

***“No more bandaid solution”***

**Yaba Bimbie Indigenous Men’s Support Group  
Evaluation Report**

**January 2004 - June 2005**



**Janya McCalman, Komla Tsey, Mark Wenitong, David Patterson,  
Bradley Baird, Dennis Warta and Andrew Wilson**

## **Acknowledgments**

We would like to thank the Yarrabah community members who were interviewed for this evaluation for sharing their time and insights regarding the Yaba Bimbie men's group. We would also like to thank Andrew Malcolm for conducting the interviews with Yarrabah community members; and Natalie Hodges and Lisa Lui for transcribing the interviews and formatting this report.

## **Explanatory note about the title of this report**

"No more bandaid solution" is part of a quote from one of the Men's Group workers. It refers to Men's Group's resolve to identify their own solutions to what they have identified as the underlying problem of men in Yarrabah. The full quote is "... you hear that all the time from our elders, our leaders they keep giving us bandaid solutions to our problems you know. Like the government keeps saying that alcohol is your problem - this is your problem, but now we're saying this is our problem, you know. ..Like what we are doing is we wanna let the government know we are identifying our own problem - the problem is that our spirit...that's what we identified it as - the problem is that our spirit was taken away. ..." (Men's group worker).

No more bandaid solution: Yaba Bimbie Men's Group  
evaluation report.

Bibliography.  
Includes index.  
ISBN 0 86443 756 10.

1. Yaba Bimbie Men's Group - Evaluation. 2. Aboriginal  
Australians - Services for - Queensland - Yarrabah. 3.  
Aboriginal Australians - Health and hygiene - Queensland -  
Yarrabah. 4. Men - Health and hygiene - Queensland -  
Yarrabah. 5. Health promotion - Queensland - Yarrabah. I.  
McCalman, Janya, 1958- . II. Yaba Bimbie Men's Group. III.  
James Cook University. School of Indigenous Australian  
Studies.

362.84991509436

Copies of this report are available from:  
Empowerment Research Program  
School of Indigenous Australian Studies  
James Cook University  
PO Box 6811  
Cairns 4870  
[janya.mccalman@jcu.edu.au](mailto:janya.mccalman@jcu.edu.au)  
Ph 4042 1259

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b> .....	4
<b>Background</b> .....	5
<b>Sources of data</b> .....	7
<b>Key developments</b> .....	7
Discussion papers .....	7
Personal development, leadership and parenting .....	8
Employment .....	9
Education and training .....	10
Tradition and culture, and men's place .....	10
Organisational development of Gurriny .....	11
<b>Findings</b> .....	11
Effectiveness of and support for men's group .....	12
Key challenges and strategies to overcome them .....	17
<b>Discussion</b> .....	22
<b>Recommendations</b> .....	26
Recommendations for immediate action (to end 2006) .....	26
Longer term recommendations (beyond 2006) .....	27
<b>References</b> .....	31
<b>Diagrams</b>	
Graph 1: New injuries bi-monthly, Yarrabah .....	14

## ***Introduction***

This report describes the collaboration between James Cook University (JCU) and the University of Queensland (UQ) with the Yarrabah Yaba Bimbie Men's Group using a participatory action research approach. The aim of the collaboration is to support Yarrabah men take greater control and responsibility for the factors influencing their health and wellbeing.

Across Australia, Indigenous men have had a vision of taking greater responsibility themselves to improve the status of men's health and play their rightful role as leaders, fathers, uncles, husbands and grandfathers. They see the empowerment of Indigenous males as crucial to the raising of self-esteem, quality of life, health status and spiritual wellbeing (Spry 1999). This "Indigenous men's movement" is arising in response to health statistics which are probably the worst for any group in Australia. Indigenous males' life expectancy is only 59 years (18 years less than the Australian average) and there is a particularly devastating death rate of young and middle aged males, which has severe consequences for culture, families and the community (SCRGSP 2005). Health risk factors include low socioeconomic status; poor living conditions; poor nutrition; the highest rate of tobacco use across all age groups of the Australian population; the harmful use of substances; and violence (Working Party of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Health & Well Being Reference Committee 2003).

The work of the Yaba Bimbie (which translates as father son) Men's Group started in February 1998 as a voluntary support group in response to a spate of suicides and suicide attempts in Yarrabah, a coastal Aboriginal community about 50km south of Cairns, north Queensland. The Men's group, auspiced by Yarrabah's community controlled health service, Gurriny Yealamucka, was funded by the National Suicide Prevention Strategy for two years from August 2001, and for a further three years by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) from January 2004. The group aims to assist "*Men take their rightful role in the community, encompassing the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical aspects of life*".

The JCU/UQ partnership with Yaba Bimbie Men's Group was formed in 2001 and will continue at least until the end of 2006. This report describes the strategies, challenges and outcomes of the group resulting from the first 18 months of the three-year NHMRC-funded research project between January 2004 and June 2005. It has been written to assist the Men's group, Gurriny management, and JCU researchers work through challenges facing the Group and to progress steps towards achieving the vision that men have set for themselves within Yarrabah's existing health reform agenda.

## **Background**

In the mid 1990s, Yarrabah had one of the world's highest rates of suicide, with 22 people from a community of 2500 people having completed suicide between 1986 and June 1996. While Queensland Health's Family Life Promotion Program offered a response to the mental health needs of men of the community in times of crisis, there was community recognition of the need for a program that addressed the wider social and emotional well-being of men. In 1998, a feasibility report for a Yarrabah Multi-Purpose Primary Health Care Service listed men's health as a priority and concluded that "*There is a need to develop a regular Men's Health program and to employ a coordinator for the program*"(p39).

In 1998, concerned members of the Yarrabah community called a meeting of men and youth to discuss problems that men were experiencing, and to determine the vision to improve men's health and wellbeing. The problems facing Yarrabah men such as the impact of colonisation on men's role in the family were examined. As a result, the Yarrabah Men's Health Group was formed. For two years, the group operated on a voluntary basis to support and promote the well-being of men. Funding was then received from the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (2001-03) and National Health and Medical Research Council (2004-06).

Previous evaluation reports have already documented the main activities of the Yarrabah Men's Group in the context of the history of Yarrabah as a community (Tsey, Patterson et al 2002; Tsey, Whiteside et al 2004; Tsey, Wenitong et al 2004) and therefore will not be repeated here. What follows is a brief summary of the group's early achievements and challenges between 2001 and December 2003.

### **Early achievements of the Yaba Bimbie Men's Group**

Men's group acknowledged the resilience of Yarrabah men in surviving the disempowerment of the mission and government-controlled eras, and their adaptation to living with disparate tribes on Kungganji land. It identified values as "Do's and don'ts" by which a man who "takes his rightful role" in the community should live (Tsey, Patterson et al 2002).

Men's group identified five sets of strategic initiatives which the men believed could support and enhance their capacity to take their rightful role. These were personal development, leadership and parenting; employment; education/ training; tradition, culture and men's place; and improving access to health services. They then developed detailed strategies to address each of the broad areas.

Men's group workers were trained in the family wellbeing leadership and personal development program and delivered the program at the weekly meetings (Daly, Tsey et al 2005). Men were referred by the Magistrates Court to attend these meetings.

There were modest but significant changes in men's personal development and growth and in their response to family responsibilities, especially housework, as a result of participation in men's group. Some men reported spending more time with their children and a reduction in alcohol use.

There was a positive response to men's group by community men. They reported observing a significant change in the behaviour of men who attended the group, including seeking help, and more men thinking of their wives and children.

Men's group members developed confidence to become more involved in community activities and issues. Several men stood for local government.

There was discussion about the lack of employment options and the importance of real jobs – not CDEP. The group's emphasis on education, training and employment started to create hope that the situation might change.

An application for funding for a business development feasibility study was successful. The report recommended that landscaping, cultural dance and stone masonry businesses were all feasible.

Men's group members identified the need for a men's place to give men space and to organise and implement objectives. However, a funding application to the Department of Corrective Services to construct the necessary infrastructure to house men's group activities in Yarrabah was unsuccessful.

Several papers were published in peer reviewed journals. These contributed to the literature about the role and benefits of Indigenous men's groups and the difficulties they face (Tsey, Patterson et al 2002; 2003; 2004; Tsey, Wenitong et al 2004; Wenitong, Tsey et al 2005).

### **Early key challenges**

Yarrabah community members perceived that men's group was only for men having problems, and was not open to all men (including gay men).

Members' extended families and the wider community wanted to know more about what men's group was doing.

Workers needed training and support to undertake proactive community development work, maintain motivation, enthusiasm and a sense of hope.

There was a perception that some men were using Men's group to escape the criminal justice system.

## ***Sources of data***

As with previous reports, the main sources of information for this report include:

- participant observations,
- reflections of Men's group project workers,
- routinely collected Men's group activity data,
- some community-level statistical data, and
- interviews with information rich community people by an Indigenous man (an ex-resident of Yarrabah). A total of 13 people were interviewed including 8 men and 5 women, ranging in age from their late 20s to 70 years old. Although only 13 community people were interviewed, and only two of the men interviewed (the men's group workers) had participated regularly in men's group meetings, there was a sense that data saturation had been reached. Interviews focused on a range of issues which had been highlighted in previous reports and the responses of community members were guided by this approach. Hence the scope of data collected through interviews was influenced by the interview approach.

The final evaluation report was written in response to feedback from Men's group workers. The final report and recommendations will be presented at a planning workshop for men to promote greater awareness about Men's Group and obtain further feedback as to critical new directions for Men's Group.

The rest of this report focuses on the period January 2004 to June 2005, being the first 18 months of the 3-year NHMRC funded project.

## ***Key developments***

Key developments between January 2004 and June 2005 included:

- The development of discussion papers to guide implementation;
- Personal development, leadership and parenting-related activities;
- Employment-related activities;
- Education and training activities;
- Tradition, culture and men's place initiatives; and
- Organisational development of Gurriny Yealamucka.

## ***Discussion papers***

The Men's group strategy plan (2001) was very broad and holistic. Issues identified by Yarrabah men as being critically important for improving their health and wellbeing included personal development, leadership and parenting; greater employment and training opportunities; identity and culture; improved access to health services; and a dedicated place for men to meet and share experiences and support each other.

A set of discussion papers, was developed to guide the implementation of the plan and minimise the group's sense of being overwhelmed by its complexities.

They were intended to be used by both Men's group leaders and Gurriny management and Governing Committee to raise issues and suggest options for further development, and as tools for inter-agency advocacy on issues that Yarrabah men consider important. The papers included reviews of the previous two years of Men's group's work and outlined four strategic initiatives, namely:

- Review of the Yarrabah Men's group: achievements and challenges 2001-2003;
- Taking our rightful place: a discussion paper outlining potential economic development options for Yarrabah men;
- Yarrabah Men's group - role in economic development;
- Men's group role in providing diversionary services;
- Development of Yaba Bimbie Men's Place; and
- Yaba Bimbie Cultural Dance Group.

Based on reviews of the relevant Australian and international literature, each discussion paper provided a brief overview of the quality of the available best practice evidence for the particular strategic initiative, key challenges and opportunities to expect in adapting such approaches to Yarrabah, and practical steps that the Men's group could take to progress the implementation process. The cultural dance group paper was also used as the basis for a successful funding submission to Arts Queensland. Subsequently, a literature review for Indigenous men's groups has also been published to inform the development of Yaba Bimbie and other Indigenous men's groups (McCalman, Tsey et al 2006). However, the JCU/Men's group team need to revisit the discussion papers and determine their future usefulness, need for updating and potential distribution to other men's groups.

### **Personal development, leadership and parenting**

Men's group workers undertook several key initiatives related to this strategic area. They included:

- weekly men's group meetings,
- the delivery of the family wellbeing program at men's group and through several community organisations,
- family violence prevention,
- family wellbeing as a diversionary program for people in the justice system, and
- a successful submission for a crime prevention program for young people at risk.

Men's group meetings continued to be held weekly during 2004/05. The group operated as both a discussion and support group, with sessions either planned in advance by the group, presented by a guest speaker or delivered by a men's group worker based on one of the topics of the Family Wellbeing Program. Men's group meetings were also used to provide informal support to men for relationship issues, parenting, sorry business and community issues. We do not have consistent data about how many men have attended men's group.

The Family Wellbeing Program (stage 1) is a 30 hour empowerment training program which assists men to address issues such as basic life skills, including parenting, conflict resolution, mediation, knowledge of drug, alcohol and gambling addictions and how to deal with them, personal income management, relationships and community leadership. The delivery of Family Wellbeing in weekly men's group meetings has been unstructured and run according to the needs of men who participate. The Family Wellbeing Program has also been provided to the clients of partner organisations such as the Gindaja Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre, Yarrabah Justice Group and the Yarrabah State High School. At the Rehab and Justice Group, the Family Wellbeing Program has been run as a structured 10-week program.

Men's group has also encouraged its members to address issues of family violence. Activities have included discussions and guest speakers at men's group about the issue of family violence, meetings for domestic violence week, and advocacy for a men's shelter. Cultural dances have also been performed at Yarrabah and in Cairns on the theme of violence, the need for identity and unity, and the history of being "taken away". Dance is seen as a potent educational media: "... *direct messages straight to their heart, direct what people want. It makes them change, it's not just entertainment. Bring them up to where you are*" (Men's group worker).

In addition to this primary prevention work, men's group also runs a 10-week Family Wellbeing Program as a diversionary program for men who are referred from the courts to attend men's group. This is also available to men post-release from prison but we do not have data about how many court-referred men or ex-prisoners have attended.

In December 2004, Men's group in partnership with Yarrabah Justice Group successfully applied to the National Community Crime Prevention strategy for funding for a project to work with young Yarrabah people at risk of becoming involved in the adult criminal justice system (and their families). This project will address the needs of young people (10-17 years old) at-risk of entering the adult criminal justice system, and their families, for a strong cultural and spiritual identity/belonging that promotes healthy pro-social development. Young people and men (as fathers and role models) will utilize empowerment strategies and address issues related to the separation of stolen generation community members from their spiritual and cultural roots. The project will employ two workers to work with both men (as leaders and role models) and young people to provide life skills training and connection with cultural identity and traditional activities. It will run over three years from December 2005 and establish a new direction for men's group.

## **Employment**

Early action to address the crucial factor of training and real employment opportunities for Yarrabah men, not just CDEP 'top up' wage, created a sense of

hope for men that things might change. The subsequent proposal for a business development feasibility study (2003) explored creative alternative ways of improving employment opportunities for men by focussing on three potential small business ventures – cultural dancing, landscaping and stone masonry, and arts and crafts. It recommended that each of the proposed ventures had the potential to provide employment opportunities either as an independent business or in partnership with an outside operator or community organisation.

One of these proposals has gone forward and serves as a model for the development of other business enterprises. In 2004/05, the cultural dance group has developed a vision to become a professional dance group and has undertaken extensive planning work and (so far) limited commercial work. The group charges \$400 for a half hour performance and \$600 for an hour, for five dancers, and during the 12-month period September 2004-05, earned \$1300.

However, with support from the Indigenous Consultative Committee (ICC), the dance group has applied to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations for funding to set up the cultural dance group as a business. The funding would provide for the development of a business plan, action plan, and marketing plan for the dance troupe; and employ a business manager to mentor a dance group manager for 12 months. The outcome of this application should be available in early 2006.

### **Education and Training**

In 2002, the men prioritised a range of basic training programs including learning to drive and obtaining a boat licence, security guard training, landscaping and caregiving for local people with mental and physical disabilities. Despite approaches to several organisations responsible for these types of training, there has been no progress. The men's group has referred men to training programs run by other organizations. Guru Gulu Kungghangi Aboriginal Corporation, for example, has organized some men to undertake a hospitality course through TAFE in preparation for the proposed Reef Cove Resort at nearby False Cape. Men's Group has also provided the family wellbeing training through the school, Rehab and Justice Group but has not been actively advocating for the availability of further training for men.

### **Tradition and Culture and Men's Place**

In early 2004, the men's group formed a cultural dance troupe called Yaba Bimbie. The dance troupe includes six regular members who have weekly practice sessions and perform at schools, parties, conferences and official openings. In early 2005, men's group successfully applied for a small grant (\$4940) from Arts Queensland to employ international "edu-tainer" (educator/entertainer) David Hudson to provide a 2-day choreography workshop for 17 dancers; organise a "Family Dance Festival Day" at Yarrabah pre-school for 60 children and family members; and develop a Yaba Bimbie DVD showreel. This five month project (April to September 2005) was very successfully

acquitted and led to the application for further funding to establish Yaba Bimbie as a professional dance troupe. The David Hudson workshop, in particular, helped the group to realize their vision, and helped to build commitment and teamwork. *“He was the right person for the job” (Men’s group worker)*. The dance troupe also plans to teach dance to young people through the crime prevention project.

Hunting and fishing trips are another occasional activity that has also been important in promoting traditional culture and giving breath and life to the men’s group.

The men’s group explored a range of options for obtaining a men’s place during the 18-month period. These have included building a shack at the beach, advocating with Council to take over established community buildings, applying for funding for a purpose-built building and incorporating a men’s place within the proposed new Yarrabah Multipurpose Health Centre. None of these options has yet eventuated (although the land at Bukki was cleared in late 2005), and the issue remains a priority for the group.

### **Organisational development of Gurriny Yealamucka**

Gurriny Yealamucka has been undergoing significant organisational planning to review the Yarrabah Health Action Plan and develop a new model of care for Yarrabah. The changes have resulted in a draft partnership agreement for future directions and implementation of the Yarrabah Health Action Plan by Gurriny, Queensland Health, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council. The agreement outlines a commitment to Gurriny as lead agency in implementing an Aboriginal community control of primary health care services to Yarrabah with a target date of 30 June 2008, but no later than 30 June 2010.

In practice, the agreement commits to providing Gurriny with funding to deliver expanded and new services, additional workforce (GPs, nurses and health workers), and infrastructure including co-location within the Queensland Health Multi-Purpose Health Centre scheduled for construction in 2006, information and communication technology systems and organisational-related processes. Although men’s group was not actively working to improve men’s access to health services during the 18 month period, and the draft agreement had not significantly impacted on the men’s group, there is the potential for these changes to have a significant impact on men’s group priorities in the near future.

### ***Findings***

The findings of this evaluation fall under two broad areas:

1. Effectiveness of and support for men’s group;
2. Key challenges and strategies to overcome them.

## **Effectiveness of and support for men's group**

During the 18 month period, there was:

- Continuing personal development and growth for men;
- Identification of the root problem “no more bandaid”;
- Reclaiming and re-defining Indigenous culture, and integration of this with Christian spirituality through dance in the church and elsewhere;
- A perception that men's group may be playing a role in helping to prevent suicides;
- A perception that men's group may be helping combat family violence and prevent reoffending;
- A community response that “men's group is the right way to go”; and
- Organisational willingness to share resources.

### ***Continuing personal development and growth for men***

Previous reports have described the personal development and growth experienced by Yaba Bimbie Men's Group participants. These have included increased confidence and self-esteem, spending more time with their children, and reduction in alcohol use (Tsey, Wenitong 2004). This evaluation provided further evidence of these personal changes. *“I have seen as a result of the men's health group, men who come from prisons, mental institutions, rehab centres, drunks on the street, turn their life completely around and who have taken their role again and some don't see any more need or use for men's groups” (Men's Group Worker).*

### ***Identification of the root problem “no more bandaid”***

In sessions of the Family Wellbeing Program, men identified a root cause of Yarrabah men's problems as lack of cultural identity, spirituality and values, and that addressing the underlying factors is critical for issues such as suicidal ideation, domestic violence, alcoholism, relationship issues, and other traumas. *“Most of the problems that were talked about were related to suicides, relationships, alcohol and drugs, past traumas, community and family violence, sexual abuse, also verbal and mental abuse of one another in the community. Most community people describe this as loss of spirit because of the hopelessness and pain which we carry and keeps us in a cycle of destructive living” (Men's Group Worker).*

Another community member described this as a “loss of values” and identified men's group as an avenue for exploring the issues and restoring confidence. *“People feel that men have lost our value, or values are in the wrong place. Men's group could be a way of redefining values” (Community member).* While this may be so, men's group leaders have pointed out the equally important problem that men are not being valued or appreciated for who they are (a continuation of the historical disempowerment). Men's group is taking steps to acknowledge and appreciate themselves and others, for example monthly awards for men to recognize their abilities or achievements.

The title of this report reflects men's emphasis on their own need for self-determination to define their own problems "... you hear that all the time from our elders, our leaders they keep giving us bandaaid solutions to our problems you know. Like the government keeps saying that alcohol is your problem - this is your problem, but now we're saying this is our problem, you know. ..Like what we are doing is we wanna let the government know we are identifying our own problem - the problem is that our spirit...that's what we identified it as - the problem is that our spirit was taken away. ..."(Men's group worker).

This theme of spiritual loss and its implications for health has consistently been raised by Yarrabah community members in previous community consultations. The 1998 feasibility study, for example, states "*The Yarrabah community identifies the reclamation of spirit or responding to the experience of hopelessness as fundamental to the achievement of health improvement*" (Baird et al 1998 p 36).

Men's group has defined strategies for assisting men build a stronger identity, including raising awareness about the need for a clear spiritual and cultural identity, cultural activities (such as dance, hunting and fishing) helping men identify their "gifts", individual counseling, and addressing the rightful roles that men have in relation to women and others. "*You didn't have to be Christian to get your spirit back. It's part of our cultural identity ... We can have a spiritual life just by going to the land you know, going to your ceremonies going to initiations and all that sort of stuff and that's part of the spiritual life we have. Bringing it back so we can move on*" (Men's group worker).

### ***Reclaiming traditional culture and integration with Christian spirituality***

The link between better health outcomes with culture and a spiritual or religious practice is well documented in the literature (Hassed 2002, Peach 2003). An ethnographic study of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men cared for their health (Adams 2001), for example, found that men were weighed down by the denial of traditional roles, lack of support systems, lack of culturally appropriate services and absence of gainful employment. They used negative strategies to deal with health issues including self-destruction and non-disclosure. The only "strategy of hope" that was utilised was a return to country/culture. Like the Yarrabah men, they felt that to assist in caring for their health, they needed to go back to their roots and capture the culture they had lost. They expressed the need to have areas set aside to educate men about traditional systems, initiations and obligations of Aboriginality. The men felt that they needed to plant the seed of cultural belonging early so that younger men would be given the right advice to help structure positive adult behaviour (Adams 2001). In another study, the authors found that Canadian Aboriginal communities which had succeeded in taking steps to preserve their heritage culture and to recover some measure of control over the institutions governing their own collective future were also dramatically more successful in insulating their children against the risks of suicide (Chandler and Lalonde 2003). Finally, when

Indigenous communities in Canada and New Zealand undertook programs for socio-cultural and spiritual recovery, over a five to fifteen year period, a process of independence and significant economic recovery followed (Hazlehurst 1997).

In many Australian Indigenous communities, community members who practice a religion or spiritual belief tend to also be non-drinkers, non-smokers and to live moderate lives. Some Yaba Bimbie men's group leaders are Christian, and promote awareness in the community of the value of adopting a spiritual life. *"If you have or you live in your spiritual existence –you wouldn't need all that stuff I mean you could just live your life. You wouldn't have to gamble you know – you can beat the tempt – if you been full in the spiritual life and that's void that's missing from the men so that's what we wanna get back into that"* (Men's group worker).

The Yaba Bimbie dance troupe was formed by the Men's Group, but most of the dancers are active members of the local Anglican Church. Dance troupe members believe that the original "hurt" caused by the church suppressing Aboriginal culture in Yarrabah's mission days, can be healed by reclaiming traditional cultural practices (and particularly dance) within the church. Hence the dance troupe performs each Sunday during church services, and (with the Bishop's blessing) has undertaken several tours of churches and schools in Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland to perform and talk to young people about Australia's heritage from a Christian perspective.

The vision of the Christian men is that the dance troupe will spearhead a further cultural revival, with individual men taking a leadership role in cultural lore, healing and traditional medicine, and other traditional practices. They believe that it is important for individual men to identify their "gifts", and that Men's group can assist to build their capacity to take on leadership roles. *"Cause if you look at the men's group in a spiritual sense, if you look at it now, what you can see is men taking their role again like men starting to dance you know? We got a dance workshop here we gotta dance traditional culture coming back and in a sense, Indigenous men are starting to dance again like a celebration of that, like of our culture being revived and that. But also those other areas where we can move the souls – structure there from our ancestors you know and the way we used to be - um if we can get back to the old structure again and use that again you know to move them."* (Men's group worker).

### ***Men's group role in helping to prevent suicides***

Men's group leaders and community members believe men's group is making an important contribution to the prevention of suicide in Yarrabah. Men's group has attempted to address some of the underlying psychological determinants of health such as promoting respect for men, reclaiming their Christian spirituality and cultural expression and redressing the values by which men live and their relationships with women. In the late 1990s, Yarrabah people identified suicide as the result of socio-emotional and spiritual ill-health relating to their historical

issues and life experiences, including loss of land, loss of spirit and loss of culture (Baird et al 1998). From the peak of an average of 3-4 suicides per annum from 1991 to 1996, Yarrabah has since experienced 2 suicides in the past nine years. It is too early to say that Yarrabah has overcome the threat of suicide and it is also unreasonable to credit the men's group alone with the success achieved so far. There is however strong evidence to suggest that the Group is playing a pivotal role in addressing suicide and related issues of self esteem and identity at community level.

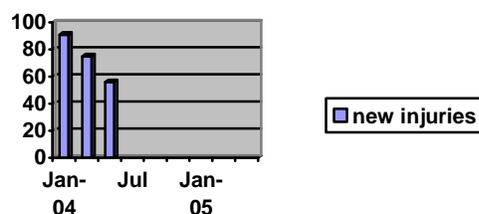
**Men's group's role in helping to combat family violence**

Men's group has been active in primary prevention to raise awareness of the issues of violence and may also be helping to prevent some men reoffend by providing the 10-week family wellbeing program to men referred by the courts. A community member described the destructive roundabout of reoffending on men and their families: "... when they go to domestic violence and they re-offend and they go back into jail. We should stop that from happening because it's just destroying them and its just sort of falling that pattern oh I'll stay out for a couple of months and I'll go in and do another six more months you know. I mean we need to keep them out of jail and here back here cause that's how their own children lose that respect for them. They see them as jail bird and sort a stay there you know" (Community member). Community members also raised the possibility that men's group could become involved with mediation with couples (such as when a man returns from jail).

Injury data for Yarrabah from Queensland Health (July 2000 to June 2004) indicates that 63% of injuries where the mechanism of injury was known were caused by assault, 32% by accident, and 5% by intentional self-harm. More than 60% of injuries occurred on Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

We have not been able to obtain more recent injury data, but this limited dataset implies a reduction in new injuries over time. Again, while it is not reasonable to credit this reduction in injury to men's group's preventive work alone, it is likely that their role in addressing family violence and support for men taking their "rightful roles" in the community may have had an impact on injury rates.

**Graph 1: New injuries, bi-monthly  
Yarrabah**



We need to obtain further statistical and qualitative data from the relevant agencies to update and expand the scope of this data. This would enable us, for

example, to further explore the relative contribution of men's group to reducing violence and/or preventing men going to prison.

### ***Men's group is the right way to go***

Preliminary results from the current evaluation of the Yarrabah Men's group confirmed that community members think that men's group is the right way to go about bringing back the role of males. Yarrabah residents feel that men have lost their values – or that values are in the wrong place, and that Men's group could be a way of redefining men's roles and values.

Community members said that it was also important that men's group start working with young people by providing male role models and alternative activities for boys (because there are not many alternatives to football). In particular, community members were keen that the men's group be involved in teaching traditional hunting and other traditional skills to children. *I think that ..our men should be given some insight to leadership and how we can be strong men, um, of this community and have a strong voice and not as a dominant voice but as ...people who can be accessed or, you know, strength and advice and you know working in conjunction with elders and stuff like that to really, to cover a whole different mind set. At the moment its more if you're not an A grade Football player then you haven't made it and if you're not in the world of the whole cycle of sex drugs and rock and roll and domestic violence then your not..* (Community member). The Crime Prevention Project will provide a structure for men's group to work with young people over the next three years.

### ***Organisations willingness to share resources***

Partner organisations have expressed a willingness to share resources with Gurriny Yealamucka and, in turn, with the men's group. *"Cause I know that it's a challenge for what's on particular men in the community and I think... there's huge potential there. That's just even in our own right ... and the other agencies can do their little bit as well to help them in whatever way we can get off the ground"* (Staff member from partner organisation).

Working in partnership with key organisations is particularly important given the broad and holistic nature of the priority issues that men have identified in their strategy plan and the obvious difficulty for men's group alone being able to address all the concerns. Staff from partner organisations spoke of their need to better understand the diverse roles of men's group and their difficulties in *"bridging the worlds"* between different organisational structures. This implies a need for men's group to clearly define or delineate their core business (services for which men's group is the best-placed service provider in Yarrabah), and areas which are not directly the responsibility of men's group but where it has a legitimate advocacy/partnership role. It would be useful for men's group to develop a communications strategy to update key partners on its ongoing work and new initiatives arising. Men's group leaders also expressed concern about

the need to develop partnership agreements with other agencies which outline mutual obligations and resourcing arrangements.

### **Key challenges and strategies to overcome them**

Key challenges facing the men's group include:

- Leadership challenges;
- Lack of community awareness of what men's group is about;
- Fluctuating attendance at men's group meetings;
- Perception that Men's group is for "good men" or "men with problems";
- The need by men to have their own place;
- The effects of Yarrabah's history on men;
- Community organizations lack of understanding of Gurriny's primary health care role; and a
- Lack of routinely collected data to monitor and evaluate activities.

### ***Leadership challenges***

The Yarrabah community has looked to men's group to provide leadership on a range of community issues such as alcohol, violence and re-offending. The need for men as leaders was seen as particularly important because of the lack of services for men in Yarrabah. Referring to domestic violence, a local woman commented: *"they never bother to look at both sides because sometimes its not always the men who are at fault, you know, like them men they got no-one to talk to"*.

During the 18-month period, several factors contributed to leadership challenges for the group. In late 2004, the men's group coordinator acted as Gurriny Manager for 3 months and subsequently had difficulty redeveloping a sphere of interest and motivation within men's group. This resulted in his resignation twice in 2005, then withdrawal on both occasions. In addition, there has been no men's group chairperson to support men's group workers since the previous chairperson was elected to Yarrabah Council in March 2004, and governing committee members have also been inconsistent.

Options for overcoming the leadership challenge might include a review and clarification of workers' roles, review of men's group's strategic areas and reprioritising of activities, and more support from Gurriny management and University partners.

### ***Lack of community awareness of what men's group is about***

Community members stated that they did not know what men's group was doing. There is confusion about understanding the direction and priorities of men's group, and particularly how the dance troupe relates to Men's Group work/priorities. *"There's a lot more issues facing men in Yarrabah now"* (Community member).

Community members also expressed concern that men's group workers were not

visible in the community, either through involvement at community events such as NAIDOC, expressing their concerns first hand, or addressing some of the critical community problems. They suggested that men's group members become more involved in community events "*We have got so many festivals going on during the year you know and you don't see men, only women out there doing whole lot of stuff and doing men's stuff, and this is where you know - they should come out and start um changing their ways*" (Community member).

Men's group could respond to these suggestions by developing a new strategy for community involvement (perhaps in conjunction with a membership drive and fundraising efforts). It could also develop a communications strategy (perhaps using a multi-media approach such as a newsletter, t-shirts, a banner etc) to raise the visibility of the group within the community.

### ***Fluctuating attendance at men's group meetings***

Not surprisingly, for a voluntary group with such a long history, levels of attendance at weekly meetings vary according to the topics being discussed, enthusiasm of men's group workers and other events, and men's other commitments with family life and the community. Men's group strategies to engage men to increase attendance at men's group have included:

- Changing the night and time for meetings;
- Picking up men earlier and ensuring that a men's group worker is at Gurriny at 7pm so men referred from the Department of Corrections can sign the attendance book and won't breach their conditions;
- Attempting to negotiate a contractual agreement with the Department of Corrections for men who were referred by the courts;
- Visitors or guest speakers;
- Becoming involved with men through other events that already occur such as football;
- Organising social events.

Community members recommended that men's group invite Yarrabah men to come to meetings. "*There's a great concern that people employed at the men's group need to actually get out off their, off their bums and start communicating and do the door to door knocking, um knocking on peoples doors and inviting them. Being first hand and getting men involved with things*" (Interviewer). They also reiterated the value of organising some activities out-of-hours and on weekends, when men are available. Producing tangible community outcomes or activities is also likely to promote further community engagement with the group.

Men's group workers responded that while occasional out-of hours activities would be beneficial, it is unrealistic to expect them to be available 24/7. Other Yarrabah men also need to take responsibility for their own choices to attend or not. Further, while attendance at meetings may fluctuate, the informal networking of men's group leaders through one on one meetings and chance conversations also has an impact on other Yarrabah men. The frequency and significance of

this informal networking should be monitored.

***Image problem of 'good men' versus 'men with problems'***

A recurring theme through the micro-evaluations of the Yaba Bimbie Men's Group has been the image problem that men's group is only for men with problems. A perception by community members that men's group was also an elite club for Christian/good men was raised repeatedly in the interviews for this evaluation and many men said they did not feel comfortable attending. Gay men, for example, would like somewhere to go, but do not attend men's group.

*"Although a lot of men come along, you know, but there's always that um there's some sort of mind set you know where people say that's only for those certain people you know. We'd like to see more people for more longer, you know, from all different social areas, to come in here and share with us" (Men's group worker).*

*"I get the perception that there's good and bad, and you have to be good to get in to the Men's group. And bad is you know, 'I am a woman basher, I am a gambler, I am an alcoholic, I smoke dope or whatever, those sorts of things. Or I am good I teetotaler, I am a Christian. And there's nothing in between there - in that grey area between there. There's a perception of ok I want to go to the Men's group but, um, you know I am reluctant because.... I want to go somewhere where me as a male I want to be supported somewhere where I can go into an environment and not be judged being one of those peoples" (Interviewer).*

Men's group leaders are aware of these views and believe that while men's group attracts a core group of leaders (some of whom are Christian) and men referred from the Corrections Service, there are also a range of other men who attend. The original community meeting which led to the first men's group grant identified priority groups as being men at risk of suicide, those in the criminal justice system and/or people with history of alcohol and drug misuse, and the broad vision statement was developed to addressing their issues. The group needs to determine whether these issues are still priorities. In fact, criticisms of men's group being "only for men with problems" may simply reflect the original priorities of the group.

There is also some evidence that Indigenous people's behaviour may be more polarized than that of non-Indigenous people. For example, a greater proportion of Indigenous than non-Indigenous people do not drink alcohol at all, but those Indigenous people who do drink, drink at harmful levels. While this may lead community people to perceive people as either "good" or "bad", men's group leaders believe that it is important that they and other community people move away from labeling and start looking at peoples' strengths and how to build on such strengths to effect positive behaviour change.

As suggested by a community member, the image problem could be addressed through ongoing education *"educating the men of this community to let them*

*know that you just come as you are.... letting them know that, you know, there is a place that is there, that is available to them for supporting whilst they're walking their journey" (Community member). However, men's group leaders have repeatedly unsuccessfully invited a range of Yarrabah men to attend men's group. It is also important to recognize that some men will rationalize their non-involvement by their perception that it is for "others", not for them.*

### ***Need for men to have their own place***

The current space at Gurriny Yealamucka is considered to be a poor facility for men as it is located at one end of the community, offers no privacy and is staffed by both men and women. Community members were very supportive of men having their own building, to be flexible in how they operate and to have an environment to address issues (such as violence) which occur out of work hours. They saw "men's place" as a neutral facility where *"its alright if we go there we can play pool we can have time out from our partners or whatever, it belongs to everybody um its not a church, its not the canteen either its somewhere we can cool it"* (Community member).

A men's place could offer men a drop-in centre or place for time out, provide a venue for men's health checks and counselling, and a place to run programs for young people to learn from elders. It could also be a place to coordinate and support the range of identified personal development, employment and business development training, and traditional/ cultural initiatives. The draft agreement that Gurriny Yealamucka co-locate within the proposed Queensland Health Multi Purpose Health Centre offers a new opportunity to advocate for a discrete men's place (with a separate entrance) within the complex.

### ***The effects of Yarrabah's history on men***

The current situation for Yarrabah men is derived from Yarrabah's history as an Anglican mission from 1892 – 1960. The mission incorporated men, women, children and infants "removed" to Yarrabah as a result of the Queensland government assimilation policy. The impact of this period, and the subsequent control by the Queensland Department of Native Affairs (1960-86) has been to devalue the role of men in the community. This was described by a community member. *"Many children came without a father so the community was largely led by the missionary and the mothers. As the boys have grown up the mothers have become the strong ones even to the extent to replacing the men in decision making, role model and vision ambition, this in turn has left men with no sense of value or achievement. Drunkenness, violence and lack of responsibility stems from this sad plight, I believe and gets worse as each generation of boys is bought into this environment. I have noticed that most of the school age children that roam aimlessly about instead of at school are boys, most children programs are either for girls or have women in charge of the programs"* (Community member).

The disempowerment of men was further worsened during the period of government control and establishment of the work for the dole Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), from the 1970s. A community member described the impact of the passive welfare economy on men's values and behaviour. *"I think when um the department, the government took over and then they started to come in with their iron rods you know... we no longer had that role ... and that's where a lot of the stress, depression set in but I think men ...had to wear that. They had to find some way of survival, so what they did - kept quiet. And then did what they had to do, but I don't think that the values have gone then. So then the alcohol started coming in, you know, there were things that been introduced and they were easy you know, but uh but the values was lost - there was when they change over"* (Community member).

The lack of "real" employment, availability of welfare payments through CDEP, and alcohol and other drugs have created a situation in Yarrabah where there is not only a lack of leadership by men but also little incentive for boys to find their own strengths. *"There's no pride or achievement in CDEP. No encouragement to find out your own ability or sense of work. Boys are growing up to look forward to life on CDEP. School is not necessary for that"* (Community member).

In response to Yarrabah's history, it is not surprising that men's self-perception and self-esteem have become tattered and that the men's group's goal is to *"restore our rightful place"*. In the current context, the group has been responding to the historical disempowerment by renegotiating relationships with a range of "others" (in particular with women, traditional owners and the community's power brokers). A men's group worker restated the group's goal as *"I like to see our goal as men's group .. to take our rightful role in society ... to see men taking the lead in those areas, you know. Move in those areas - it's not to dominate the woman or anything like that... just to take the lead again"*.

Members of the group have identified a concern about its relationship with the key powerbrokers in Yarrabah – the traditional owners (T.O's) and Council. Concerns relate to the implications for power structures of men's group members taking their *"rightful place"* *"This should be driven by the community, but people are not from the area so feel out of place. They worry about T.O.s. Connecting back - this is your place. There should be a declaration to each and every person in the community. That way we can all celebrate. It's a little thing, but then we can move ahead. Build us more closer"* (Men's group worker).

### **Community organisations lack of understanding of Gurriny's primary health care role**

Measurable outcomes from Men's Group have occurred where the group has either obtained independent funding for discrete projects (crime prevention project and cultural dance group) or in areas which are perceived to be men's group's core business (men's group meetings and family wellbeing program). There is also anecdotal evidence that men's group has also had a significant

impact on issues such as suicide prevention and family violence, although we do not have the data to quantify this. However, where key strategies have required advocacy for support to progress the issues, they have generally not progressed. Examples include critical strategies such as men's place, employment, education and training, and improving access to health services.

The cultural dance group provides a good example of a micro-initiative developed by men's group which was not supported by Council. The dance group has been very successful in engaging a group of committed young men at a grass roots level "*They were on fire. The dance group needed them to take ownership, and by them going down there, they got that ownership and matured a lot*" (Men's group worker).

Council declined to support the dance troupe's application for funding through the Indigenous Coordinating Council (ICC) citing lack of clarity on a number of issues; including a request for a memorandum of understanding between Yaba Bimbie Dance Troupe and Menmny Museum; a shared responsibility agreement outlining certification to organisations; clarity of copyright/intellectual and cultural property rights; clarity of use of the CDEP, and a questioning of whether the dance troupe fitted within Gurriny's primary health care brief. Despite some (unproductive) negotiation with Council, these issues were not resolved, and the result was that the ICC agreed to proceed with the application despite Council's lack of support.

This highlights the need to define and communicate Gurriny Yealamucka's broad primary health care approach to key partners and carefully negotiate the complexity of relationships within Yarrabah (for example, men's group issues may involve challenging the role of Yarrabah Council within the community, yet its initiatives to obtain external funding require the endorsement of Council). There is also a need to strengthen the advocacy skills and role that are critical to progressing men's group's agendas through provision of training for men's group leaders and support from Gurriny management to advocate on the Men's Group's behalf when issues require a higher level of negotiation.

#### ***Lack of routinely collected activity data to evaluate and monitor outcomes***

It has been difficult to obtain consistent data regarding weekly attendance rates, referrals of men from the courts, reoffending rates, and outcomes of the Men's group diversionary program. Collection of routine attendance statistics lapsed during the period and without these statistics it is difficult to evaluate the effect that men's group is having in the Yarrabah community.

#### ***Discussion***

Although the Yaba Bimbie men's group was established as a response to a spate of suicides and self-harm in Yarrabah in the 1990s, the group identified that the main problem facing men was a breakdown in family values. Family values, defined as caring and sharing, helping correct each others children, family

dysfunction and men's role in the family, were seen to "*underpin all the things that most men were concerned about*" (Second year operational plan, 2002).

The group's broad vision of "*restoring men's rightful role in the community, encompassing the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical aspects of life*" (to be achieved by men adhering to the values described in the "Do's and Don'ts) can be seen as a response to this problem. The broad scope of Men's Group work ultimately aims to change men's role in the Yarrabah community by empowering men to address the underlying determinants of men's health, including their personal development, relationships, parenting, leadership in the family and community, alcohol, gambling, violence, spiritual needs, tradition and culture, and employment.

The broad scope of men's group activities is consistent with the Indigenous view of health, defined as "*not just the physical wellbeing of the individual but the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community*" (National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party 1989). But the group has limited funding and men's group leaders have limited education and training to address the broad determinants of health on its own. The challenge, therefore is to determine the "bread and butter" activities of the group (those over which the group has direct control such as weekly meetings and social events) and their capacity to address broader issues through advocacy.

This evaluation report has been workshopped with Yaba Bimbie men's group workers/leaders to both ensure its accuracy and to identify key priority issues. As a result several of the challenges identified are already being addressed, for example, a newsletter was developed and distributed in Yarrabah to inform community members of men's group activities, men's group leaders decided to present individual men with awards to recognise their achievements and abilities, and all three men's group workers enrolled in formal education programs (in health promotion and community development). These examples highlight the importance of participatory action research in ensuring that issues are identified and addressed as an integral part of the research. While some key issues have required immediate attention, others require a longer term response. Community empowerment typically takes at least seven years to generate significant social and policy change (Laverack and Labonte 2000).

The new model of care for health service delivery in Yarrabah and new role for Gurriny Yealamucka will provide opportunities for men's group to reposition itself. The men's health portfolio within this new structure is currently envisaged to incorporate tradition and culture, education, men's shelter, support for community business enterprises, youth services and healthy life promotion. However, it may be useful for the group to explicitly adopt a broader health promotion framework for planning or structuring its future activities, and to negotiate its own agenda within a new Gurriny structure. A health promotion framework could provide a more explicit pathway for men's group to obtain health funding resources while

still enabling men’s (and women’s) groups to address the wider structures and actions that promote health by “*enhancing the capacity of individuals and communities to take control over their lives and improve their health*” (Ottawa Charter 1986). The capacity of Men’s Group to apply health promotion concepts to its work will be enhanced by the enrolment of two of the Men’s group workers in the Graduate Diploma of Indigenous Health Promotion at Sydney University in 2006, and the third in a community development training program.

The key action areas for health promotion, as they relate to the Yaba Bimbie Men’s Group are:

- Action 1: Promoting health and wellbeing through healthy public policy by putting health on the agenda of local council, government departments, and the private sector for Men’s Group priority issues to ensure policy makers are aware of the health consequences of their decisions and accept their responsibilities for health.
- Action 2: Creating supportive environments by making changes towards men’s health and wellbeing including men taking care of each other and the community.
- Action 3: Strengthening community action for health by empowering men to take ownership and control of their own efforts and destinies including defining priorities, making decisions, planning strategies and implementing them to achieve better health for Yarrabah men.
- Action 4: Developing the personal skills of Yarrabah men by moving beyond the transmission of information to develop personal, social and political skills which enable individuals to promote health and wellbeing.
- Action 5: Reorienting health services by working in partnership to refocus attention beyond curative and clinical services towards the goal of health gain for Yarrabah men (Ottawa Charter 1986).

The findings of this report relate to the work of men’s group over the eighteen month period from January 2004 and June 2005, but builds on the previous work of the group and will be further developed during the remaining NHMRC funded period (and beyond). The table below presents a summary of the key strategies and outcomes of Men’s Group since 1998 using the Ottawa Charter framework. The table demonstrates both the broad nature of men’s group activities and the group’s achievements towards its vision. It can be difficult to measure empowerment outcomes, and to attribute them to particular interventions (Laverack and Labonte 2000), hence the outcomes listed in the table may not fully describe the achievements of the group.

<b>Health Promotion Actions</b>	<b>Men’s Group Strategies</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Building healthy public policy	Involvement in a range of community issues with partner organisations and committees eg housing action group,	Partner organisations expressed a willingness to share resources with Gurriny and men’s group.

	<p>family violence activities, school parent committee. MOU with Department of Community Corrections to provide a diversionary program for men convicted in the courts. Contributions to Alcohol Management Plan.</p>	<p>Contributed to increased awareness of housing issues – Bukki area was included on the town plan. May have helped to prevent some men re-offend and supported some men not to go to prison.</p>
<p>Creating supportive environments</p>	<p>Held weekly men's group meetings. Organised social events. Coordinated hunting and fishing trips. Development of a Yaba Bimbie dance troupe, including choreography training, a "family dance festival day" and development of a DVD showreel. Dance performances to raise awareness of a range of community issues. Informal support for men with relationship issues, parenting, sorry business and community issues. Strategies to assist men build a stronger self-esteem and identity including identifying "gifts", cultural activities, counselling, and recognition of abilities and achievements. Attempts to reclaim self-determination including renegotiating power relationships with women, traditional owners and the community's power brokers. Crime prevention project for young people at risk (from 2006). Use of the media to inform the wider community of men's group activities and issues. Networking with other Indigenous Men's Groups.</p>	<p>Persistence of men's group since 1998. Use of participatory action research (PAR) and documentation of outcomes led to employment of 2 Men's Group workers for 3 years through NHMRC funding and a further Men's Group worker through CDEP. Recognition of the impact of Yarrabah's history on men. Identification of the root cause of men's problems as "loss of spirit" and "loss of values". Identification of values by which a Yarrabah man who "takes his rightful role" can be recognised. These were listed as "Do's and don'ts" and include behaviours related to personal development, relationships, parenting, leadership in the family and community, alcohol, gambling, violence, spiritual needs, tradition and culture, and employment. Community members think that men's group is the right way to go about bringing back the role of males. Modest but significant changes in men's response to family responsibilities, especially housework. Some men reported spending more time with their children. Employment of two Crime Prevention Workers for 3 years (from 2006).</p>
<p>Developing community action</p>	<p>Some men became more involved in community issues and several stood for local government. Discussions and activities to address family violence. Business development feasibility study was conducted and one small business opportunity is being pursued. Explored options for obtaining a "men's place". Involvement in community events.</p>	<p>Positive response to the group by the community. Raised awareness about the issues of family violence. A sense of hope among men's group members that training and employment options might increase. Some employment and income for Yaba Bimbie dancers. May have contributed to the dramatic decline in suicide in Yarrabah. May have contributed to the apparent decline in injury in the community. Raised awareness, support and land for a community "men's place".</p>
<p>Increasing personal skills</p>	<p>Trained men in the Family Wellbeing Empowerment Program through men's group, Gindaja Alcohol Rehabilitation</p>	<p>Modest but significant changes in men's personal development and growth. Increased confidence and self-esteem, and</p>

	Centre, Justice Group and Yarrabah State School. Used the Family Wellbeing Program as a diversionary program for men referred by the courts. Teaching dance to men and boys. Men's group workers trained in Family Wellbeing stages 1-5; community development, computer skills, submission and report writing, governance training and counselling skills.	more men seeking help. Some men reported a reduction in alcohol use. Men and boys trained in cultural dance. Significant enhancements in the skills and abilities of men's group workers including improved confidence, literacy and community development skills.
Reorienting the health system	Provision of health information through men's group meetings Prevention and early intervention activities eg family violence awareness, counselling. Attempts to improve men's access to health services by developing a men's place.	Use of participatory action research (PAR) and documentation of outcomes has contributed towards the Yarrabah Partnership Agreement i.e.gradual transitioning of primary health care services to Gurriny Yealamucka as lead agency for community control of health services in Yarrabah.

As the table summarises, Yaba Bimbie Men's Group has achieved considerable outcomes, particularly in those areas where the group acts directly with Yarrabah men (rather than through advocacy). Individual members of the group have reported significant personal changes towards living according to the "Do's and Don'ts", there has been a concerted effort to explore the underlying determinants of health and wellbeing, some changes in health outcomes (such as suicide and family violence) are indicated, and there is a positive response to the group by the Yarrabah community. To further progress the work of men's group, both immediate and longer term issues need to be considered.

## ***Recommendations***

### **Recommendations for immediate action**

Recommendations to the end of 2006 include:

1. Men's group needs to ensure its own sustainability. This could occur through negotiations (by Gurriny management) with the Commonwealth and State Health Departments for funding for the two Men's Health Worker positions, as early as possible since the National Health and Medical Research Council funding for the two positions will run out on 31 December 2006.
2. Men's group should consider strategies to strengthen the participation and involvement of Yarrabah men in the group (and hence the relevance and reach of strategies, community support and men's group credibility). This could be achieved by re-establishment of a men's group committee with representation from the heads of each of the key families as community leaders.

3. Men's group needs to coordinate a meeting of community men to revise and update the Yaba Bimbie men's group strategic plan, being mindful of the new opportunities available and challenges facing Men's group.
4. Men's group leaders need to strengthen the group's ability to advocate for critical issues. This may include enhanced support from Gurriny management, and/or advocacy training for men's group workers and committee members.
5. Men's group needs to review whether it should continue to focus on the issues of those men at particular risk of suicide (including men who are heavy drinkers, those with a history of violence and men in the Corrections system); or the broader community of Yarrabah men.
6. The men's group leaders could also consider whether adopting a health promotion approach would assist with structuring men's group strategies and maximise opportunities for further funding. The advantages and potential pitfalls in doing so will be discussed in a separate position paper in the context of Gurriny's model of primary health care.
7. Key men's group strategies need to be pursued, at least until the end of 2006, including:
  - the continued coordination of active, interesting men's group meetings,
  - social and community events,
  - hunting and fishing trips,
  - provision of the Family Wellbeing Program for both men diverted by the courts and others,
  - Yaba Bimbie Dance Troupe,
  - men's place,
  - the crime prevention project,
  - commitments to training programs (in health promotion and community development), and
  - monthly PAR meetings with JCU researchers.
8. Men's group should reinstate the collection of consistent data regarding weekly attendance rates, referrals of men from the courts, reoffending rates, and outcomes of the Men's group diversionary program within the context of Gurriny Yealamucka's health information system. The Priority Driven Research (PDR) and Tools Projects should contribute to data collection.

### **Longer term recommendations**

Recommendations for action beyond 2006 (using the Ottawa Charter framework) include:

## **Action area 1: Promoting health and wellbeing through healthy public policy**

1. Men's group/Gurriny management to advocate to the Department of Community Corrections to recognize, support and resource Men's Group's preventive work to reduce re-offending and keep men out of the criminal justice system. The memorandum of understanding between the Department of Corrections and Yaba Bimbie Men's Group should be reviewed to update the mutual responsibilities and resourcing agreements.
2. Men's group/Gurriny management could advocate that the Yarrabah schools should incorporate more extensive language and culture programs within their school programs (possibly through the Crime Prevention Program).
3. JCU to consider undertaking micro evaluation to determine whether a community men's group can influence the long term health of men who are involved in the criminal justice system. It should include the effectiveness of court support and diversionary programs in meeting individual men's needs and preventing re-offending; the health consequences of correctional outcomes and the cost effectiveness of Men's Groups as a crime prevention and diversionary strategy.
4. The JCU/Yaba Bimbie team to revisit the discussion papers and determine their future usefulness for supporting Yaba Bimbie men's group's advocacy role, need for updating and potential distribution to other men's groups. They may be useful for other men's groups and (with the published papers) could be posted on either a Gurriny website (not yet developed) or the "Aboriginal and Islander Men's Forum' website.

## **Action area 2: Creating supportive environments by making changes towards health and wellbeing**

1. Men's group to consider designing a billboard sign (and obtaining Council permission for it's erection) at the entrance to Yarrabah welcoming traditional and historical people and visitors to Kungganji land. This would serve as a symbolic gesture of reconciliation between all Yarrabah peoples.
2. Men's group to increase men's group's visibility at community events through a multi-media approach including displays, banners, shirts etc and the presence of men's group workers. This could occur in conjunction with fund raising activities.
3. Men's group to consider developing a website to showcase the achievements of men's group.

4. Men's group to develop a quarterly newsletter to update key partners and community members on its ongoing work and new initiatives arising.
5. Men's Group should design a simple log sheet for recording the number of their informal networking contacts. One week each quarter, men's group leaders could tick the log sheet for each time they talk to either an Indigenous adult or young person.

### **Action area 3: Strengthening community action for health**

1. Men's group to continue to advocate for men's self-determination, to acknowledge and appreciate the abilities and achievements of men, and to delegate more responsibilities to members. The focus of community meetings should be on building self-esteem and focusing on behaviours rather than labeling types of people.
2. Men's group to continue to pursue options for locating a "men's place" in Yarrabah including either advocating for a discrete men's space within the new multipurpose health service and/or apply for funding for a purpose-built building. Actions could include requesting permission from Yarrabah Council's CDEP Coordinator for support to clear the land for men's place and provide tools for building.
3. Men's group leaders to follow up suggestions for community action that arise from the Family Wellbeing Program.
4. Men's group to consider its role and strategies for spearheading a cultural revival in Yarrabah (including links with existing cultural resources such as the Arts Centre and Menmuny Museum).
5. Men's group could consider a further development of a family violence strategy including male leaders role in addressing family violence (violence is not acceptable).
6. Men's group should consider how they could assist with mediation with couples (such as when a men returns from jail).
7. Men's group to consider further development of an alcohol strategy including monitoring consumption as a group, a peer pressure campaign, taking control of self and accountability.
8. JCU/men's group to consider obtaining statistical and qualitative data from the relevant agencies to explore the relative contribution of men's group in family violence/crime prevention and suicide prevention areas. This should include data for weekly attendance rates, referrals of men from the

#### **Action area 4: Developing the personal skills of Yarrabah men**

1. Men's group to assess the training needs of Yarrabah men and facilitate training programs where appropriate eg computer and literacy skills. Continue to refer men to training programs facilitated by other organizations.
2. Men's group to ensure that the learnings from the development of the Yaba Bimbie dance business are available to other men who may wish to develop small business enterprises. Practical support could include provision of information about financial services and support networks.
3. Yaba Bimbie dance group/men's group could choreograph the Family Wellbeing Program topics through dance and teaching the program to young people through schools or the crime prevention project (this could form the basis of a further funding submission).

#### **Action area 5: Reorienting health services**

1. Men's group/Gurriny management to advocate to Queensland Health to consider recruiting and retaining Indigenous male health workers to improve access to health services for Indigenous men.
2. Men's group could play an active role in encouraging and supporting men to become health workers (active recruitment and support).
3. Through Gurriny and the Partnership process, Men's Group could become the main conduit or channel for improving access to health services for men.

## References

- AIHW, and Australian Bureau of. Statistics (2001). The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Canberra.
- Baird, L., Mick-Ramsamy, L., Percy, F. (1998). Yarrabah Community Multi-Purpose Primary health Care Service Feasibility Study. Final Report Dec 1998.
- Daly B., Tsey K., Whiteside M., Baird, L., Kingsburra S., Jackson K., Baird B., Patterson D., Warta D., Cadet-James Y., Wilson A., and Fagan R. (2005) "We're the talk of the town": facilitating mastery and control in Indigenous communities. An evaluation of a family Wellbeing" personal and community development project in Yarrabah. Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service Yarrabah and University of Queensland school of Population health Cairns, April 2005.
- Hassed C. (2002) Are we approaching mental health in the right spirit? *Aussienet* 2002. p10-12.
- Laverack G and Labonte R (2000) A planning framework for community empowerment goals within health promotion. *Health Policy and Planning*; 15(3): 255-262.
- McCalman, J., Tsey, K., Wenitong, M., Whiteside, M., Haswell, M., Cadet James, Y., Wilson, A. (2006) Indigenous Men's Groups: A literature review. School of Indigenous Australian Studies and School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University.
- McCalman, J., Tsey, K., Wenitong, M., Ahkee, D., Jia, A., Ambrum D., and Wilson, A. (2006) "Doing good things for men" Ma'ddaimba-Balas Men's Group Evaluation Report January 2004 – June 2005. School of Indigenous Australian Studies and School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, James Cook University.
- Peach H.G. (2003) Religion, spirituality and health: how should Australia's medical professionals respond? *Medical Journal of Australia* 178 (2): 86-88.
- Spry, F. (1999). "Growing up as an Indigenous male" First National Indigenous Male Health Convention 1999. Ross River Central Australia.
- SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) (2005). Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage. Key indicators 2005. Commonwealth of Australia 2005.
- Tsey, K., D. Patterson, et al. (2002). "Indigenous men taking their rightful place in society? A preliminary analysis of a participatory action research process with Yarrabah Men's Health Group." *Australian Journal of Rural Health* 10: 278-284.
- Tsey, K., Patterson, D., Whiteside, M., Baird, L., Baird, B. & Tsey, K. (2003). Indigenous men taking their rightful place in society? A follow-up report. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 10(6): 278-284.
- Tsey, K., Patterson, D., Whiteside, Baird, L, Baird, B & Tsey, K. (2004). A micro analysis of a participatory action research process with a rural Aboriginal men's health group. *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 10(1): 64-71.
- Tsey, K., Wenitong, M., McCalman, J., Baird, L., Patterson, D. Baird, B., Whiteside, M. Fagan, R., Cadet-James, Y. & Wilson, A. (2004). A Participatory Action Research Process with a rural Indigenous Men's group: monitoring and reinforcing change, *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 10 (3): 130-136
- Wenitong, M., Tsey, K., McCalman, J., Fagan, R., Baird, L., Patterson, D., Baird, B., Whiteside, M., Cadet-James, Y., Wilson, A., Social determinants of health, rural Aboriginal men and participatory action research in Queensland, Australia. Ed: Cant G., Goodall, A., Inns, J.

Discourses and Silences. Indigenous Peoples, Risks and resistance. Christchurch, New Zealand 2005. Chapter 21. p277-287.

Working Party of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Health & Well Being Reference Committee (2003). A national framework for improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Males. Canberra, Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health: 1-42.

World Health Organisation (WHO) and Canadian Public Health Association. Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. Ottawa. WHO. 1986. <http://www.who.int/hpr/archive/docs/ottawa.html>