

17311 - New submission from Early Years Strategy - Public Submissions

Health systems, services and communities must shift to engage and support fathers in the perinatal period

In recent decades, Dads Group Action and Collaborative research has consistently demonstrated the wide-ranging benefits of engaging and supporting fathers in the perinatal period. However, health systems and services have traditionally focused on mothers, often overlooking the crucial role fathers play in promoting positive outcomes for the entire family. As the evidence mounts, it is imperative that we shift our approach to recognize and actively involve fathers in prenatal and postnatal care.

The research presented here highlights the substantial benefits of father engagement in the perinatal period for the well-being of infants, mothers, and fathers themselves. Engaged fathers contribute to better cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes for their children, improved maternal mental health, and even stronger family bonds. This involvement extends beyond immediate benefits, with lasting positive effects on the family's socio-emotional and economic well-being. The benefits of father engagement are also evident in the context of family violence prevention and mental ill health and suicide. Research demonstrates that involved fathers can help prevent and mitigate the impact of family violence, improve family dynamics, and reduce the risk of mental health issues for both themselves and their partners. Moreover, fathers who are actively engaged in the perinatal period are more likely to develop strong attachment relationships with their children, which are crucial for healthy child development.

Health systems and services must adopt a more inclusive approach that recognizes the importance of fathers in the perinatal period. This can be achieved by designing and implementing father-friendly policies and practices, such as offering tailored antenatal and postnatal education and support programs, and promoting fathers' attendance at healthcare visits. By fostering an environment that encourages father engagement, we can ensure that health professionals are equipped to provide comprehensive care and support for the entire family.

Furthermore, it is crucial that we address potential barriers that might prevent fathers from engaging in the perinatal period, such as a lack of knowledge, cultural norms, or limited access to appropriate services. By breaking down these barriers, we can ensure that all fathers have the opportunity to contribute positively to their family's well-being.

In conclusion, the wealth of research evidence presented here underscores the need for health systems and services to shift their focus and actively engage and support fathers in the perinatal period. By doing so, we can capitalize on the vast potential of father involvement to improve the health and well-being of infants, mothers, and fathers, and create stronger, more resilient families. The time to act is now - let us seize this opportunity to build a brighter future for families everywhere.

Evidence Base for Dads Group Programs

All Dads Group programs are all built upon evidence and research that all focus on addressing social issues such as mental-ill health and suicide, family violence and child development, which formulates our three pillars of social impact. The evidence, research and theories you will see throughout this document is both primary and secondary. Since 2009, Dads Group programs have been evaluated by various organisations including Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety

(ANROWS), Movember, the University of Sunshine Coast and Healthy Male. We have pieced together large volumes of research that allows our programs to address the significant unintentionally overlooked risk factors fathers and families face, particularly during the perinatal period. Dads Group as an organisation specifically seek to address these risk with a prevention / early intervention framework.

Theories Supporting Dads Group Programs

At the very core of Dads Group is fathers socially connecting with other fathers and their babies, designed as a prevention approach to reduce issues of mental-ill health and suicide, and family violence. It is a strength based approach using peer support and facilitated learning environments to support the under supported demographic in new families - fathers. Research shows that an effective father figure results in reduced incidents of violence, crime, and alcohol and drug abuse; enhanced mental health and self-esteem; improved school engagement and performance; increased social competence; decrease in risky sexual behaviour; and improved health behaviours (Wood & Lambin, 2013).

Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory, Bandura 1969, supports this approach, as it considers both environmental and cognitive factors that interact and influence learning and behaviour, with a focus on observing, imitating and modelling behaviours and emotions of the people around them (Bandura, 1969).

One often stated benefit of participating in a men's social group is the social interaction with other new fathers and the space to watch and learn from their behaviours, coping mechanisms and parenting skills (Fisher et al., 2021). This learning can build towards another Bandura (1977) theory of self-efficacy, by which one's beliefs in their capabilities and functioning, with the ability to control events that affect their life. Two main sources of self-efficacy are experience-based, and high self-efficacy has been linked to improved lifestyle habits and increased resilience in the face of stress and adversity (Etherton et al., 2020).

Social learning has been connected to self-regulation factors when dealing with alcohol abuse (Kotelchuck, 2021), as well as providing mechanisms for the intergenerational transmission of both minor and severe forms of domestic violence (Wareham et al., 2009). Simons and colleagues (1991) found that parents who had previously engaged in aggressive parenting techniques had subsequently produced parents who were likely to use the same aggressive parenting practices. Violence, like all social behaviour, is something that is learned and reinforced in childhood either directly or indirectly through parents or other role models and can habitually persist in adulthood as a coping mechanism or conflict resolution (Mihalic & Elliot, 1997; Huesmann, 2018).

Attachment Theory

Experiential childhood education and development is arguably the primary focus of Dads Group programs, it is one of the main reasons behind our model where fathers and families attend community dads group events with their babies and children. Our aim overall is to bring increased awareness to all fathers across the community of the importance of their role to their child's development beginning from the antenatal period, and how they can support their child's development whilst building positive, healthy relationships between father and child.

The attachment theory supports Dads Group programs, as it is an exploration of the way that

children and their parents develop bonds over time, and the influence these bonds have on the child over their lifetime (Sutton, 2018). Individuals with secure attachments in their relationships (i.e., those that are trusting and warm) having the most positive outcomes. Studies have shown secure father-child attachment relationships can increase reciprocated friendships and result in fewer behaviour problems in children (Brown & Cox, 2019; Juffer et al., 2017). It is another area of parenting research that has been looked at extensively for mothers, yet not for fathers, despite Bowlby (1969) noting in that attachment to fathers was common, even when the infant did not see the father on a regular basis. It was not until the mid-80s that researchers moved away from seeing fathers as a 'playmate' than a principal attachment figure and moved away from a hierarchical model where mothers were higher than fathers on the attachment scale (Bretherton, 2010). Now that research has extended to fathers, it has been shown that more than one factor can influence on a child's attachment to their parent. A combination of elements such as sensitivity and parenting pleasure, as well as cognitive, affective and behavioural characteristics in parents (Brown & Cox, 2019).

Healthy, Respectful Relationships and Positive Masculinity

Evidence suggests that positive support programs for fathers can increase healthy relationships with their partners. Several studies have shown that such programs can lead to improved communication, increased satisfaction in the relationship, and a decrease in conflict.

One study published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* found that fathers who participated in a parenting program that included relationship skills training reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction and better communication with their partners. The study also found that these fathers were less likely to engage in conflict with their partners, and that their partners reported higher levels of satisfaction in the relationship.

Another study published in the *Journal of Family Psychology* found that fathers who participated in a program focused on promoting positive father-child interactions also showed improvements in their relationships with their partners. The study found that these fathers reported lower levels of relationship conflict and higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

A review of several studies on father involvement programs, published in the *Journal of Family Issues*, found that programs that included relationship education or support for the couple were more effective in improving relationship outcomes than programs that focused solely on parenting or father-child interactions.

In addition to these studies, there are several programs that have been developed specifically to support fathers in their relationships with their partners. One example is the "Boot Camp for New Dads" program, which includes relationship education as well as practical parenting skills training. Another example is the "Building Strong Families" program, which includes relationship education and coaching for both partners.

Overall, the evidence suggests that positive support programs for fathers can be effective in improving relationships with partners. By providing fathers with the skills and support they need to navigate the challenges of parenthood and maintain healthy relationships, these programs can have a positive impact on families and children.

References for positive support programs for fathers increases healthy relationships with partners

When it comes to masculinity, one factor that can impact parent-child attachment is a father's notion of gender roles and their own sense of masculinity. The traditional gender roles for men frame them as the "breadwinner", providing economically for their family and assumed to be less

emotionally involved with their children (Cabrera et al., 2018). This leads to the assumption that fathers do not engage in hands-on parenting, and do not affect their children's lives emotionally, leaving them out of research focus in favour for mothers (Cabrera et al., 2018). Masculinity is a complex psychological concept which can lead to potential power and privilege for men, but can also harm those men and their communities (Caperton et al., 2019).

These masculine gender norms can play a large role in creating barriers for fathers to communicate anxieties to those closest to them, for fear of judgement, disappointment, dismissal, and concerns of burdening their partner or loved ones (Das & Hodkinson, 2019). This perceived burden can create a negative feedback loop, compounding depressive symptoms in fathers (Caperton et al., 2019). Caperton and colleagues also suggest that perceived failure to reach these gender norms can lead to social isolation, stigma and loss of spousal support. Silverstein, Auerbach and Levant (2002) describe 'gender role strain' in contemporary fatherhood; where fathers attempt at enacting the more traditional father role, one developed in a different societal and historical context, which has led to a reconstruction by fathers of a new parenting prototype of what it means and is expected of being a father.

More recent evidence suggest fathers are shifting from the traditional masculine parenting roles that prioritise work over family (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021).

Primary Data

USC Research into Dads Group Interventions

In addition to a lack of interventions exclusively for fathers, there is also a lack of research designs focused on the parenting programs for fathers that have already been granted evaluation (Cowan & Cowan, 2018). Research conducted by the University of Sunshine Coast used the social learning theory, attachment theory, and positive masculinity in the context of fatherhood to explore and to reflect on, male psychology, identity, fathering behaviour, and decision making about involvement in the fathering role.

The aim of this research was to examine the underlying psychosocial aspects of why Dad's Group participants report that the group has helped them become better fathers, develop stronger bonds with their children, improved their relationship with their partners and feel more confident in their capabilities.

An open-ended qualitative survey was used to question participants about how Dads Group has affected their sense of identity as a father, their relationships and their skills and confidence they have built since transitioning into fatherhood. The survey also contained information on what the participants of Dads Group believe makes a 'great dad' as well as their general thoughts and feelings about fatherhood. It is expected that the responses from participants will include elements of social learning theory (how they have learned from other fathers within the group), thoughts on masculinity (e.g., ideals of being a man), and their effects on their relationships with their partners (e.g., feeling more securely attached, relationships are more trusting and warmer). It also anticipated that linking the underlying psychosocial theory with why the benefits of participating in the Dads Group will highlight specific protective factors for domestic violence, child development and family wellbeing as well as contribute to the body of knowledge on fathering today and provide information that will assist Dad's Group with ongoing improvements to their practices and programs, as well as inform future development of men's and fathers' mental health programs.

Reference Link (Dads Group: A qualitative study Research Proposal Kelly McConville)

USC Research to Inform the Design of Community-Based Interventions

In 2019, although the transition to parenthood is widely considered a challenging time for new mothers, the experiences of new fathers have long been under researched. Parenting by fathers is occurring in the context of changing norms about masculinity and fatherhood (Johansson, 2011). Men may struggle in negotiating their new identity as a father and are known to be reluctant to seek help – this may have negative implications for their family (Asenhed et al., 2013; Yousaf et al., 2015). It is recognised that father-child bonding contributes to healthy child development (Fletcher, 2011; Lamb, 2010). Furthermore, supporting fathers who are struggling through parenthood, reduces the burden on families which translates into better psychological and behavioural outcomes for the child (Wilson & Durbin, 2010).

Due to the success of Dads Group's (formally known as Dads Group Inc) community based programs and interventions focusing on fathers, the University of Sunshine Coast believed our community dads groups to be a suitable case study to inform the design of community-based interventions seeking to engage dads in social activities. With expectations on fathers increasing, investigating the operation of an organisation that engages and supports fathers, facilitating their negotiation into a new role and identity as a father, was timely. This research captured the intersection between support groups and these changing norms, providing an important research understanding of community-based programs for fathers.

The aim of this research was to:

Explore the approach of DGI in their implementation of new dads' groups, including required resources and the functions they perform, measures of success and how they contribute to the overall vision of DGI

To provide a 'systems' model of DGI's strategic approach and vision, offering greater insight into the operations and potential for optimising community impact.

To undertake a community survey aiming to inform the ongoing development of DGI by exploring the approaches and challenges of dads, mums and care-givers.

To identify an ideal DGI system that best supports social change which will contribute sustainably to the ongoing wellbeing of dads and families.

The support of new fathers and prevention of mental ill-health is imperative given the influence fathers can have on their children's development. Historically, warm and involved fatherhood has been associated with a range of positive outcomes, such as school readiness (McWayne et al., 2013), and cognitive, emotional, and social development broadly (Lamb, 2010; Towe-Goodman et al., 2014). More recently, the father-child relationship has been directly linked to child prosocial behaviour, even when controlling for the influence of mother and teacher relationships (Ferreira et al., 2016). A father's positive beliefs about parenting in early life have also been associated with their child having fewer challenging behaviours in subsequent years (Kroll et al., 2016). Furthermore, emerging research suggests that rough-and-tumble play, common in father-child interactions, is associated with better social and cognitive outcomes, as well as fewer aggressive behaviours in the child (Anderson et al., 2019; StGeorge & Freeman, 2017). In contrast to these beneficial outcomes, when parental mental ill-health is present, there can be significant social, economic and psychological impacts on families and the capacity for sensitive care may be compromised (van

Santvoort et al., 2015).

Community-based programs are an avenue through which individuals can become engaged in a strengths-based environment. For example, peer-led support has been used to facilitate behaviour change by building trust based on shared lived experiences, role-modelling living well, and engaging others with help available and the broader community (Gillard et al., 2015). Gendered approaches to encouraging help-seeking have been recognised as important (Harris et al., 2014) and community-based groups may be well-suited to cater to these needs, providing an inclusive and non-pathologising environment where men build relationships and engage as peers (Morgan et al., 2007).

Community-based groups could also have a role in addressing the broad societal issues men face. Dads playgroups, for example, aim to help fathers develop supportive social relationships, sense of purpose, family harmony, and connections to physical and mental health services, all of which are recognised as protective factors against the risk of suicidality (Black Dog Institute, 2018). Further to this, the act of empowering fathers to develop an identity as a father and embrace this new role is a step towards challenging gender stereotypes as well as strengthening equal and respectful relationships, both of which contribute to the prevention of domestic and family violence (Our Watch, 2015).

A cooperative research project between Dads Group and the University of the Sunshine Coast

Action Research Findings

November Digital Dads Group Project 2020 - 2022

Project Name: Digital Dads Group

Project Summary

In April 2020 at the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic, Dads Group took their Community Dads Group online. The plan was to create a safe 'virtual' space, providing isolated dads with the support and connection they needed to manage the day-to-day stresses of parenthood and social isolation. Through additional support, Dad's Group aims to expand and scale the online support programs and pathways for new and expecting fathers.

To achieve this, the project team's goal is to enhance the digital platform technology and functional capability allowing for a better user experience and enhanced participation of the program; develop participant support process, including the establishment and management of a participant database, allowing for greater communication and support.

University of the Sunshine Coast - Thriving Communities Evaluation Findings

Project Background

Dads Group delivered the Thriving Communities Project, a 12 month project funded by the QLD

government designed to improve health pathways for expectant fathers, new fathers and families in Townsville, Toowoomba and Rockhampton. This project was groundbreaking, traditionally health services in the hospitals and in the community are trained and focused on supporting mothers and children, leading to them unintentionally excluding fathers from providing support and their services. The aim of this project is to work with hospitals, community health services, establish community Dads Groups and Digital groups, allowing us to support fathers and families through the perinatal period starting from the hospital space through to the community.

Project Reach

Approximately 997 parents attended the revised antenatal classes

Approximately 232 Health professionals were involved in the TC project

Approximately 240 parents attended DG community events

Approximately 795 parents on the FB groups

Approximately 200 parents attended MWAP events

1. Expectant parents:

a. How useful was the information provided during the dads group connection? i. 93% stated the information was very useful or extremely useful.

b. What did you like most about the Dads Group experience? i. 90.5% agreed to 'all of the above' with the following options: 1. learning about the different levels of support available 2. tips on becoming a dad and self-care 3. connecting with a male Dads Group facilitator 4. chatting with other dads to be

c. 65 other comments were offered by expecting parents. All of them were positive. Key words in the comments were excellent, informative, great, support, discussions.

Here are some of the comments: i. Found Dads talk excellent ii. Good info on mental health iii. It was great being able to speak with other dads about supporting our partners iv. Amazing! I'm so glad he will have access to that extra support v. I'm interested to go. Liked Dads Group info, signs and tips vi. So many different levels of support available vii. Don't know how I'll go as a dad. Great to know about what can help

Community survey

To what extent do you agree or disagree to the following statements:

a) I look up to other fathers/mothers as role models or for guidance in parenting?

i) 87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed

b) Feel my capacity as a parent or carer for my children is growing? i) 93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed

c) Connecting with Dads Group has helped me as a parent or caregiver i) 63% of respondents strongly agreed

d) I have been shown ways to connect with my baby to support their healthy social and emotional brain development?

i) 67% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed

e) Feel connected within my community? i) 47% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed

Comment: Joining Dads Group allowed me to form safe relationships to reduce my social isolation
Health professional and service providers

a. Midwives and DGARs: i. Midwives: Midwives were asked to complete a survey after delivering

each session. We received 44 completed surveys.

A summary of some of the data is below:

1. 86% of midwives strongly agreed that the Dads Group facilitation helped your Hospital / Health Service to support the fathers in their engagement and/or education?
2. 95% of midwives rated the DGAR experience for the expecting dads as between 8 and 10 out of 10.
3. Midwives were asked to tell us which part of the DG experience they thought was most valuable. Some responses below: a. Knowing they're not alone - ability to debrief b. The openness, having a forum to talk and connect with other Dads c. Connections; having a voice; being heard/valued d. Engaging and supporting dads e. Giving dad's the knowledge and somewhere to go f. Raising awareness of local support for Dads - feedback from the participants
4. Some other comments from the midwives were: a. Compliments our program - reinforces session discussions b. [REDACTED] (DGAR in Townsville) provides a safe space, information from a male perspective c. Encourages questions and to access support from other Dads d. Families aware of different levels of support within the community e. Positive feedback from the dads and partners f. Builds community connections g. Positive outcomes on mental health and child development h. Strengthens caring, committed and kind relationships within the family i. Long term family benefits and connections

DGARs

DGARs were asked to complete a survey after delivering each session. We received 12 completed surveys.

1. 83% of DGARs rated the DGAR experience for the expecting dads between 8 and 10 out of 10.
2. 75% of the DGARs rated the connectedness they created with the expectant dads during their session as between 8 and 10 out of 10.
3. Some of the valuable topics of conversation reported by the DGARs were: a. We talked about mums PND experiences and stats, the role dads have in helping to minimise that, mums groups, connection to professionals when dads are struggling, and different parenting resources b. We talked about preparation for the birth, planning, car seats and costs c. Yes - discussed challenges associated with being a new Dad d. We talked about men's reluctance to seek support and why e. We talked about the stigma of being a man and not seeking support and being prepared for bubs arrival as a dad
4. Some other comments from the DGARs were: a. Everyone seemed engaged, smiled, laughed, made comments and answered questions b. There were positive comments, smiles and nods during the groups c. All couples seemed engaged d. The midwife and parents indicated the session was very beneficial, everyone indicated the data provided in slides was new information they didn't know beforehand.

Other service providers

We received 17 responses from a survey for other community service providers.

- i. 76% of respondents stated that Dads Group had a somewhat positive or positive impact on the people they support/care for
- ii. 88% of respondents stated that it was very important or extremely important that Dads Group continue their work in their region
- iii. 94% of respondents stated that it was very or extremely important for families to have a DG in

their local area?

iv. Some other comments from service providers: 1. Whilst the focus is on dads, the impacts have a positive effect on the whole family. 2. Great to have a local group specific to the area. Provides opportunities for Dads to connect locally in person- improves emotional well-being, confidence, sharing stories/ experiences/ where to go for additional support. As such benefits the whole family 3. Foster connections amongst services 4. The dads feel validated and have something that can connect with and as healthcare workers to be able to offer this is great

Direct quotes from attendees/participants/clients

'There are very few community based support groups for new fathers and this is an incredibly important social need'

'Provided a unique service for Dads. It has given them an opportunity to connect with each other.'

'Beneficial to parents when starting this new journey and particularly dads to hear it from a peer going through the same things to help them understand their own thoughts and feelings'

'It is important to have positive role models in the community'

'Peer to peer groups such as Dads Group provides a forum for dads to get together and aid one another in ways that only an organisation like this can.'

'There are many services available for women, and these services are usually set in spaces and times that are women friendly. Dads Group is specifically focussed on men, at men friendly times and spaces with the added supports via digital means.'

'Dads Group provide a healthy way to engage with dads and provide a role model for healthy and respectful behaviours.'

'Past parents have commented they wish that was around when they had their previous children. It enables to give both sides of the parent partnership support and show how important both sides are to ensuring that both parties see how important they both are to this journey.'

'Dads are so much more involved in parenting and caring for their children and dads group provides a safe environment for dads to ask questions and get support from other dads. It builds connection between dads in a community which I believe will have positive outcomes for the mental health of fathers and the development of the child.'

'I love that there are different options, not just a meet up as this may not suit everyone. There really is something for every dad.'

Total Figures

Engaged with approximately 3,995 expecting parents in antenatal classes in QLD

Co-Facilitated approximately 250 antenatal classes in QLD

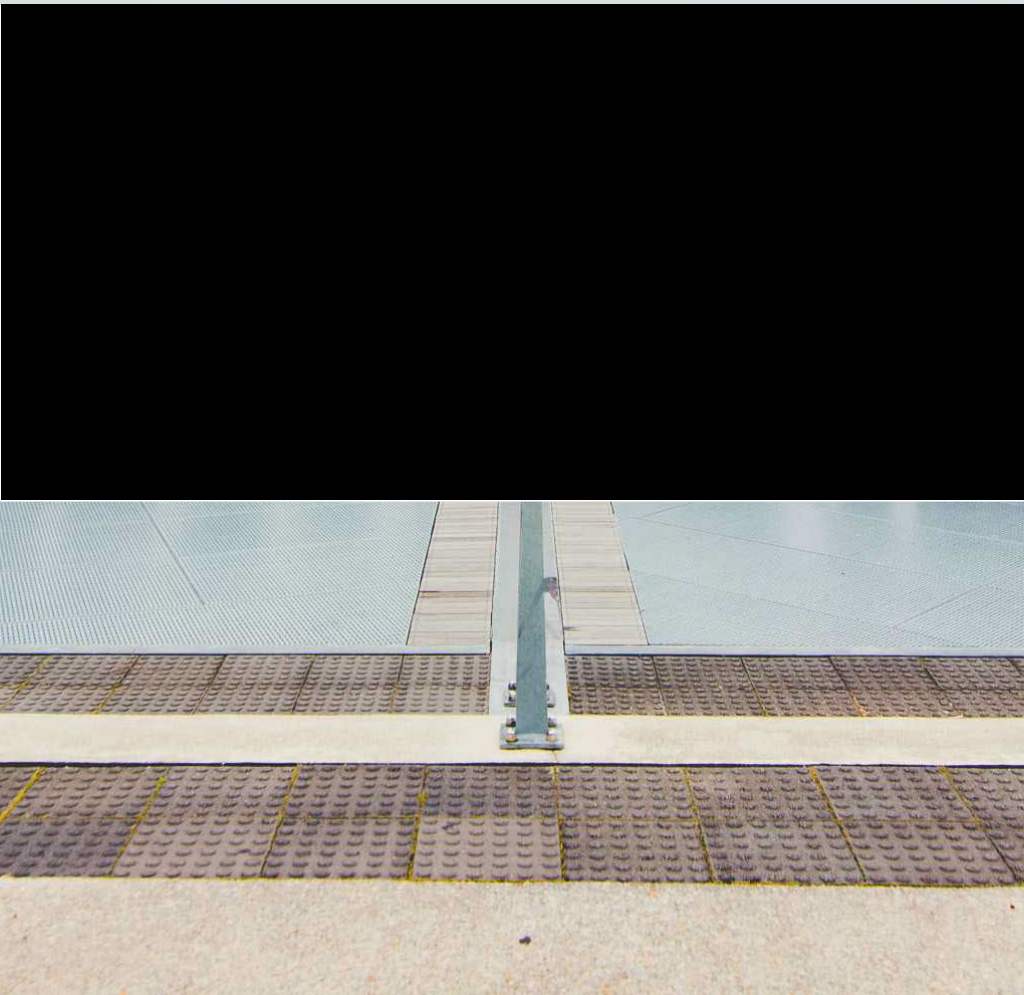
88.75% strongly agreed - That antenatal classes helped to support both myself and my partner better.

74.17% agreed - I feel I have good knowledge about parenting

86% of midwives strongly agreed that the Dads Group facilitation helped both parents

MAN WITH A PRAM

2019 EVENT OVERVIEW



Event Summary

Man With A Pram 2019 has been a major success. From what in previous years was a single event held in Ringwood, to become Australia's first national Fathers Day event, we are proud of the teams and community leaders who have made this happen. We had 19 events run at the same time on Fathers Day across Australia, with 1 more event to run in Dardanup, WA on September 15th.

Event Locations

MWAP 2019 ran in 20 locations across Australia. The 19 locations ran their events on Fathers Day (1st of September). The approximate number of attendees in total is around 1000 people.



National Supporters



NOOSA PACIFIC



Australian Government
Department of Social Services



EASTLAND



Yarra Valley Toyota
Croydon & Lilydale



Individual Events

Noosa

Approx Event Attendees: 80



Brisbane

Approx Event Attendees: 60



Sydney

Approx Event Attendees: 50



Bondi

Approx Event Attendees: 25



Individual Events

Blaxland

Approx Event Attendees: 30



Cronulla

Approx Event Attendees: 10



Canberra

Approx Event Attendees: 15



Albury

Approx Event Attendees: 50



Individual Events

Healesville

Approx Event Attendees: 25



Ringwood

Approx Event Attendees: 75



Melbourne

Approx Event Attendees: 40



Geelong

Approx Event Attendees: 45



Individual Events

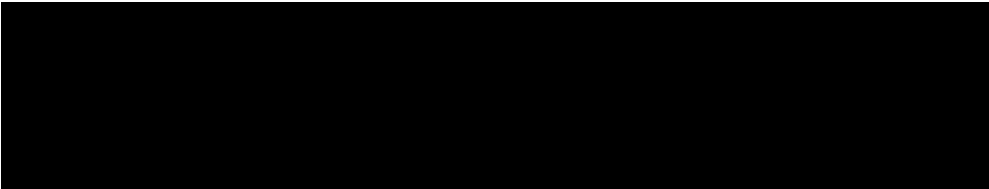
Mildura

Approx Event Attendees: 282



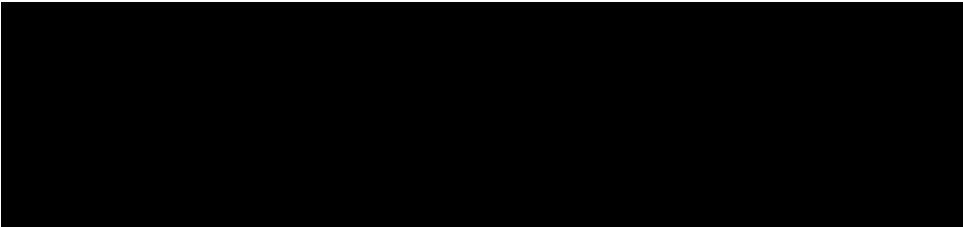
Hobart

Approx Event Attendees: 50



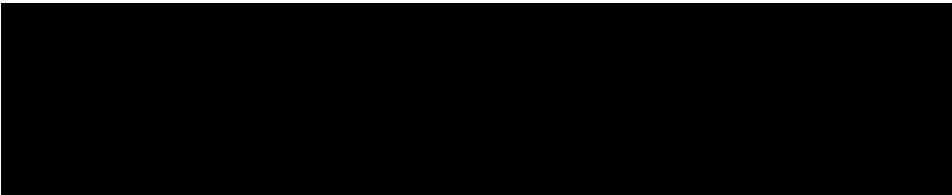
Gawler

Approx Event Attendees: 60



Perth

Approx Event Attendees: 65



Individual Events

Broome

Approx Event Attendees: 40



Bouliá

Approx Event Attendees: 40



Tindal (RAAF Base)

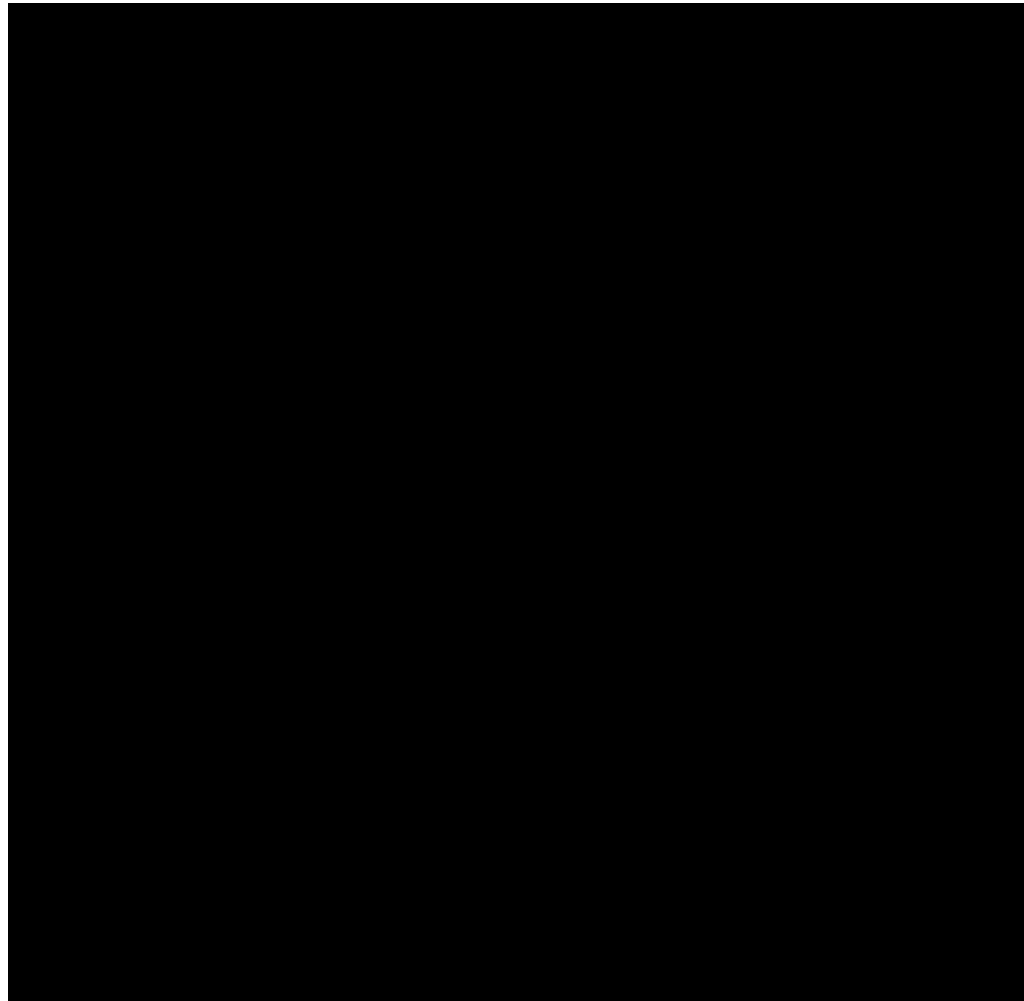
Approx Event Attendees: 10



Event Media

The majority of our event media can be found at

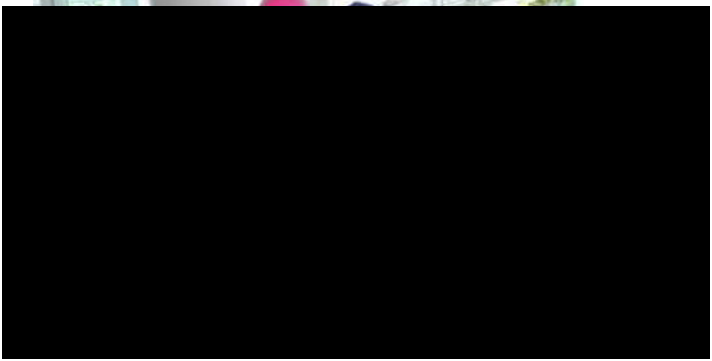
<https://www.manwithapram.com/media>



Stories From The Events

Noosa

██████ moved over from ██████ to the Sunshine Coast two weeks ago. He was involved in a fathers group in ██████ (as they are very popular there) but now he has no community or connection with any fathers groups in Australia. He saw the event on Facebook and decided to come along with his little son. He was introduced to the head of Dads of Noosa (who is also ██████), they did the walk together and now he is plugged in and attending the Dads of Noosa group which meets regularly. Not only does he have a connection in his new town and country ██████ has a great close friend whose families regularly catch up together.



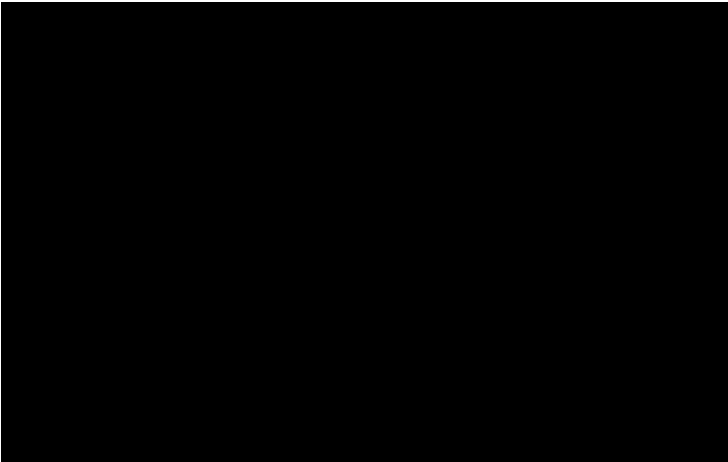
Mildura

██████ is a single dad who came along to our event with his three year old boy ██████. He said that being a dad is the best thing in the world for him. He talked enthusiastically about what a good kid ██████ is and how he wants him to be a good person, to share with others and not be a bully. ██████ is on his own, he has no family around him and hasn't found support for himself as a dad in our community compared with the support available for mums. He felt really happy to have somewhere to go to on father's day where he could do some fun activities with ██████ and be around other dads and their kids, something he doesn't get to do very much as a single dad. He wants more events like this one for local dads where he can spend time with ██████ and find support with other dads.

Stories From The Events

Geelong

"I'm proud to say I have a beautiful fiancée and a 3 1/2 month old boy [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. Approx 4 months ago we moved to Geelong, being in a new area and not knowing anyone I wanted to meet some other dads, and families, in the area to share stories with, become mates and work towards building a new community. I reached out to Dads Group and started the group in Geelong. Since then it's been awesome connecting with like minded dads in the town. We are a growing group that has been sparked by the "Man with a Pram" event. It was a fantastic event that drew close to 50 people to share a short work that not only strengthened the community but allowed for further group growth. Exceptionally supported by Bakers Delight and Westfield in Geelong, we had a great morning that we hope is one of many. We are currently continuing to develop and organising catchups on weekends and weekdays to cater for various lifestyles and parenting styles of people in our group."



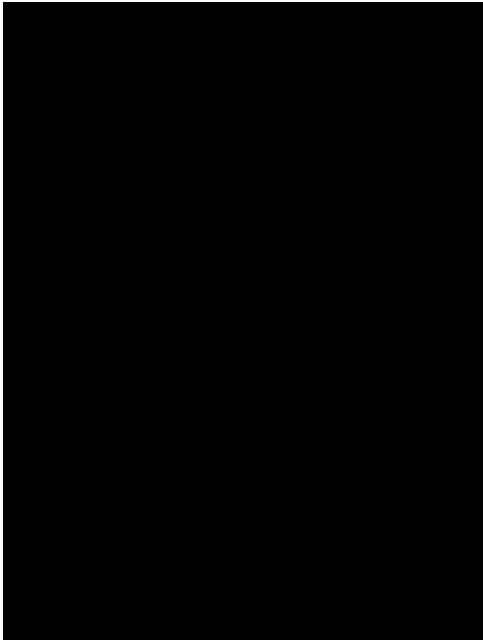
Geelong

[REDACTED], a stay at home father of nearly a 2-year-old, with no close friends or family in the local area. Found that the MWAP 2019 Geelong event helped him connect with other fathers that had similar and shared interests that he would not have met otherwise. The MWAP 2019 Geelong event has directly resulted in two social gatherings since the Fathers Day event that would not have been possible without Dads Group Inc and The Dad's of Geelong.

Stories From The Events

Healesville

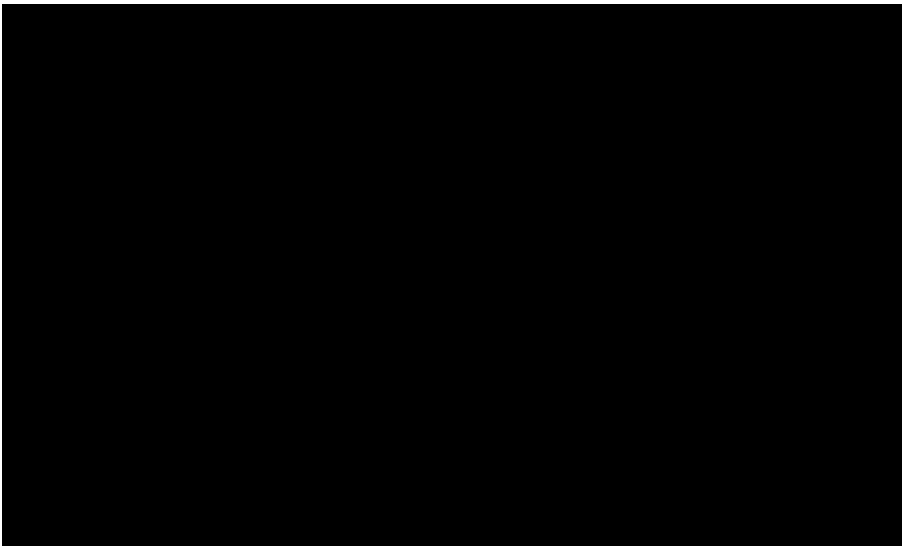
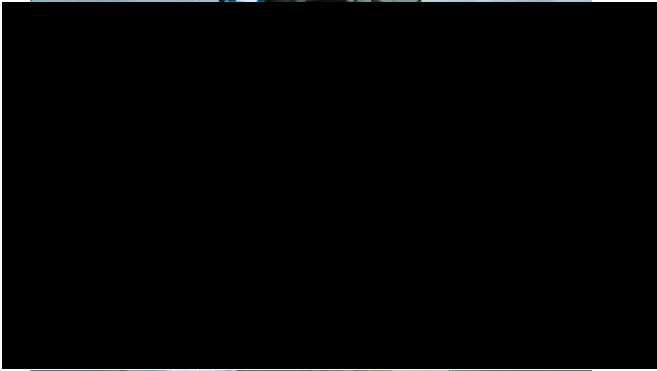
██ ██████████ ██████████ went to get a job in Australia and then ██████████ came out a year later. They had decided they really didn't want the kids growing up in ██████████ and so had their first baby in Australia, without any family support. They had moved to a regional area however after some time had felt isolated so moved to Croydon, an outer suburb of Melbourne. ██████████ wanted to support ██████████ in being a dad to their now 2 young boys, and to connect with other dads, as they didn't have strong support networks over here. They came across MWAP Healesville which seemed to be a nice thing to do – the picnic aspect proved an important place to connect



Stories From The Events

Ringwood

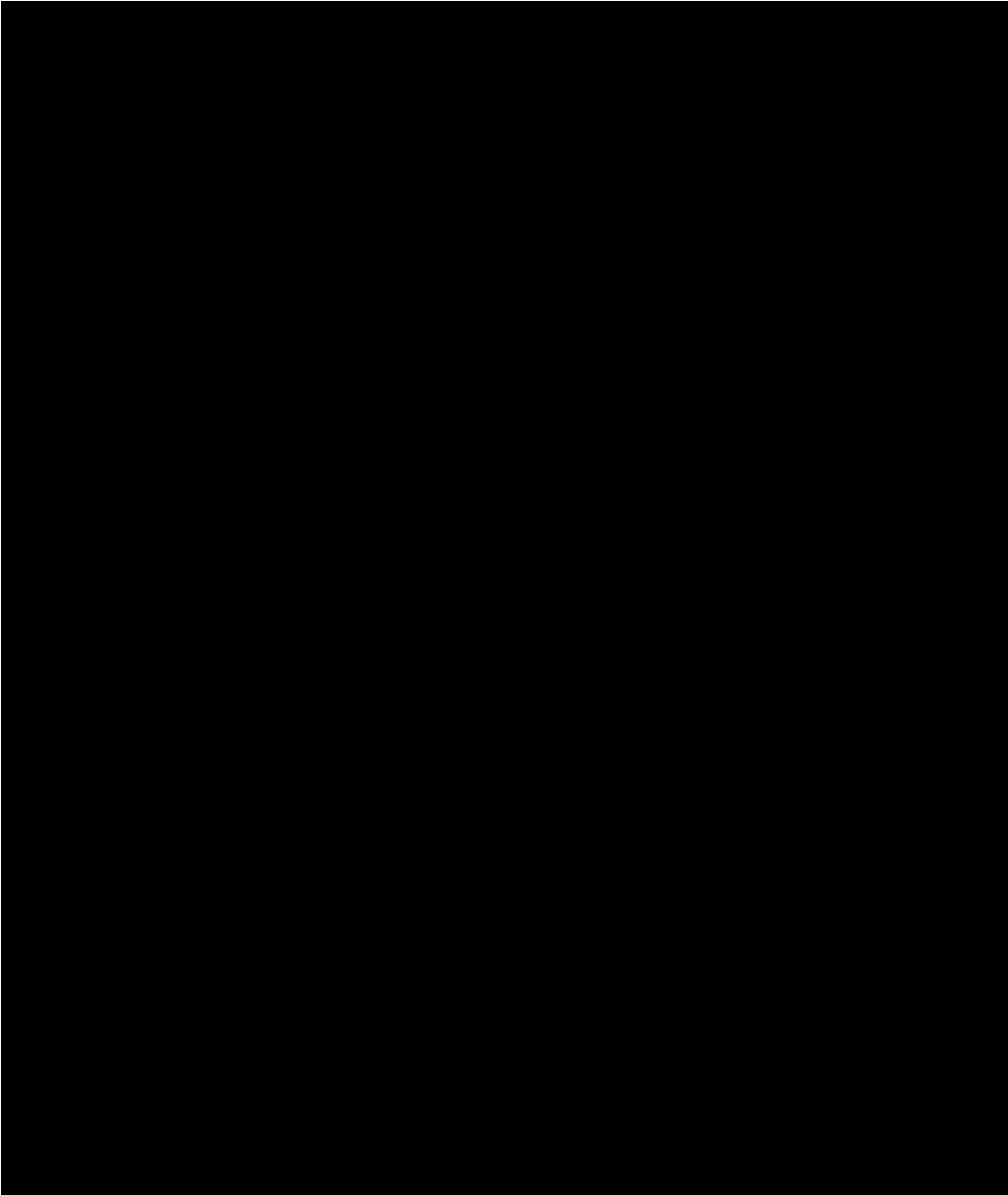
One couple brought their baby to the event (their 1st and only child.) Tragically their baby is very ill and they do not know how much time they have left. It was a celebration of Fatherhood at the event for their first Father's Day, but could also be their last few months. One of our volunteers, felt drawn to this family and spent the entire day with them, offering to get coffee/tea, play games with the baby and sit and listen to the couple. She came up to me during the event and said "I'm sorry I haven't been much help today! My heart just feels drawn to them and if it's alright, I want to support them as much as I can."



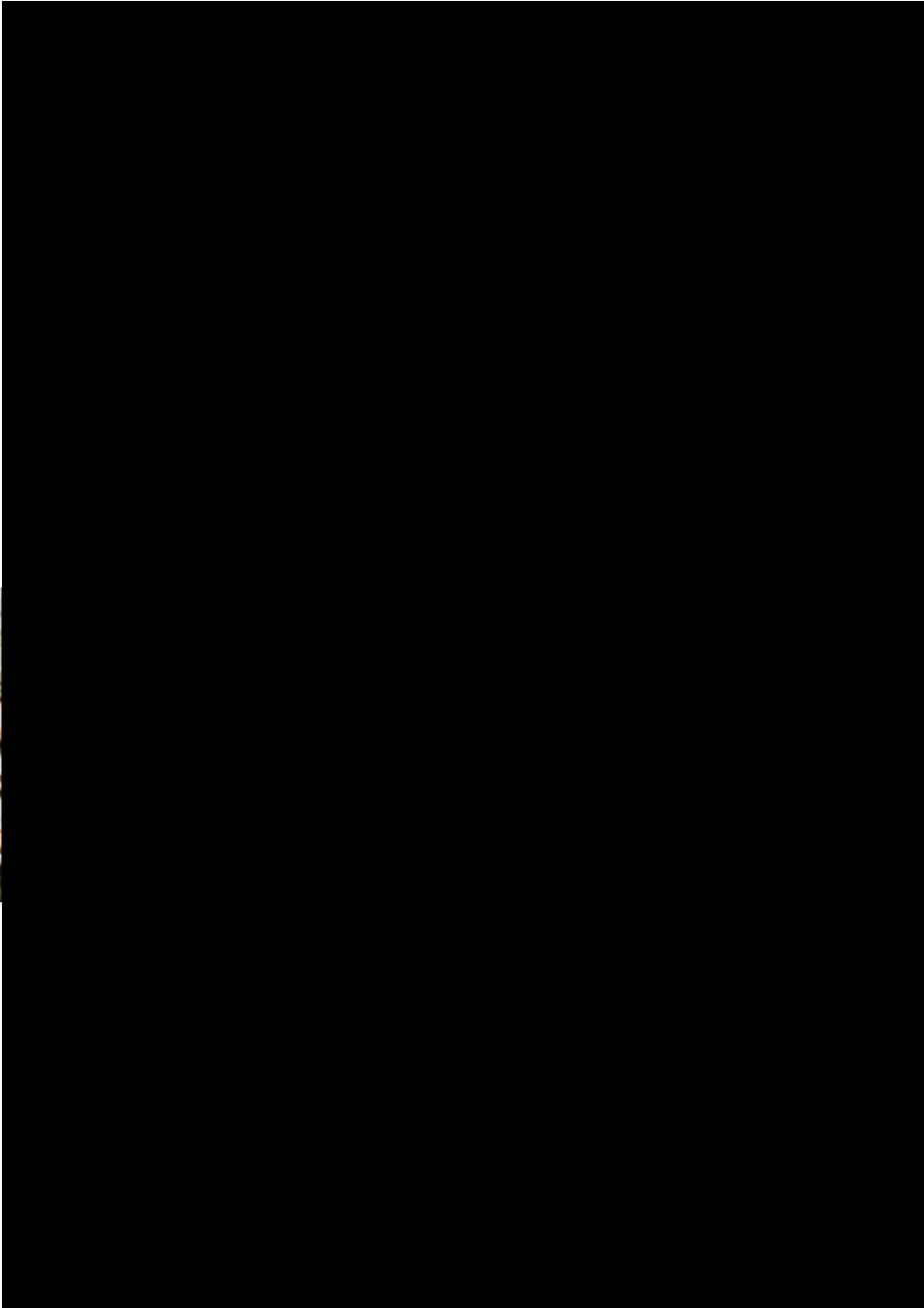
Photos From The Events

All event photos can be found at this link:

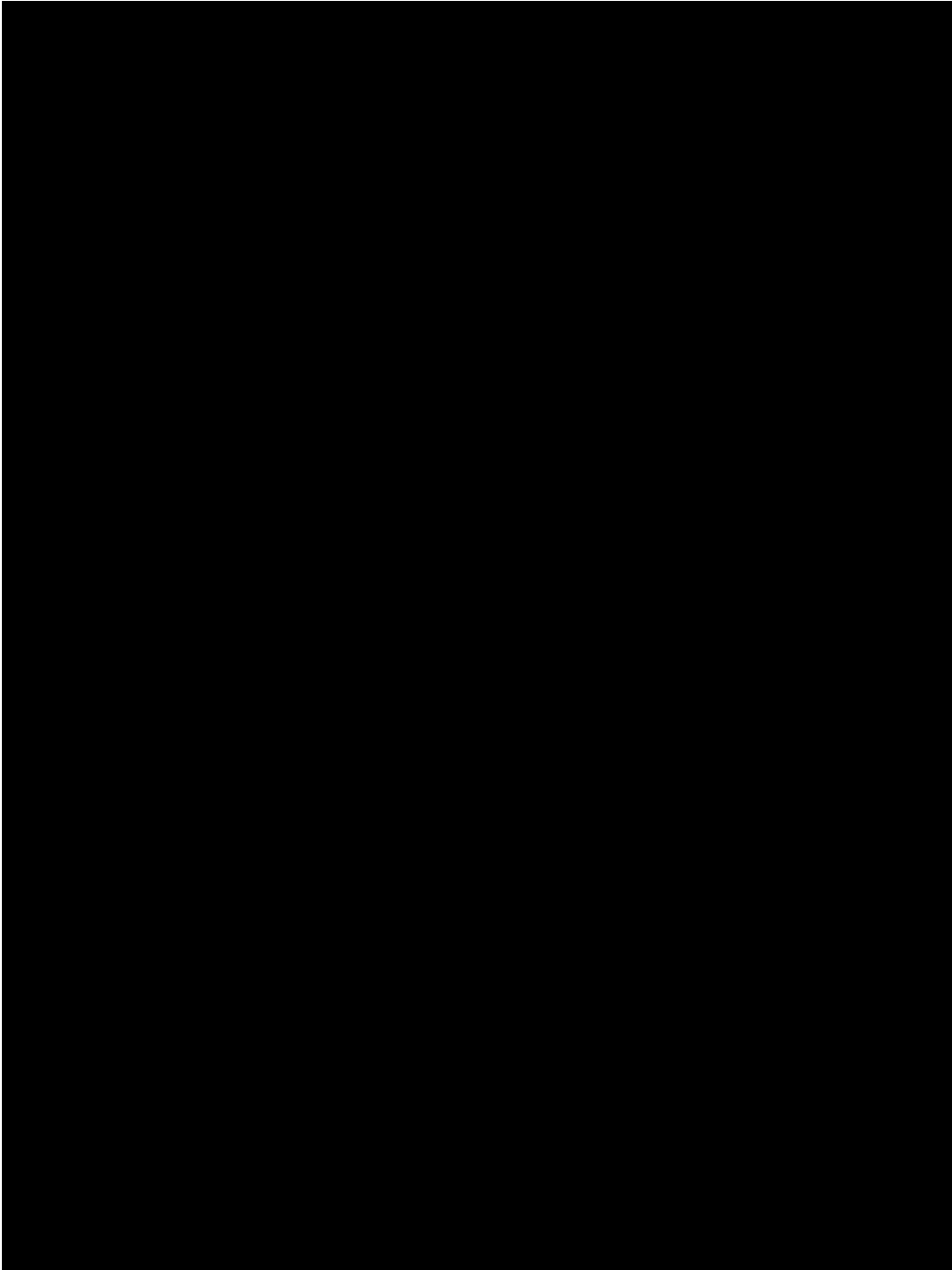
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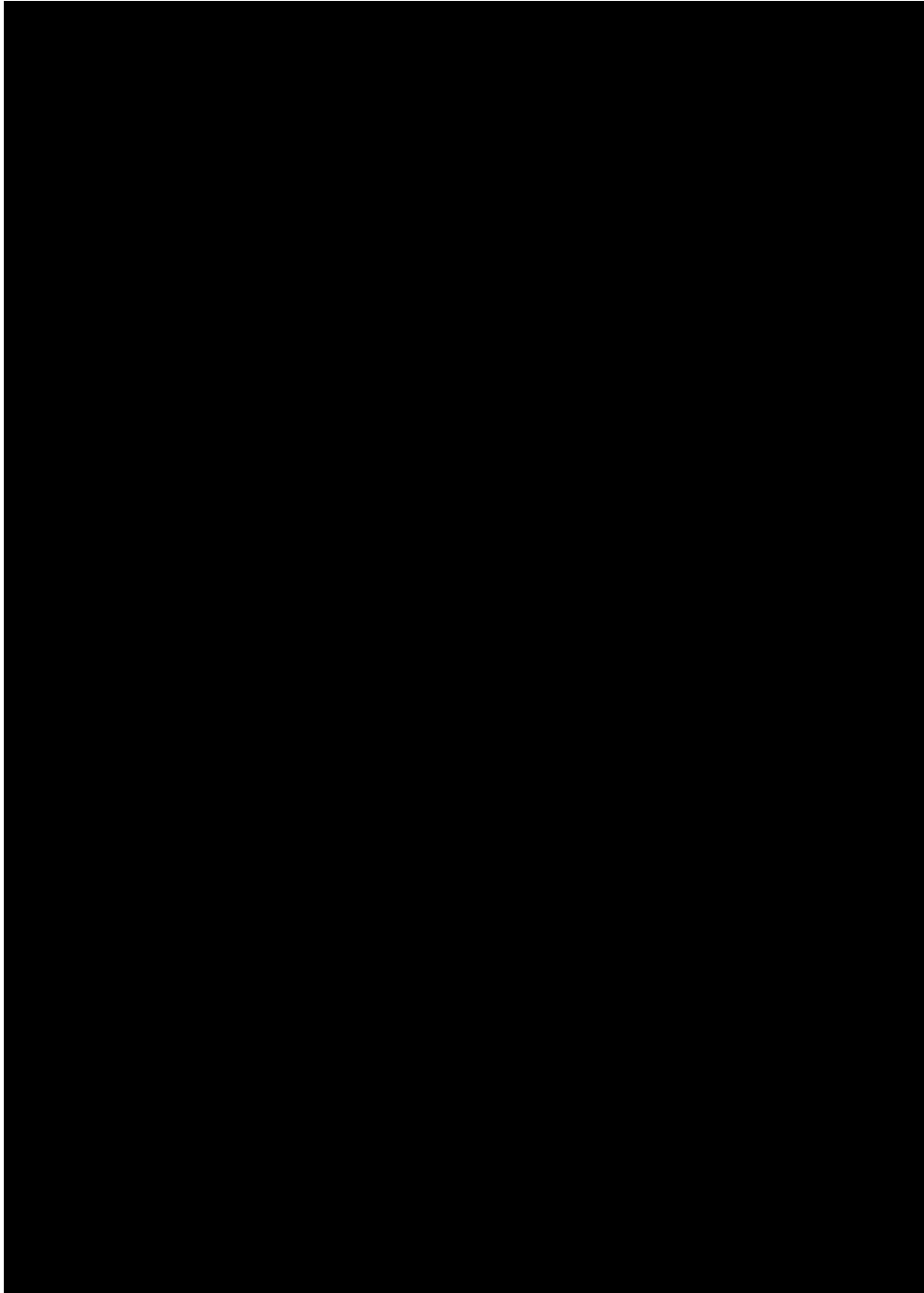


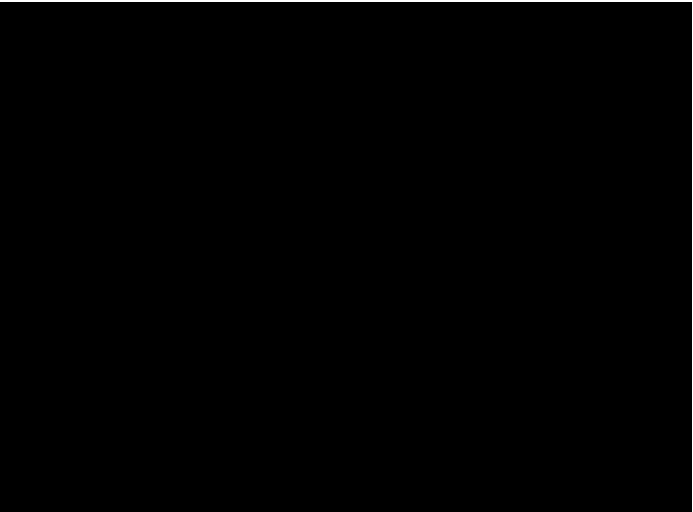
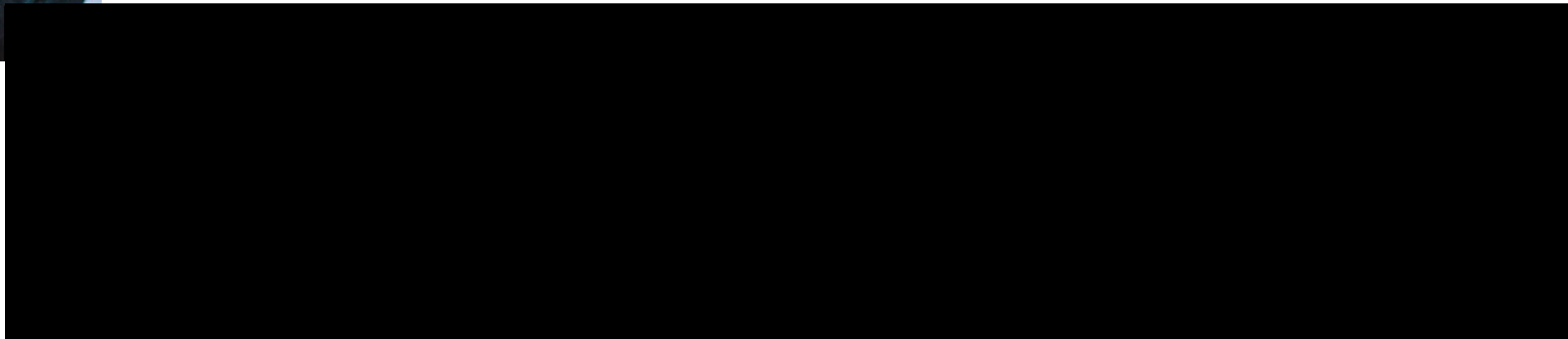
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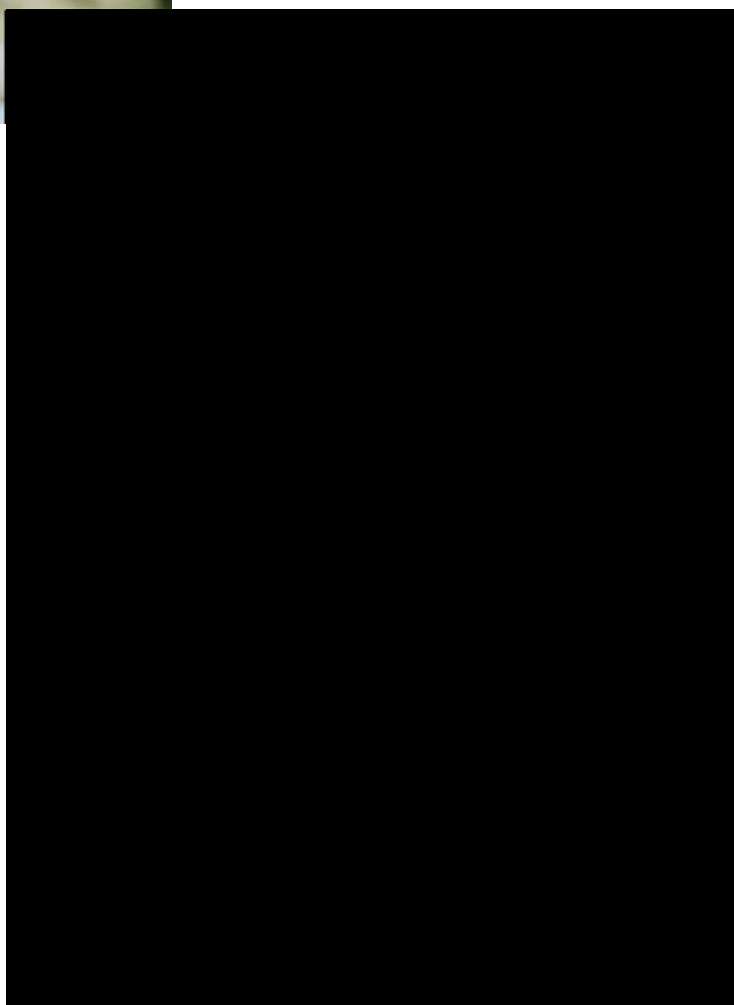


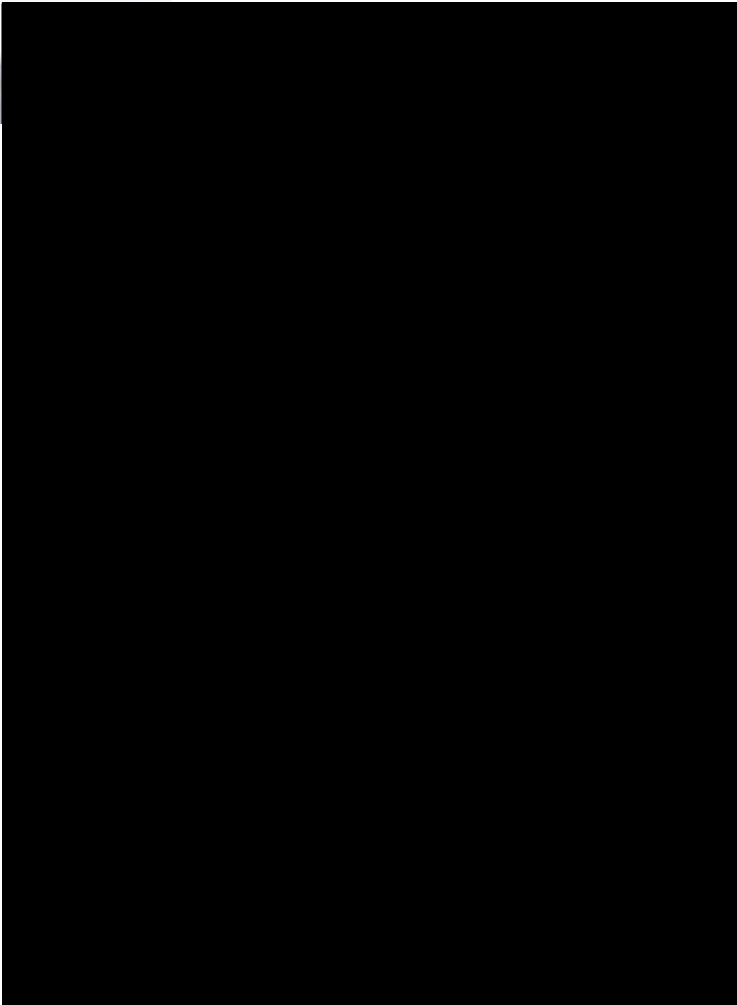
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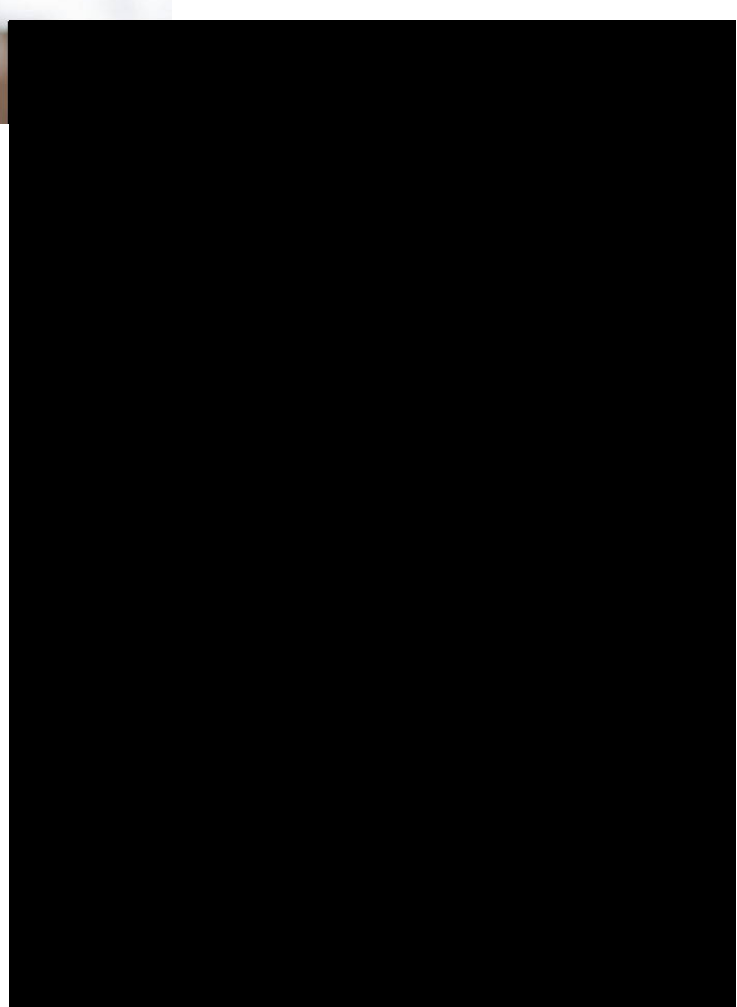












A city skyline with various skyscrapers is visible in the background under a cloudy sky.

MAN WITH A PRAM

Connect your community. Raise awareness. Support new families!

[Media Links](#)

[Event Report Link](#)





What is it?

Australia's 'National Fathers Day Event'

A community event for fathers, mothers, infants/children, grandparents and health professionals. Including a pram walk for new fathers and their infants, activities for mums and their friends all designed to grow the awareness of perinatal mental health for fathers and build communities of new fathers and families across Australia.

Why? Perinatal Mental Health for Fathers

New fathers have little to no support during the early months and years of parenthood. Research shows that this can have devastating and even tragic impacts on families. Dads Group (DG) are changing this by partnering with organisations and establishing dads groups and public events across the nation. These new spaces and events connect new fathers and families with communities, resources and networks that can support their transition to parenthood.



How we do it?

DG (Dads Group) and partners host social impact Man with a Pram events, in collaboration with City Councils and other organisations to promote positive paternal engagement in parenting and partner support.

When is our next event?

The 2021 event will be hosted across towns and Capital Cities Nationally on Fathers Day 5th September 2021. This annual event is now in its fifth year however it will be the time since covid-19 DG (Dads Group) have launched a national event on Fathers Day.

Our aim is to secure major NGO and corporate sponsors that can support and host the rollout of this exciting event nationally across the following cities and regional centres - Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Canberra, Hobart.



Who else has been part of MWAP?

We hope you and your organisation will join together with DG (Dads Group), Tresillian, Movember Foundation, The Federal Government, Bakers Delight, Baby Jogger Australia, Ergobaby, and a number of other previous partners to promote this growing movement of motivated 'role model' fathers who are changing the next generation of families through simple yet powerful family support programs.

Will you join us?

NGO and corporate partnerships are crucial to the success of these major events. We are looking for partners who can build this event to maximise the impact across the nation.

Partnership Tiers

Category	Benefits	Cash Price*	In kind	Total
National Platinum Presenting Partner	All Cities: Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide, Hobart, Man with a Pram Presented by Your Organisation 2X Video Interviews for Social Media Posts (Plus all items listed below) Branding on all event printing (T-shirts, Bags, etc.) Keynote introduction for VIP Video interviews x 2 prior and x 2 post Event Film Clip Branded and Presented Anticipated Live Coverage across each major location	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$50,000
Gold Event Partner	All Cities: Large Logo Exposure on Printed Flyers, Facebook Tiles, Landing Page Logo, Exclusive Social Media Post, Social Media Video interview with dedicated photo of your choice, Video interviews x 1 prior and x 1 post	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$10,000
Silver Event Partner	All Cities: Logo Exposure on Printed Flyers, Facebook Logo and Landing Page Logo, Group Post	\$2,000	\$2,000	\$4,000
Event Partner	All Cities: Facebook Exposure, Landing Page Logo, Group Post	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$2,000
Product Partner	All Cities: Social Media Exposure, Photos of Products	\$500	\$500	\$1,000
Impact Partner	Building supportive communities for fathers and families	0	In kind	In kind

*Price can be made up of in-kind and cash up to 50:50, in-kind value is measured as RRP divided by two, closing dates for sponsorship categories and benefits will be provided on request

Contact tom@dadsgroup.org for more details (separate state only partnership options may be available per state subject to request)



The background of the slide is a dark, semi-transparent image of a school building with windows and a street lamp.

Join us and grow the tribe of role model fathers

We are changing modern day fatherhood for the better. One
father and family at a time

Make this part of your legacy

Please confirm your interest by emailing : tom@dadsgroup.org Or calling 0492936787

The bottom section of the slide features a dark, semi-transparent image of children playing on a playground.

www.dadsgroup.org

Dads Group

Evidence for Supporting Fathers in the Perinatal Period

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Health systems, services and communities must shift to engage and support fathers in the perinatal period

In recent decades, Dads Group research has consistently demonstrated the wide-ranging benefits of engaging and supporting fathers in the perinatal period. However, health systems and services have traditionally focused on mothers, often overlooking the crucial role fathers play in promoting positive outcomes for the entire family. As the evidence mounts, it is imperative that we shift our approach to recognize and actively involve fathers in prenatal and postnatal care.

The research presented here highlights the substantial benefits of father engagement in the perinatal period for the well-being of infants, mothers, and fathers themselves. Engaged fathers contribute to better cognitive, emotional, and social outcomes for their children, improved maternal mental health, and even stronger family bonds. This involvement extends beyond immediate benefits, with lasting positive effects on the family's socio-emotional and economic well-being.

The benefits of father engagement are also evident in the context of family violence prevention and mental ill health and suicide. Research demonstrates that involved fathers can help prevent and mitigate the impact of family violence, improve family dynamics, and reduce the risk of mental health issues for both themselves and their partners. Moreover, fathers who are actively engaged in the perinatal period are more likely to develop strong attachment relationships with their children, which are crucial for healthy child development.

Health systems and services must adopt a more inclusive approach that recognizes the importance of fathers in the perinatal period. This can be achieved by designing and implementing father-friendly policies and practices, such as offering tailored antenatal and postnatal education and support programs, and promoting fathers' attendance at healthcare visits. By fostering an environment that encourages father engagement, we can ensure that health professionals are equipped to provide comprehensive care and support for the entire family.

Furthermore, it is crucial that we address potential barriers that might prevent fathers from engaging in the perinatal period, such as a lack of knowledge, cultural norms, or limited access to appropriate services. By breaking down these barriers, we can ensure that all fathers have the opportunity to contribute positively to their family's well-being.

In conclusion, the wealth of research evidence presented here underscores the need for health systems and services to shift their focus and actively engage and support fathers in the perinatal period. By doing so, we can capitalize on the vast potential of father involvement to improve the health and well-being of infants, mothers, and fathers, and create stronger, more resilient families. The time to act is now - let us seize this opportunity to build a brighter future for families everywhere.

Evidence Base for Dads Group Programs

All Dads Group programs are all built upon evidence and research that all focus on addressing social issues such as mental-ill health and suicide, family violence and child development, which formulates our three pillars of social impact. The evidence, research and theories you will see throughout this document is both primary and secondary. Since 2009, Dads Group programs have been evaluated by various organisations including Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), Movember, the University of Sunshine Coast and Healthy Male. We have pieced together large volumes of research that allows our programs to address the significant unintentionally overlooked risk factors fathers and families face, particularly during the perinatal period. Dads Group as an organisation specifically seek to address these risk with a prevention / early intervention framework.

Theories Supporting Dads Group Programs

At the very core of Dads Group is fathers socially connecting with other fathers and their babies, designed as a prevention approach to reduce issues of mental-ill health and suicide, and family violence. It is a strength based approach using peer support and facilitated learning environments to support the under supported demographic in new families - fathers. Research shows that an effective father figure results in reduced incidents of violence, crime, and alcohol and drug abuse; enhanced mental health and self-esteem; improved school engagement and performance; increased social competence; decrease in risky sexual behaviour; and improved health behaviours (Wood & Lambin, 2013).

Social Learning Theory

The Social Learning Theory, Bandura 1969, supports this approach, as it considers both environmental and cognitive factors that interact and influence learning and behaviour, with a focus on observing, imitating and modelling behaviours and emotions of the people around them (Bandura, 1969).

One often stated benefit of participating in a men's social group is the social interaction with other new fathers and the space to watch and learn from their behaviours, coping mechanisms and parenting skills (Fisher et al., 2021). This learning can build towards another Bandura (1977) theory of self-efficacy, by which one's beliefs in their capabilities and functioning, with the ability to control events that affect their life. Two main sources of self-efficacy are experience-based, and high self-efficacy has been linked to improved lifestyle habits and increased resilience in the face of stress and adversity (Etherton et al., 2020).

Social learning has been connected to self-regulation factors when dealing with alcohol abuse (Kotelchuck, 2021), as well as providing mechanisms for the intergenerational transmission of both minor and severe forms of domestic violence (Wareham et al., 2009). Simons and

colleagues (1991) found that parents who had previously engaged in aggressive parenting techniques had subsequently produced parents who were likely to use the same aggressive parenting practices. Violence, like all social behaviour, is something that is learned and reinforced in childhood either directly or indirectly through parents or other role models and can habitually persist in adulthood as a coping mechanism or conflict resolution (Mihalic & Elliot, 1997; Huesmann, 2018).

Attachment Theory

Experiential childhood education and development is arguably the primary focus of Dads Group programs, it is one of the main reasons behind our model where fathers and families attend community dads group events with their babies and children. Our aim overall is to bring increased awareness to all fathers across the community of the importance of their role to their child's development beginning from the antenatal period, and how they can support their child's development whilst building positive, healthy relationships between father and child.

The attachment theory supports Dads Group programs, as it is an exploration of the way that children and their parents develop bonds over time, and the influence these bonds have on the child over their lifetime (Sutton, 2018). Individuals with secure attachments in their relationships (i.e., those that are trusting and warm) having the most positive outcomes. Studies have shown secure father-child attachment relationships can increase reciprocated friendships and result in fewer behaviour problems in children (Brown & Cox, 2019; Juffer et al., 2017). It is another area of parenting research that has been looked at extensively for mothers, yet not for fathers, despite Bowlby (1969) noting in that attachment to fathers was common, even when the infant did not see the father on a regular basis. It was not until the mid-80s that researchers moved away from seeing fathers as a 'playmate' than a principal attachment figure and moved away from a hierarchical model where mothers were higher than fathers on the attachment scale (Bretherton, 2010). Now that research has extended to fathers, it has been shown that more than one factor can influence on a child's attachment to their parent. A combination of elements such as sensitivity and parenting pleasure, as well as cognitive, affective and behavioural characteristics in parents (Brown & Cox, 2019).

Healthy, Respectful Relationships and Positive Masculinity

Evidence suggests that positive support programs for fathers can increase healthy relationships with their partners. Several studies have shown that such programs can lead to improved communication, increased satisfaction in the relationship, and a decrease in conflict.

One study published in the Journal of Marriage and Family found that fathers who participated in a parenting program that included relationship skills training reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction and better communication with their partners. The study also found that these fathers were less likely to engage in conflict with their partners, and that their partners reported higher levels of satisfaction in the relationship.

Another study published in the Journal of Family Psychology found that fathers who participated in a program focused on promoting positive father-child interactions also showed improvements in their relationships with their partners. The study found that these fathers reported lower levels of relationship conflict and higher levels of relationship satisfaction.

A review of several studies on father involvement programs, published in the Journal of Family Issues, found that programs that included relationship education or support for the couple were more effective in improving relationship outcomes than programs that focused solely on parenting or father-child interactions.

In addition to these studies, there are several programs that have been developed specifically to support fathers in their relationships with their partners. One example is the "Boot Camp for New Dads" program, which includes relationship education as well as practical parenting skills training. Another example is the "Building Strong Families" program, which includes relationship education and coaching for both partners.

Overall, the evidence suggests that positive support programs for fathers can be effective in improving relationships with partners. By providing fathers with the skills and support they need to navigate the challenges of parenthood and maintain healthy relationships, these programs can have a positive impact on families and children.

References for positive support programs for fathers increases healthy relationships with partners

When it comes to masculinity, one factor that can impact parent-child attachment is a father's notion of gender roles and their own sense of masculinity. The traditional gender roles for men frame them as the "breadwinner", providing economically for their family and assumed to be less emotionally involved with their children (Cabrera et al., 2018). This leads to the assumption that fathers do not engage in hands-on parenting, and do not affect their children's lives emotionally, leaving them out of research focus in favour for mothers (Cabrera et al., 2018). Masculinity is a complex psychological concept which can lead to potential power and privilege for men, but can also harm those men and their communities (Caperton et al., 2019).

These masculine gender norms can play a large role in creating barriers for fathers to communicate anxieties to those closest to them, for fear of judgement, disappointment, dismissal, and concerns of burdening their partner or loved ones (Das & Hodkinson, 2019). This perceived burden can create a negative feedback loop, compounding depressive symptoms in fathers (Caperton et al., 2019). Caperton and colleagues also suggest that perceived failure to reach these gender norms can lead to social isolation, stigma and loss of spousal support. Silverstein, Auerbach and Levant (2002) describe 'gender role strain' in contemporary fatherhood; where fathers attempt at enacting the more traditional father role, one developed in a different societal and historical context, which has led to a reconstruction by fathers of a new parenting prototype of what it means and is expected of being a father.

More recent evidence suggest fathers are shifting from the traditional masculine parenting roles that prioritise work over family (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021).

Primary Data

USC Research into Dads Group Interventions

In addition to a lack of interventions exclusively for fathers, there is also a lack of research designs focused on the parenting programs for fathers that have already been granted evaluation (Cowan & Cowan, 2018). Research conducted by the University of Sunshine Coast used the social learning theory, attachment theory, and positive masculinity in the context of fatherhood to explore and to reflect on, male psychology, identity, fathering behaviour, and decision making about involvement in the fathering role.

The aim of this research was to examine the underlying psychosocial aspects of why Dad's Group participants report that the group has helped them become better fathers, develop stronger bonds with their children, improved their relationship with their partners and feel more confident in their capabilities.

An open-ended qualitative survey was used to question participants about how Dads Group has affected their sense of identity as a father, their relationships and their skills and confidence they have built since transitioning into fatherhood. The survey also contained information on what the participants of Dads Group believe makes a 'great dad' as well as their general thoughts and feelings about fatherhood. It is expected that the responses from participants will include elements of social learning theory (how they have learned from other fathers within the group), thoughts on masculinity (e.g., ideals of being a man), and their effects on their relationships with their partners (e.g., feeling more securely attached, relationships are more trusting and warmer). It also anticipated that linking the underlying psychosocial theory with why the benefits of participating in the Dads Group will highlight specific protective factors for domestic violence, child development and family wellbeing as well as contribute to the body of knowledge on fathering today and provide information that will assist Dad's Group with ongoing improvements to their practices and programs, as well as inform future development of men's and fathers' mental health programs.

Reference Link (Dads Group: A qualitative study Research Proposal Kelly McConville)

USC Research to Inform the Design of Community-Based

Interventions

In 2019, although the transition to parenthood is widely considered a challenging time for new mothers, the experiences of new fathers have long been under researched. Parenting by fathers is occurring in the context of changing norms about masculinity and fatherhood (Johansson, 2011). Men may struggle in negotiating their new identity as a father and are known to be reluctant to seek help – this may have negative implications for their family (Asenhed et al., 2013; Yousaf et al., 2015). It is recognised that father-child bonding contributes to healthy child development (Fletcher, 2011; Lamb, 2010). Furthermore, supporting fathers who are struggling through parenthood, reduces the burden on families which translates into better psychological and behavioural outcomes for the child (Wilson & Durbin, 2010).

Due to the success of Dads Group's (formally known as Dads Group Inc) community based programs and interventions focusing on fathers, the University of Sunshine Coast believed our community dads groups to be a suitable case study to inform the design of community-based interventions seeking to engage dads in social activities. With expectations on fathers increasing, investigating the operation of an organisation that engages and supports fathers, facilitating their negotiation into a new role and identity as a father, was timely. This research captured the intersection between support groups and these changing norms, providing an important research understanding of community-based programs for fathers.

The aim of this research was to:

1. Explore the approach of DGI in their implementation of new dads' groups, including required resources and the functions they perform, measures of success and how they contribute to the overall vision of DGI
2. To provide a 'systems' model of DGI's strategic approach and vision, offering greater insight into the operations and potential for optimising community impact.
3. To undertake a community survey aiming to inform the ongoing development of DGI by exploring the approaches and challenges of dads, mums and care-givers.
4. To identify an ideal DGI system that best supports social change which will contribute sustainably to the ongoing wellbeing of dads and families.

The support of new fathers and prevention of mental ill-health is imperative given the influence fathers can have on their children's development. Historically, warm and involved fatherhood has been associated with a range of positive outcomes, such as school readiness (McWayne et al., 2013), and cognitive, emotional, and social development broadly (Lamb, 2010;

Towe-Goodman et al., 2014). More recently, the father-child relationship has been directly linked to child prosocial behaviour, even when controlling for the influence of mother and teacher relationships (Ferreira et al., 2016). A father's positive beliefs about parenting in early life have also been associated with their child having fewer challenging behaviours in subsequent years (Kroll et al., 2016). Furthermore, emerging research suggests that rough-and-tumble play, common in father-child interactions, is associated with better social and cognitive outcomes, as well as fewer aggressive behaviours in the child (Anderson et al., 2019; StGeorge & Freeman, 2017). In contrast to these beneficial outcomes, when parental mental ill-health is present, there can be significant social, economic and psychological impacts on families and the capacity for sensitive care may be compromised (van Santvoort et al., 2015).

Community-based programs are an avenue through which individuals can become engaged in a strengths-based environment. For example, peer-led support has been used to facilitate behaviour change by building trust based on shared lived experiences, role-modelling living well, and engaging others with help available and the broader community (Gillard et al., 2015). Gendered approaches to encouraging help-seeking have been recognised as important (Harris et al., 2014) and community-based groups may be well-suited to cater to these needs, providing an inclusive and non-pathologising environment where men build relationships and engage as peers (Morgan et al., 2007).

Community-based groups could also have a role in addressing the broad societal issues men face. Dads playgroups, for example, aim to help fathers develop supportive social relationships, sense of purpose, family harmony, and connections to physical and mental health services, all of which are recognised as protective factors against the risk of suicidality (Black Dog Institute, 2018). Further to this, the act of empowering fathers to develop an identity as a father and embrace this new role is a step towards challenging gender stereotypes as well as strengthening equal and respectful relationships, both of which contribute to the prevention of domestic and family violence (Our Watch, 2015).

A cooperative research project between Dads Group and the University of the Sunshine

Coast

Action Research Findings

Movember Digital Dads Group Project 2020 - 2022

Project Name: Digital Dads Group

Project Summary

In April 2020 at the beginning of the covid-19 pandemic, Dads Group took their Community Dads Group online. The plan was to create a safe 'virtual' space, providing isolated dads with the support and connection they needed to manage the day-to-day stresses of parenthood and social isolation. Through additional support, Dad's Group aims to expand and scale the online support programs and pathways for new and expecting fathers.

To achieve this, the project team's goal is to enhance the digital platform technology and functional capability allowing for a better user experience and enhanced participation of the program; develop participant support process, including the establishment and management of a participant database, allowing for greater communication and support.

University of the Sunshine Coast - Thriving Communities Evaluation Findings

Project Background

Dads Group delivered the Thriving Communities Project, a 12 month project funded by the QLD government designed to improve health pathways for expectant fathers, new fathers and families in Townsville, Toowoomba and Rockhampton. This project was groundbreaking, traditionally health services in the hospitals and in the community are trained and focused on supporting mothers and children, leading to them unintentionally excluding fathers from providing support and their services. The aim of this project is to work with hospitals, community health services, establish community Dads Groups and Digital groups, allowing us to support fathers and families through the perinatal period starting from the hospital space through to the community.

Project Reach

- Approximately 997 parents attended the revised antenatal classes
- Approximately 232 Health professionals were involved in the TC project
- Approximately 240 parents attended DG community events
- Approximately 795 parents on the FB groups
- Approximately 200 parents attended MWAP events

1. Expectant parents:

a. How useful was the information provided during the dads group connection? i. 93% stated the information was very useful or extremely useful.

b. What did you like most about the Dads Group experience? i. 90.5% agreed to 'all of the above' with the following options: 1. learning about the different levels of support available 2. tips on becoming a dad and self-care 3. connecting with a male Dads Group facilitator 4. chatting with other dads to be

c. 65 other comments were offered by expecting parents. All of them were positive. Key words in the comments were excellent, informative, great, support, discussions.

- Here are some of the comments: i. Found Dads talk excellent ii. Good info on mental health iii. It was great being able to speak with other dads about supporting our partners iv. Amazing! I'm so glad he will have access to that extra support v. I'm interested to go. Liked Dads Group info, signs and tips vi. So many different levels of support available vii. Don't know how I'll go as a dad. Great to know about what can help

Community survey

To what extent do you agree or disagree to the following statements:

a) I look up to other fathers/mothers as role models or for guidance in parenting?

i) 87% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed

b) Feel my capacity as a parent or carer for my children is growing? i) 93% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed

c) Connecting with Dads Group has helped me as a parent or caregiver i) 63% of respondents strongly agreed

d) I have been shown ways to connect with my baby to support their healthy social and emotional brain development?

i) 67% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed

e) Feel connected within my community? i) 47% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed

Comment: Joining Dads Group allowed me to form safe relationships to reduce my social isolation

Health professional and service providers

a. Midwives and DGARs: i. Midwives: Midwives were asked to complete a survey after delivering each session. We received 44 completed surveys.

A summary of some of the data is below:

1. 86% of midwives strongly agreed that the Dads Group facilitation helped your Hospital / Health Service to support the fathers in their engagement and/or education?

2. 95% of midwives rated the DGAR experience for the expecting dads as between 8 and 10 out of 10.

3. Midwives were asked to tell us which part of the DG experience they thought was most valuable. Some responses below: a. Knowing they're not alone - ability to debrief b. The openness, having a forum to talk and connect with other Dads c. Connections; having a voice; being heard/valued d. Engaging and supporting dads e. Giving dad's the knowledge and somewhere to go f. Raising awareness of local support for Dads - feedback from the participants

4. Some other comments from the midwives were: a. Compliments our program - reinforces session discussions b. [REDACTED] (DGAR in Townsville) provides a safe space, information from a male perspective c. Encourages questions and to access support from other Dads d. Families aware of different levels of support within the community e. Positive feedback from the dads and partners f. Builds community

connections g. Positive outcomes on mental health and child development h. Strengthens caring, committed and kind relationships within the family i. Long term family benefits and connections

DGARs

DGARs were asked to complete a survey after delivering each session. We received 12 completed surveys.

1. 83% of DGARs rated the DGAR experience for the expecting dads between 8 and 10 out of 10.
2. 75% of the DGARs rated the connectedness they created with the expectant dads during their session as between 8 and 10 out of 10.
3. Some of the valuable topics of conversation reported by the DGARs were: a. We talked about mums PND experiences and stats, the role dads have in helping to minimise that, mums groups, connection to professionals when dads are struggling, and different parenting resources b. We talked about preparation for the birth, planning, car seats and costs c. Yes - discussed challenges associated with being a new Dad d. We talked about men's reluctance to seek support and why e. We talked about the stigma of being a man and not seeking support and being prepared for bubs arrival as a dad
4. Some other comments from the DGARs were: a. Everyone seemed engaged, smiled, laughed, made comments and answered questions b. There were positive comments, smiles and nods during the groups c. All couples seemed engaged d. The midwife and parents indicated the session was very beneficial, everyone indicated the data provided in slides was new information they didn't know beforehand.

Other service providers

We received 17 responses from a survey for other community service providers.

- i. 76% of respondents stated that Dads Group had a somewhat positive or positive impact on the people they support/care for
- ii. 88% of respondents stated that it was very important or extremely important that Dads Group continue their work in their region
- iii. 94% of respondents stated that it was very or extremely important for families to have a DG in their local area?
- iv. Some other comments from service providers: 1. Whilst the focus is on dads, the impacts have a positive effect on the whole family. 2. Great to have a local group specific to the area. Provides opportunities for Dads to connect locally in person- improves emotional well-being, confidence, sharing stories/ experiences/ where to go for additional support. As such benefits the whole family 3. Foster connections amongst services 4. The dads feel validated and have something that can connect with and as healthcare workers to be able to offer this is great

Direct quotes from attendees/participants/clients

'There are very few community based support groups for new fathers and this is an incredibly important social need'

'Provided a unique service for Dads. It has given them an opportunity to connect with each other.'

'Beneficial to parents when starting this new journey and particularly dads to hear it from a peer going through the same things to help them understand their own thoughts and feelings'

'It is important to have positive role models in the community'

'Peer to peer groups such as Dads Group provides a forum for dads to get together and aid one another in ways that only an organisation like this can.'

'There are many services available for women, and these services are usually set in spaces and times that are women friendly. Dads Group is specifically focussed on men, at men friendly times and spaces with the added supports via digital means.'

'Dads Group provide a healthy way to engage with dads and provide a role model for healthy and respectful behaviours.'

'Past parents have commented they wish that was around when they had their previous children. It enables to give both sides of the parent partnership support and show how important both sides are to ensuring that both parties see how important they both are to this journey.'

'Dads are so much more involved in parenting and caring for their children and dads group provides a safe environment for dads to ask questions and get support from other dads. It builds connection between dads in a community which I believe will have positive outcomes for the mental health of fathers and the development of the child.'

'I love that there are different options, not just a meet up as this may not suit everyone. There really is something for every dad.'

Total Figures

- Engaged with approximately 3,995 expecting parents in antenatal classes in QLD
- Co-Facilitated approximately 250 antenatal classes in QLD
- 88.75% strongly agreed - *That antenatal classes helped to support both myself and my partner better.*
- 74.17% agreed - *I feel I have good knowledge about parenting*
- 78% strongly agreed - *They have been shown ways to connect with my baby to support their healthy social and emotional brain development*
- 86% of midwives strongly agreed that the Dads Group facilitation helped your Hospital / Health Service to support the fathers in their engagement and/or education
- 95.41% either agreed or strongly agreed - *I would recommend this birth and parenting program to other parents*

Feedback:

Great to meet other dads and learn from how they interact with their babies and hear the stories of various experiences

Very helpful for my mental health. A nice thing to do with my child as a duo. Gives my weekends structure and purpose and gives my wife a rest.

This is a great support for fathers & think it should be available for dads more broadly

Gives me a chance to bond with my son alone. He gets to feel more comfortable with just Dad. And the same in reverse. This also allows time for my partner to do things she would like to do alone. Good for all of us and a good excuse to get out of the house

It helps to feel connected

'There are very few community based support groups for new fathers and this is an incredibly important social need'

'Provided a unique service for Dads. It has given them an opportunity to connect with each other.'

'It is important to have positive role models in the community'

'Dads Group provide a healthy way to engage with dads and provide a role model for healthy and respectful behaviours.'

'I love that there are different options, not just a meet up as this may not suit everyone. There really is something for every dad.'

Queensland Health: Perinatal Integrated Model of Care for Fathers - 'Dads and Peers' Project Evaluation Findings

Project Background

The Dads 'n Peers: LINK Project is a multi-stakeholder project that aims to improve new parents' antenatal education experience and has a specific focus on the experience for new fathers. The Project promotes the inclusion of fathers in antenatal education by embedding a father-focused program of education into existing antenatal education programs.

The Project supports adaptations to hospitals' existing Birth and Parenting Programs, which include: • The addition of Emotional Preparation for Parenthood (EPP) classes (minimum 2 hrs), if not previously offered;

- Training and inclusion of Perinatal Peer Educators as the co-facilitators of the EPP classes;
 - Revision of general antenatal class curriculum to be more father-inclusive;
- and

- A Dads Group experience within the antenatal class with the aim of providing new fathers with knowledge from someone with lived-experience as a new parent (2 X ½ hr).

Peer-to-peer social connections between fathers are encouraged within the classes and local Dads Groups are being established are part of the Project.

The EPP and Dads Group experience have been combined as integral parts of the Project. Although Project organisers believe both are important in creating optimal outcomes for parents, they could be incorporated into antenatal education programs as stand-alone components. The Dads Group experience could be facilitated face-to-face or remotely, and could take up as little as 20 minutes if time was limited.

Reach

Approximately 1300 parents attended the revised antenatal classes at RBWH & 700 at Redcliffe.

Approximately 200 parents at Caboolture attended.

SMS4dads - 215 fathers registered for this program from (March- end of June). This element of project continues till November

five groups collectively have 618 group members.

These five groups had hosted 68 social events in total, with an average of 5 fathers attending each event with their babies.

Effectiveness and Impact

Expectant parents in the post class survey indicated

Perinatal mental health and wellbeing for families is important and parents acquired improved knowledge on class completion.

- 98.33% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed to the following survey question – *Mental health and wellbeing are important during pregnancy and after the birth, for the parents and baby.*
- 97.08% of respondents agreed and strongly agreed - *I feel I have good knowledge on emotional health and wellbeing.*

The father/partner focus within classes improved understanding of their role whilst helping better support parents

- 88.75% agreed and strongly agreed - *These antenatal classes have helped to support both myself and my partner better.*
- 74.59% agreed and strongly agreed - *I liked the personalised contact from the Dads Group trained facilitator with both the mums and dads/partners in the class. This helped me to understand the role of a father/partner better.*

The classes helped stress the importance of both the mother and fathers/partners

- 96.25% agreed and strongly agreed - *I feel the antenatal classes helped stress the importance of both the mother and father/partner.*

The peer educator sharing their personal story in the EPP class was useful to the class attendees

- 81.23% agreed and strongly agreed - *I feel the Peer Educator sharing their personal story in the Emotional Preparation for Parenthood class was useful.*

The classes improved the awareness of father/baby focused programs

To the survey question - *I am aware of Father Baby focused programs.*

- 87.5% agreed and strongly agreed in the post survey; in contrast to 15.62% agreed and strongly agreed in the pre class survey.

The classes improved support awareness in the attendees

- 99.17% agreed and strongly agreed - *I will ask for help if I am struggling to care for my baby.*
- 96.66% agreed and strongly agreed - *I know where to get help as a parent;* this is in contrast with 65.43% agreed and strongly agreed in the pre class survey.

Further indicators of impact may be established when considering the post and pre survey results to the following questions.

- 82.50% agreed and strongly agreed - *I feel I have good knowledge about labour and birth;* 26.56% agreed and strongly agreed in the pre class survey.

- 74.17% agreed and strongly agreed - *I feel I have good knowledge about parenting*; 40.82% agreed and strongly agreed in the pre class survey.
- 97.08% agreed and strongly agreed - *I feel I have good knowledge on emotional health and wellbeing*; 80.27% agreed and strongly agreed in the pre class survey.

Below are some responses which relate most specifically to impact. When asked to consider a range of statements, the results to the survey indicate that:

- 85.37% agreed and strongly agreed – *They feel confident in my own parenting*
- 87.80% agreed and strongly agreed – *They feel my capacity as a parent or carer for my children is growing*
- 78.05% agreed and strongly agreed - *They have been shown ways to connect with my baby to support their healthy social and emotional brain development*
- 88.89% responded 'yes' to the question - *Are you aware of Dads Group, or any other dad and baby focused programs or events?*

Key findings from the end of project survey for CBE midwives include:

Training/confidence:

- 50% indicated quite well and very well; 37.5% indicating adequately to - *how effectively did the training prepare you*
- 87.5% indicated moderate and very confident; 12.5% slightly confident - *how confident do you feel co-facilitating the EPP class*

Value of EPP class:

- 87.5% indicated moderate and very important - *how important you feel it is to educate expectant parents about the emotional health challenges in the perinatal period.*
- 100% indicated agree and strongly agree - *please rate how has your experience of co-facilitating the EPP classes has impacted on your midwifery practice.*
- 100% indicated agree and strongly agree - *have increased my own capacity to respond appropriately and supportively to perinatal mental health issues in all clinical settings*

Value of Father inclusivity in classes

- 87.5% indicated agree and strongly agree - *Providing more father/partner focused information and images helps to better support and engage parents*
- 87.5% indicated agree and strongly agree - *The personalised contact from the Dads Group representative, helps the father/partner to understand their expected role*
- 100% indicated agree and strongly agree - *The personalised contact from the Dads Group representative, helps parents understand what support is available for the father/partner*

The following are select midwife's comments when asked can you tell us about your experience co-facilitating the class with peer educators.

'They said the peer educator was the best part of the class. I think so too' !!

'Both the expectant Mums and Dads seem to become more engaged in the next sessions and in each other's feelings. The entire group becomes more cohesive and chat together more at breaks'.

'I feel the PPE brings a realisation to parents that it can cause issues around anxiety or depression post having a baby. Parents always respond really well to the PPE and afterwards always say how much information they got from the class'.

'I think it's an eye opener for the new parents. And hearing the story from a fellow parent makes the reality of the potential mental health issues something to take note of. We aren't just giving them a whole bunch of statistics, we are giving them someone's lived experience'.

'They help to make the content of this class so much more meaningful & real. It has become my favourite class to facilitate'!

Metro North Hospitals Previous strategies to Engage men

When asked what strategies or programs, if any, hospitals had used to engage fathers before the Project, only the participants from the site that had been running a similar project model (Redcliffe) described their hospital proactively engaging men. Two participants were unsure whether any particular strategies for men were in place prior to the Project, while two spoke of men being welcome but not targeted or specifically catered for.

"They were encouraged to come as part of the antenatal classes, but there was nothing specifically directed at men or dads."

"...No strategies to get them there. It was up to them if they wanted to participate. They got the same as the woman got."

"It's not that different to what we were doing before. We've been using female peer educators. This is the first time we've worked with dads [as peer educators], so it's an easy transition for us. It's not been a problem at all."

Expectant parents in the post class survey indicated that their experiences with the program were very positive:

The presentation of the father/partner focus within classes improved understanding of their role whilst helping better support parents

- 77.09% either agreed or strongly agreed to the following survey question - *I identified with the slide presentation with the images and language for dads/partners. This helped me to understand the role of a father/partner better*

The Peer Educator sharing their personal story and co-facilitating the Emotional Preparation for Parenthood class was valuable experience for program attendees

- 76.25% either agreed or strongly agreed - *I feel the Peer Educator assisting with role plays, signs and symptoms or other sections in the Emotional Preparation for Parenthood class was useful*

The personalised contact from the Dads Group representative was a identified a positive part of the program

- 74.59% either agreed or strongly agreed - *I liked the personalised contact from the Dads Group trained facilitator with both the mums and dads/partners in the class. This helped me to understand the role of a father/partner's better*
- 69.59% either agreed or strongly agreed - *The facilitated dads group or mums group experience created a special and important space for connection and sharing with other dads or mums*

Overall, the program was very well received and presented as a program the attendees would recommend

- 95.41% either agreed or strongly agreed - *I would recommend this birth and parenting program to other parents*

The following are select attendees comments and highlights when asked - Do you have any suggestions for improvement of these antenatal classes?

There were several comments relating to the use of technology and the virtual classes, some people did struggle with this both in presenting and viewing. (All responses are available via the link and on request).

I thought the midwives/presenters/additional guests were friendly and super helpful!! I would like to thank everyone for their time and efforts - I really enjoyed the birth & parenting classes

Honestly the classes via teams were great. Being time poor with work and it being every week, teams made it so much more manageable and less stressful.

They were great! Really enjoyed them. Wouldn't change anything. Really enjoyed the practical elements

Nothing very accessible and information was provided

Feedback from Dads registered for SMS4dads program.

The following examples of messages received from dads reflect their positive experiences:

'Just wanted to say I love receiving these texts, would be happy to get them more frequently :)'

'I think it is an excellent programme'

'Good to see this kind of information presented concisely and in a great format! It is hard to see the wood in the trees sometimes with this info so big thumbs up to you guys 👍'

'Great tip, thank you'

'Thanks. The last message was beautiful and made me cry'

'Oh man, I think this service is amazing. It just has all these beautiful things in there - very gentle tips and nudges for you to stay connected and then links to further information. I think its great'

From a dad finishing SMS4dads: This has been a massive support for me over the last 8 or 9 months or so, every tip helped form the dad I've become in some small way

Community Dads Group Leaders

The following are selected comments from three of the five Community Dads Group Leaders from Brisbane and North Lakes regarding the impact of Dads Group and the program:

"What I love about this Dads and Peers project is that dads are getting connected to Dads Groups from the antenatal period rather than when their kids are 2 or 3 years old".

"Being a co-facilitator in the antenatal classes and a group leader within the catchment of the hospital allows me to already form a connection with dads before they come to my group meetups, which they've said makes a huge difference for them".

"A dad came with a 10 day old baby, he feared going out alone without mum, but after going to dads group with bubs it gave him the confidence to look after his son without the need for mum to intervene"

“Before joining Dads of North Lakes I was keeping a lot of things bottled up because I had nobody to talk to about them, now I have other dads to share with who can understand what I am going through”.

Community Survey

In this survey, those respondents that have been involved with a Dads Group (62%) were asked - *Can you please explain how you feel about the value of connecting with Dads Group for both yourself and your partner?*

Themes identified in those responses included:

- Supportive & helpful
- Relieving & reassuring
- Connectedness & shared experiences
- Wellbeing, confidence & bonding
- Learning & insightful

Some more specific responses included:

Great to meet other dads and learn from how they interact with their babies and hear the stories of various experiences

Very helpful for my mental health. A nice thing to do with my child as a duo. Gives my weekends structure and purpose and gives my wife a rest.

This is a great support for fathers & think it should be available for dads more broadly

Gives me a chance to bond with my son alone. He gets to feel more comfortable with just Dad. And the same in reverse. This also allows time for my partner to do things she would like to do alone. Good for all of us and a good excuse to get out of the house

It helps to feel connected

Reference Links:

[Pilot Hospital Program Evaluation Findings](#)

[Thriving Communities Community Survey Report](#)

[Dads n Peers Project Evaluation Report](#)

[Dads n Peers Hospital Administrator Interviews Report](#)

Secondary Data

Evidence that Supports Dads Group Programs

Dads Group have designed their programs to educate expectant and new fathers, about the importance of being engaged and involved in the raising and caring of their children, and how by doing so assist in maintaining healthy relationships with their partners. There is significant evidence that suggests that engaged fathers can improve their relationship with mothers. Here are some studies and references that support this claim:

**Dads
Group**

1. A study by Lamb and Lewis (2013) found that fathers' involvement in childcare was positively associated with relationship quality between parents, even after controlling for factors such as income and education.
2. A study by Carlson et al. (2016) found that fathers who were more involved in caregiving reported higher levels of relationship satisfaction with their partners.
3. A meta-analysis of 24 studies found that father involvement was positively associated with maternal relationship satisfaction, suggesting that engaged fathers can contribute to a more positive and supportive relationship with their partners (Sarkadi et al., 2016).
4. A longitudinal study by Proulx et al. (2007) found that fathers who were more involved in childcare and household tasks were more likely to experience an increase in relationship satisfaction over time.
5. A study by Hawkins et al. (2002) found that fathers' involvement in household tasks was associated with increased relationship satisfaction and a decrease in relationship conflict.

These studies suggest that engaged fathers can positively impact their relationship with mothers, leading to increased relationship satisfaction and decreased conflict. By contributing to the caregiving and household tasks, fathers can create a more equitable and supportive environment for their partners.

References for engaged fathers can improve their relationship with mothers