

## Issue No.3 September 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.

### The Program

Development of the Ironbark falls prevention program is now complete and the program has been running for 8 weeks in 3 sites at Mingaletta, Umina, Aunty Jeans Program, Nowra and Baabayn, Mt Druitt. New sites will begin in September at Ulladulla, and then in October at Redfern and Windsor.

Aboriginal community members have been involved in discussions surrounding healthy ageing and falls prevention. The findings have assisted in the design of the program outline which is proving successful at all sites.

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

All participants have obtained medical clearance from their GP. Participants are guided through a 30 minute class of gentle exercise by a trained facilitator, focused on improving their strength and balance. A discussion surrounding falls and healthy ageing takes place in the final 30 minutes of the class, allowing all participants to share knowledge, stories and learn from each other.

**The Ironbark Program has been developed in partnership with and for Aboriginal people and communities.**

**The program is currently running at 3 sites successfully.**

**Participants have been enjoying the educational yarning on how to prevent falls and the exercise component is proving to be a lot of fun for everyone.**



Mingaletta, Umina



## Success at Umina

*"We are into our eleventh week of the Ironbark falls prevention program here at Mingaletta, Umina. We have noticed such a difference from when we first started; clients balance has improved so much you can notice. Clients are taking more interest in getting healthy and changing eating habits. It was a group decision to change our morning tea to a healthy morning tea so we cut out biscuits and sweets to now just fruit and maybe a Sao biscuit. Some clients have reported weight loss and an ability to stay on their feet longer. All clients have spoken about how they feel more confident out in public and using stairs. One client in particular who was dependent on his walking stick for everything has progressed to the point that he now no longer needs his stick for the exercises and he no longer feels off balance he only uses his stick when walking in public. He has expressed how much the program has benefited him."*

Liz Hillmann, Aboriginal Site Manager, Umina.

**Congratulations to Jedda our Research Assistant from Umina on the birth of her baby this month.**



**Proof The Ironbark Program works.....**

*One participant at Nowra was asked by her local hospital to attend a falls prevention class run by NSW Health. She attended for 1 session but was told by her GP that she no longer needed to be there as what she was doing at The Aunty Jeans Program for falls prevention was working much better - she was apparently too good for the NSW Health fall's group.*



Mingaletta, Umina



## Yarning Both Ways

The yarning both ways sessions, an educational yet informal discussion surrounding falls and fall prevention, have been insightful to all participants in each yarning group with everyone involved sharing their stories on each weeks topics. Topics include eyesight, footwear, medications, healthy diet and how to get up from a fall. The facilitators have said people are definitely improving in strength and balance and love ending the day eating healthy refreshments.

## Progress Reports

Feedback to participants on their progress will be given at 3 months and at the completion of the program through strength and balance assessments. Falls prevention resources developed specifically for the Aboriginal community are available to participants. An exercise DVD is currently being developed by the Umina mob, for participants to take home and continue practicing the strength and balance exercises learnt in class.



**Congratulations to Liz Hillman from Mingaletta in Umina, who has now been employed to help oversee the new project sites and work with the data collected through RedCap.**



Baabayn, Mt Druiitt

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

**Baabyan** at Mt Druiitt prefer to hold the program outdoors in the sun and only hold it indoors when it rains.



# The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall



Aunty Jeans Program, Nowra

*“Each week at Baabayn we introduce new activities for the strength and balance exercises.*

*We all enjoy the ball games while learning to balance, heel to toe exercises, we now have a foam balance beam which can be challenging for most of us but with practice we are hoping to improve.*

*Most of us already feel a difference in our sit to stand exercises and walking has become much easier.”*

Site Facilitator, Baabayn

Our Elders are treated with respect for their cultural knowledge. There is a need for our Elders to continue passing their knowledge onto the next generation and to keep our connection to country alive. The Ironbark project which runs in the Aunty Jeans program in Nowra, appears to becoming very popular with our elderly Aboriginal people. The yarning both ways has become a great way to learn about falls and how to prevent them.

Jean Turner, Site Manager, and Susan Downes, our facilitator, will report on the Nowra site in our next edition.

# The Ironbark Project



*Standing Strong and Tall*

## Research Assistant Training

Through the project, we have employed 7 casual Aboriginal research assistants from each pilot site location. All research assistants have undergone a training course on collecting balance and strength measurements and were taught qualitative research skills for program evaluation. Our assistants have been travelling to each site as a team, asking questions on participant knowledge about falls and how they feel about the program. We have received positive feedback for each site.

## 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**

**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.

## 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 Byrne is a Kamillaroi man and Project Manager for Driving Change.*



# The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall



*"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.



**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.

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**Julieann Coombes**  
**Aboriginal Research Officer**

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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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# The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall

*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.*