

## Yarrabah Men's Health Initiative

### Queensland

### Overview

#### History

During the 80's and 90's the Yarrabah Aboriginal community suffered from the effects of a cluster of violent suicides by young men. These events prompted a range of local initiatives aimed at strengthening the community. The Yarrabah Men's Health Initiative was one such activity, and was formed in 1997 as a voluntary support group.

#### Aims

The main aim of the group according to the original vision statement was: 'to restore men's rightful role in the community using a holistic healing approach, encompassing in the program the spiritual, mental, physical, emotional and social aspects of life'.

#### Focus

The Yarrabah Men's Health Initiative is primarily a suicide prevention project.

#### Target group

Aboriginal men living in the Yarrabah community.

### Project Structure

#### Lead agencies/partnerships

The project is a collaboration between:

- University of Queensland
- James Cook University
- Gurriny Yealamucka Aboriginal Health Service, Yarrabah.

#### Funding

The Yarrabah Men's Health Initiative started with no funding in 1997 and was run by volunteers from the community. In 2001 it secured 2 years of National Suicide Prevention Strategy funding. This allowed two local men to be employed (1 full-time and 1 part-time) to co-ordinate and support the activities of the Men's Initiative.

In January 2004 the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) provided funding for 3 years to consolidate the initiative and extend it to one other community.

### Project Description

The Men's Health Initiative is based on a Participatory Action Research (PAR) model of intervention. One of the first steps of the PAR process is to encourage the men to translate their 'vision statement' into concrete achievable goals. As part of this the men describe the characteristics and behaviour patterns of a 'Yarrabah man playing his rightful role in community'. This has taken the form of the 'Dos and Don'ts Chart' listing positive personal qualities to develop, and negative qualities to avoid.

Other key activities are:

- Development of a Strategy Plan focusing on: employment, education and training, tradition and culture; leadership and personal development, and health services for men;
- Weekly education meetings, bonding activities, hunting and fishing trips;

- Organising referrals from the local magistrate courts;
- Development of a Small Business Feasibility Study;
- Detailed business plans for 3 potential business initiatives for men: cultural dancing, landscaping, and stone masonry;
- Extension of the PAR process to one other Indigenous men's group;
- Support for a group of young men to transform their church-based dance group into a viable small business;
- Development of a literature review of business enterprise development in Indigenous communities; and
- Partnerships with Indigenous dance groups in White Buffalo, Canada.

(from "Social Determinants of Health, Rural Indigenous Men and Participatory Action Research", Wenitong, M. et al. 2004)

All participants are involved in personal evaluations to rate their individual performance and behaviours.

## Resources

Yarrabah Men's Health Group website:

<http://www.yababimbie.org.au/mensgroup.html>

Social Determinants of Health, Rural Indigenous Men and Participatory Action Research.

Wenitong M, Baird L, Tsey K, McCalman J, Patterson D, Baird B, Whiteside M, Fagan R, Cadet-James Y & Wilson A. (2004).

Proceedings of 2004 World Congress for Rural Sociology, Trondheim, Norway.

<http://www.yababimbie.org.au/Resources/2.Social%20determinants%20%23%2325B.pdf>

A Participatory Action Research Process with a Rural Indigenous Men's Group: Monitoring and Reinforcing Change.

Tsey K, Wenitong M, McCalman J, Baird L, Patterson D, Baird B, Whiteside M, Fagan R, Cadet-James Y, & Wilson A. (2004).

Australian Journal of Primary Health, Vol.10, no.3, p.130-136

<http://www.yababimbie.org.au/Resources/3.A%20participatory%20actio%23258.pdf>

(Other reports may be made available from

<http://www.yababimbie.org.au/paperspublished1.html>.)

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