved teamwork/collaboration		Improved health service delivery	X

	Cost benefit			
	Other – please describe below...			
Other:	A possible channel to provide information to young Aboriginal fathers who do not access family and health services.			
Provide details:	While the standard response to providing support to young parents is to develop face-to-face services the use of the internet and mobile phones provides a low-cost easily accessed contact point for hard-to-reach groups. Young fathers are an essential part of the community yet have few or no services to offer them support. The Stayin on Track website could be used in conjunction with face-to-face clinical and parenting services to ensure improved outcomes for the community.			

Who/what will the outcomes of this project most directly impact?

(examples: new knowledge, impact on patients/health service delivery, cost saving, efficiency/productivity, teamwork/collaboration, sustainability)

	Patients/Families	X	Public/Communities	X
	Clinicians		Other Researchers	
	Other – please describe below..		Health Service	
Other:				
Provide details:	<p>Young Aboriginal fathers will have access to resources which fit with their lifestyle and which offer support from peers discussing the important changes occurring as Aboriginal men become fathers.</p> <p>Health service staff will have a point of contact with the young Aboriginal fathers that they rarely see in clinics and parenting programs.</p>			

Section 3: Research Outputs

List all journal articles/conference presentations/reports/books that **have occurred** as a result of this project

Type	Full Reference
<i>(Journal, Conference, Report, Book, Other – give details)</i>	<i>(Full Journal reference, conference name and location (keynote or presenter))</i>

List all journal articles/conference presentations/reports/books **published or planned** as a result of this project

Type <i>(Journal, Conference, Report, Book, Other – give details)</i>	Full Reference <i>(Full Journal reference, conference name and location (keynote or presenter))</i>
Seminar presentation where Stayin on Track developments were presented	Presentation to Goodstart Preventing Family Violence seminar, Melbourne 2017. Key research directions on the impact of family violence on children, families and staff and what Goodstart can learn from this to formulate its response to family violence. Richard Fletcher, Jaime Wroe and Johanne Knowles
Invited submission including where Stayin on Track development	Submission to the National Children’s Commissioner Megan Mitchell Focus on Young Parents and their Children: Fathers in the setting of young parenthood A/Prof Richard Fletcher, Dr Jennifer StGeorge, Family Action Centre Faculty of Health and Medicine The University of Newcastle, NSW
Keynote presentation where Stayin on Track developments were presented	Early Childhood Australia (ECA) National Conference, Darwin NT. Engaging fathers in the early childhood space; Why and how? A/Prof Richard Fletcher, Family Action Centre Faculty of Health and Medicine The University of Newcastle, NSW

Section 5: Workforce Capacity Building

Provide a summary of the staff who **contributed** to this project *(add more rows if required)*

Name	Current Role <i>(eg. RN, Dietician)</i>	Contribution to Project <i>(eg. Data collection, results analysis, report writing)</i>
Craig Hammond	Aboriginal Liaison Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle	Liaison with AMS. Contacting and interviewing young fathers
Darren Faulkner	Senior Counsellor Wi yiliin ta CAMS	Liaison with AMS, advisor on cultural aspects of young fathers’ presentation
Louie Hahn	Graphic designer	Photography, graphic design
Geoff Skinner	Senior Lecturer Software design, University of Newcastle	Software design
Brian Kelly	Professor of Psychiatry, University of Newcastle	Project design
Richard Fletcher	Associate Professor, Family Action Centre, University of Newcastle	Chief Investigator responsible for all aspects of the project.

Section 3: Certification

I certify that this is an accurate Progress Report for the period covered.

One copy of any journal or media articles published during the reporting period has been included (in both hard and soft copies) (as applicable)

Chief Investigator Name: Richard Fletcher

Date 10 August 2017

Signature

