



Social and Cultural Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Mothers in Prison Newsletter

Newsletter 1

August 2012

Editorial

Welcome to the Social and Cultural Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Mothers in Prison newsletter. This newsletter provides up-to-date information on the progress and achievements of the research project across both hubs – NSW and WA.

The research team is comprised of academics and professionals across NSW, WA and the ACT and is based at the Perinatal and Reproductive Epidemiology Research Unit (PRERU) at the University of NSW. The research project is led by Principal Investigator Professor Elizabeth Sullivan with Chief Investigators: Professor Juanita Sherwood (UTS), Ms Jocelyn Jones (NDRI), Professor Eileen Baldry (UNSW), Professor Tony Butler (UNSW), Associate Professor Marisa Gilles (Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health), and Professor Michael Levy (ACT Justice Health Service & ANU) with Associate Investigators: Dr Devon Indig (Justice Health) and Dr Mandy Wilson (NDRI). The team is supported by Project Coordinator & Post-Doctoral Fellow Ms Sacha Kendall (UNSW) and Research Associate Ms Lise Lafferty (UNSW).

As we are soon concluding the consultation phase in NSW and both hubs are preparing to commence phase two of the research, it's a good time to run through our updates both nationally and hub-specific. The research team has a number of achievements to report thus far in 2012!

Team Update

The Social and Cultural Resilience and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Mothers in Prison project has conducted consultations with community organisations and community members in both NSW and WA. These consultations have helped guide and shape the focus of the research in both states. As our research is led by community, the focuses in NSW and in WA have shifted to reflect the needs and concerns identified within each state. Resulting from these consultations, WA is focusing its research on Aboriginal mothers in prison and their experiences of imprisonment as well as the experiences of motherhood while incarcerated. In NSW, community organisations and community members have raised concerns about the experiences of Aboriginal mothers in prison and out of prison and the impacts of their imprisonment on their loved ones. This has shifted the focus in NSW to look at the experiences of Aboriginal mothers in and out of prison and the experiences of their

children, family and community while mothers are in prison and when they are released. Both hubs are preparing to commence Phase Two of the research.

In May, the project hosted its second annual Chief Investigator meeting. Team members travelled from WA and Canberra to attend the team building event in Sydney. A special Morning Tea was hosted at the Kirby Institute during this time to update Sydney-based stakeholders on the team's collaborative and hub-specific progresses. The Morning Tea was attended by government agencies and non-government organisations with presentations given by both hubs. Dr Mandy Wilson (Curtin) presented: 'Aboriginal mothers in prison project' providing an overview of the WA prison profile and included a project update. Dr Devon Indig (Justice Health) presented 'Experiences of Aboriginal Men in Custody: Trauma, racism and the criminal justice system'. This was followed by Professor Juanita Sherwood's presentation 'Trauma and its impact'. Ms Jocelyn Jones facilitated a workshop on culturally sensitive interviewing practice and protocols. Team members had the opportunity to role play interview scenarios with actors playing the part of Aboriginal mothers in prison.

We are pleased to present the new project's logo (see above centre)! The WA hub commissioned the work of the new logo through WA's transitional centre. The work was designed by Natalie, an Aboriginal woman who is currently in WA's Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women in Perth. About the design of the logo:

The larger hand on the image belongs to the artist. The child's hand reaching out to hers belongs to her two year old Granny (her niece's son). He was born in Bandyup Women's Prison and now resides at Boronia with his mother. Natalie explained that in prison she's getting the chance to look after her niece's child, something she didn't get to do with her children on the outside.

The foot-prints on the logo are the feet of the older children who lead and look after the 'littler ones. The U-shaped symbols represent the women and mothers of these children. Relating to home, are the swirls of the waterholes and Natalie has drawn tracks leading from one waterhole to another. Despite having been incarcerated multiple times she is connected to her country and people. She tells the story of her Granny who, rather than following Boronia's concrete paths, weaves his way through the beautifully manicured garden beds; "a true Nyungar", she laughs.

A mothering literature review is nearing completion. This review will assist in ascertaining what mothering means within an Indigenous context and is an important part of our research.

NSW Update

The NSW team has been quite busy these past few months completing consultations across NSW, consulting with relevant state government agencies, non-government organisations and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations both in Sydney and in regional NSW. These consultations have been pivotal in guiding the project's research focus and processes within NSW.

In April, two NSW team members (Juanita Sherwood & Lise Lafferty) visited government agencies, NGOs and Aboriginal organisations in both Nowra and Broken Hill. Team members Lise Lafferty & Sacha Kendall returned to Nowra in July to complete consultations there. Earlier this month, team

members met with a diverse range of organisations in Kempsey and in Wellington, thus completing the consultation phase of the research in NSW.

While the consultation phase is drawing to a close in NSW, it is with great gratitude to all the individuals and organisations who have given so generously of their time, knowledge and resources these past several months in shaping the research in NSW! We have been honoured by the generosity of insight and expertise of our stakeholders as well as the warm and enthusiastic reception the project received in each of the communities we travelled to and visited.

The NSW team is currently in the process of preparing for its first NSW Advisory Group meeting. The NSW Advisory Group will consist of two sub-groups: Sydney and Regional. Sydney-based Advisory Group members will attend a meeting in Redfern early next month. Regional-based Advisory Group members will be consulted via email and phone correspondence on all documents circulated. Both sub-groups will consist of experts within the field and representatives of relevant organisations including government, non-government and Aboriginal community-controlled services.

NSW will be submitting ethics applications to the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC), Corrective Services NSW, Justice Health, UNSW and UTS following the NSW Advisory Group meeting next month.

The NSW hub is preparing to commence phase two following ethics approval. Phase two will consist of surveys and in-depth interviews of five target groups as identified by the community as relevant participants through the consultation phase. The participant groups are: Aboriginal women in prison, Aboriginal mothers in prison, Aboriginal mothers post-release, the family members of Aboriginal mothers who have experienced incarceration, and community and departmental staff who work with Aboriginal mothers in prison and post-release.

WA Update

The WA hub has engaged extensively with key stakeholders in the community including representatives from Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, government and non-government agencies. The consultation process, while garnering local support for the project, provided a picture of the concerns the community have in relation to Aboriginal mothers in prison in Western Australia. Broadly, themes arising from consultation included the urgent need for prison programs and services that meet the specific cultural, spiritual and health needs of this population. Concern was also expressed about the babies and children who reside with their mothers in prison, in particular around issues to do with the child's limited access to healthcare in prison and the adequacy of mother and baby facilities. In addition, stakeholders agreed that, to address the high recidivism rate among Aboriginal women, we need to know more about these women's health and other needs for successful transition from prison into the community.

The researchers in WA have also been advised on research process by members of two on-going reference groups. The first group is comprised of community and consumer representatives, and the second draws on the experience of university and medical professionals. Members of these groups have been actively involved in identifying key issues facing Aboriginal mothers in prison and the

community, pinpointing gaps in service provision for these women (both in prison and on release), and most recently, contributing to the development of the qualitative interview schedule which will be piloted next month with Aboriginal mothers in Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women. These groups have met in person twice and have provided email and phone input regularly.

The WA hub has received ethics approval from the Research and Evaluation Committee of the Department of Corrective Services (WA), the Western Australia Aboriginal Health Information and Ethics Committee (WAAHEC) and Curtin University. Presently, a representative, nominated by Corrective Services, is contacting the Superintendents at all WA prisons that hold women; she is facilitating the WA hub's entry into the study sites. This month, the WA team is commencing pre-fieldwork visits to the prisons and local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to promote the research and establish community links. They are starting at Greenough Regional Prison and Geraldton Regional Aboriginal Medical Service. As part of the capacity building component of the project, local Aboriginal people will be employed at each site to help conduct the interviews and provide interpreting and psychological support as needed.

Thank you...

The team is very thankful for the input of energies, knowledge and expertise given so generously by everyone who has taken the time to meet with us. Many thanks for your significant and valued contributions to the project and the research process. We are honoured to be informed by such a diverse group of professionals with extensive experience and professional insight.

On behalf of the research team, thank you for your involvement, expertise and contributions!