

The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall

Issue No.2 April 2015

Background

Falls are a leading cause of hospitalisation for older Aboriginal people in NSW and can lead to isolation, loneliness and depression. Despite the high burden of falls in Aboriginal people, there are few programs addressing falls for Aboriginal people.

Project Aims and Objectives

The Ironbark Project aims to develop a culturally appropriate falls prevention program specifically designed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people, allowing them to stay healthy and strong in their homes and communities.

Outcomes of Yarning Circles

We held ten yarning circles with Aboriginal community members at the Central Coast, Illawarra Shoalhaven and the Central West. The messages that came through the yarning circles are important for the development of the falls program, which we have now started to develop. A total of 74 older Aboriginal people were involved in discussions surrounding healthy ageing, falls prevention and program design. One-on-one interviews with service providers working with older Aboriginal clients gave perspective on what service gaps exist in the area of falls prevention and provided suggestions to filling these. All these findings are being used to develop the program.



“Having a good ol’ laugh”

“Having a good laugh and your friends – I think your friends keep you young, I really do, because I’ve never felt so happy since I’ve aged, since after 50, until I come down here”

“Positive attitude even though your world is falling down around your ears, try and keep positive and don’t lose your sense of humour or you may as well leave the planet.”

“Group exercise, the only way. You do it at home, after a few weeks you get a bit more lax so I won’t be here next week; it just dies off, you know? Where if you’re in a group you’re more – others can be here to come along to exercise”

“I think the best part of how I age, stay fit. The fitter you’ll be the better you’ll be, and as far as falls go, if you’re fit you shouldn’t fall over as much.”

The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall

Instead of adapting an existing mainstream fall prevention program for Aboriginal people we decided to ask the question, "What did Aboriginal people and communities want and what would their falls program to look like?" when developed in partnership with and for Aboriginal people and communities.

The Ironbark Program has been developed answering this very question.

What the program will look like

The Ironbark Program will be an on-going, group-based, strength and balance exercise class with an education component held within yarning circles.

The program will run for one session per week, 1.5 hours in duration. Participants must obtain medical clearance from their GP before they are able to join the class. Participants will be guided through a 45 minute class of gentle exercise by a trained Aboriginal facilitator, focusing on improving their strength and balance. Following this, the final half an hour of the class will be an informal discussion surrounding falls and falls prevention over refreshments lead by the facilitator.

"Personally myself I'd rather be in a group to encourage us to do it whereas if you're at home you say, I'm not doing it today, whereas if you're in a group you'll do it"

During the yarning circles, that were held in each Aboriginal community, we discovered a common thread of the elderly people believing that falls was "the downfall of getting older" and "we need our own program to prevent falls". These common threads throughout the yarning circles helped develop The Ironbark Pilot Program.

On-going feedback to participants on their progress will be given at monthly strength and balance assessments, with support and further information available from the facilitator when needed.

Falls prevention resources developed specifically for the Aboriginal community will be made available to participants, including an exercise DVD for participants to take home to continue practicing the strength and balance exercises learnt in class.



The program will be run at culturally-safe community locations already familiar to and accessed by many local older Aboriginal people.

The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall

It is very common in Aboriginal culture for Aboriginal children to be cared for by their grandparents. There was a common theme of remorse if independence was lost due to a fall and they were no longer able to care for their grandchildren.



Our Elders are treated with respect for their cultural knowledge and there is a need for our Elders to continue passing their knowledge onto the next generation and to keep our connection to country alive.

Research Assistants

There will be 4 casual Aboriginal research assistants 1 assistant from each pilot site location who will undergo a training course on collecting pre and post balance and strength measures and taught qualitative research skills for program evaluation. The 4 assistants will work and travel to each site as a team and will also be asking questions about your knowledge on falls and how you feel about the

program before the program starts and after the program finishes.

Funding

The project is funded by the NSW Health Aboriginal Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Demonstration Grants Program.

Key stakeholders include:

- MINGALETTA Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation
- Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Centre
- Nunyara Aboriginal Health Service
- Darrumulan Aboriginal Home care
- Central Coast Medicare Local, Guri Wâgir
- Aunty Jeans Chronic Care Program
- Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation
- Mt Druitt Health and Community Centre

Governance

A Steering Committee provides overall guidance and advice for the program as it relates to Aboriginal communities in NSW. The committee ensures appropriate Aboriginal involvement at all levels of the project including design, conduct and dissemination, as well as sharing insights and knowledge of the Aboriginal community to maximise program effectiveness and success. The group meets in person twice a year and maintains ongoing communication by email and phone.

The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall

Consultation

It is important to us that Aboriginal communities are consulted and that we work in partnership with the Aboriginal community in all aspects of this project. This program will be developed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. From the birth of this project Aboriginal people have been involved, from the employment of an Aboriginal research officer to the naming of the project, the art work and of course for the future development of a culturally appropriate Aboriginal Falls Program that will be sustainable for Aboriginal communities.

Our Logo

The Iron Bark Project: Standing Strong and Tall "The Iron bark project evokes images of old, strong, trees standing tall and that is what we want to see our old people doing. Standing tall and strong as they age." *Jake*

Jake Byrne is a Kamillaroi man, and Project Officer for Driving Change.



"The symbols I have used in the tree are representing land and water. The tree symbolises strength and growth, the root system symbolises life and staying grounded. Around the tree are dreaming symbols representing our people and our cultural connection."



Kylie Cassidy, a Wiradjuri woman, completed our image with her Aboriginal art work of an Iron Bark tree.

The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall

Contacts



Caroline Lukaszuk
Project Manager

Injury Division, The George Institute
Caroline joined The George Institute in February 2014 as the Project Manager for the Healthy Aging Project. The vast majority of Caroline's public health experience has been with working for international Non-Government Organizations in countries including India and Indonesia.

P 0401842029

E clukaszuk@georgeinstitute.org.au



Julieann Coombes
Aboriginal Research Officer

Injury Division, The George Institute
Julieann joins The George Institute as an Aboriginal Research Officer with the Injury Division. Julieann's focus areas are; Aboriginal cultural awareness, equity and health. She advocates for better health outcomes for Aboriginal people at secondary, tertiary and national institutions.

P 0421247386

E jcoombes@georgeinstitute.org.au

We would like to acknowledge the participation of Aboriginal people and Elders who engaged with us on our learning journey and we look forward to a continued partnership.

Your contributions have been extremely helpful and valuable for the production of your Aboriginal Falls Program.