

The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall

Issue No.4 January 2016

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 amongst Aboriginal people, there are few programs addressing falls specifically for Aboriginal communities.

Project Aims and Objectives

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



In 2015, the Ironbark fall prevention program was piloted in Nowra, Mt Druitt and Umina for a 6 month period. In 2016, we will be trialing The Ironbark Program in Ulladulla, Redfern and Windsor. These sites will be the last of the pilot project.

This project has enabled older Aboriginal people to have control of their own health, with Aboriginal community involved from the very beginning. The improvements we've seen and heard about from the 3 original sites have been remarkable.



Doug, from Umina, no longer uses his walking stick

Many people have now found they do not need to use their canes or walking sticks as much and are feeling stronger, more confident and have even lost that extra weight they have been trying to get rid of for years. Some have started up walking groups together with other program participants and healthy eating is now becoming part of their new healthy lifestyles.

In return for their contributions to the project, each community has received a culturally appropriate and sustainable fall prevention program which they can continue to use in their communities into the future.

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“The Nowra Aunty Jean's group thoroughly enjoyed participating in the 6 months Ironbark Standing Strong and Tall program. With attendance between 20-30 participants each week the yarning topics were thought provoking, educational, practical, and a great way of sharing wisdom within the group. Everyone had a chance to have a say and contribute equally, which is wonderful in a large group. The exercises were enjoyable with most of the group adding these exercises into their home routine. The Aunty Jean's Nowra group plan on continuing with the Ironbark exercises and yarning circles to share knowledge in the New Year. Thanks so much to Caroline, Julieann, and all the workers of the Ironbark Project at the George Institute for your support and for including our group.”

Susan Dowes (Facilitator from Nowra)

Results

Our lovely Aboriginal research assistants visited each participating community at the beginning of the program, collecting strength and balance measures. They repeated this at 3 months and then again at the end of the program, at 6 months.



Karen, Liz and Mary at Nowra



Karen and Annalise at Mt Druitt

Over the time of the program, our research assistants enjoyed travelling and meeting our Elders from the different communities.

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Karen and Cherie at Ulladulla

So far, we have seen improvements in the time it has taken participants to walk 4 meters at our 3 original pilot sites, from the beginning of the program, at 3 months, and at the end of the program. This shows that the mobility of participants has improved over the 6 months.

The time taken to complete 5 'sit-to-stand' exercises has also become much shorter at all 3 sites, showing that people have better leg strength.

"I never want this program to end, I have enjoyed coming and being a part of this wonderful community, I don't use my walking stick anymore and have lost 10 kg"
Donna from Umina

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 land alive. The Ironbark Program has given Elders the confidence and strength to continue in this important part of their lives.



"This has been the best program I have ever done. I had a fall and the doctor sent me to the hospital fall program they have, and they said that I should go back to [Ironbark] because I was too advanced for them, so I came back here to my mob and I am better every day for it"
Betty from Ulladulla

"So as we start a new year, Caroline and I would like to wish you all the best for the future. Keep up with the program and continue the exercises you have learnt at home. Enjoy community and we will see you in the near future."

From Julieann and Caroline

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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
- Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation, Mt Druitt
- Mount Druitt Community Health Centre
- Aunty Jeans Chronic Care Program, Nowra
- Aunty Jeans Chronic Care Program, Ulladulla
- Wyanga Aboriginal Aged Care, Redfern
- Hawkesbury District Health Service

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.

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.



Our Logo

"The Ironbark 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 Byrne, a Kamillaroi man and Project Manager 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.

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Contacts



Caroline Lukaszuk
Project Manager
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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.

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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.

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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.