



# **Quop Maaman: Aboriginal Fathering Project**

## **Final report of activities**

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## **‘Nidja Noongar boodjar gnulla nyininy’**

### **This is Noongar country we are sitting in**

#### **Introduction**

Being a Noongar maaman (man and father) involved in raising koorlangka (children) brings lots of happiness and excitement, along with many challenges. Noongar maaman have always helped one another learn about the fathering role and how to be effective in the role. Indeed one of the key features about Noongar traditions is that our moort (family) help out so that men are not alone when it comes to looking after kids. Many changes imposed on us by Wedjela (non-Aboriginal people) have made it hard for Aboriginal men to bring up their kids with good support. Our old people had kids taken from them, were punished for speaking language and practicing culture and had their authority to be maaman as fathers, uncles, brothers and pops stripped by governments. Despite this, our history is also full of maaman who have quietly maintained their status as boordier (leaders and bosses) and who have been inspirational as maaman (fathers, uncles and pops). They have allowed the old karla mia (home fires) to continue to burn for many moorditj maaman (strong men). Today this karl (fire) for kaarnya maaman (respectful fathering) is heating up again and many Noongar maaman (fathers) are getting together to support young men as they step into roles that involve looking after koorlangka (children).

The Aboriginal Fathering workshop series has been designed by Noongar men for Noongar men. It has been set up to provide maaman (father) with a chance to get together and try some new and old activities with their koorlangka (children). The goal is to support Noongar men as they work at katatjiny bidi (go along to become learned and do good) for their koorlangka (children).

This short report describes the development of a set of workshop resources to support Noongar maaman (fathering). It describes the project objectives and plan and sets out some of the themes about Aboriginal fathering identified in the literature. It also explains the process used in meeting and working with Noongar men, outlines the workshop structure, describes the Noongar cultural framework adopted, and reports on the evaluation of the work.

## The project – objectives and plan

The Quop Maaman: Aboriginal Fathering Project was developed by Moodjar Consultancy on behalf of The Fathering Project (<http://thefatheringproject.org>). The following activities were undertaken for the project.

The Quop Maaman Project had the following aims:

- 1 To create an Aboriginal fathering program based on appropriate research and consultation
- 2 To create DVD resources to support the program
- 3 To conduct a pilot of the program with appropriate evaluation
- 4 To create a set of outcomes that would lead to further investment into research and program delivery.

Key elements in the scope of work are set out in the following table:

<b>Key activity &amp; output</b>	<b>Description</b>
Convene project steering group (group meeting)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Plan, review project and the men to be invited to workshops</li><li>2) Review process</li><li>3) Review proposed program</li></ol>
Desktop research into Aboriginal Fathering and fathering program (10,000 word written document)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• History of Aboriginal fathering and ‘parenting’</li><li>• Definition of good fathering</li><li>• Cultural elements</li><li>• Current programs</li><li>• Features of good fathering and features of success in fathering programs</li><li>• Essential program components for this project</li><li>• Reviewing the work</li></ul>
Convene workshop with Noongar men	Eight men to be invited to attend a full-day workshop
Interviews of individual men	Up to eight men are invited for interviews

Visit up to 3 programs with elements of fathering	Field visits to see first hand programs, understand structure, review achievements and film elements on location
Production of short films	Produce a set of videos for use and testing in pilot program
Design of pilot program	Design an Aboriginal fathering program suitable for use in conducting pilot program
Carry out pilot	Host a pilot program with up to ten men and boys
Review of pilot program	Prepare and carry out a short evaluation process for pilot program
Launch of workshop content including video and other material	Host an event to launch the project content
Write report	Provide a written report suitable for academic publishing. Report to detail a future Aboriginal Fathering Program – this will achieve a project aim. Provide a DVD to assist in the delivery of the Aboriginal Fathering Program to achieve project aims.

Note: in the early stages of planning for this project it was agreed that the project team would concentrate attention on Aboriginal fathers of the Southwest of Western Australia. The reasons for this included: 1. value of being a strong ‘cultural’ workshop series, 2. size and expense of covering state or nation was prohibitive given the budget available, and, 3. accessibility of strong Noongar maaman (men) within the Perth areas.

### **Reviewing the literature**

The first task completed was a review of the literature concerned with Aboriginal fathering globally. The draft literature review was completed early in the project. This work allowed the team to frame their initial discussions with Noongar men and was helpful in setting up filmed interviews. It continued to be helpful in shaping the design of

the set of resources for the workshop series. Content in the literature review was revisited at the completion of meetings with Noongar men. The review contributed to the material in seven information sheets that are included in the workshop resource kit.

Key themes explored in this work includes:

- Fathering and Noongar culture and traditions
- Why do we need to support Noongar maaman (fathers)?
- The importance of culture, country and language
- The contributions of Noongar maaman – some good stories
- Indigenous men on the move again
- Organisations involved in supporting Aboriginal fathers
- Features of successful Fathering Programs.

The content of this review of the literature will also help create at least one conference paper and published journal article. Note: members of the team have been invited to present at the Lowitja Institute Conference in Melbourne, November 2016.

### **The process and meetings**

To assist in the process of the design and testing of resources for an Aboriginal fathering workshop series, four separate meetings were held with groups of Aboriginal men. The first of these was held with seven men at the Claremont Campus of UWA in December 2015. The discussion of the session was filmed and included men talking about:

- Stories of Aboriginal men who have acted as strong fathers
- The differences between Aboriginal fathering and non-Aboriginal fathering
- The main challenges and difficulties facing Aboriginal fathers
- Programs, activities and supports that help Aboriginal men become stronger fathers
- The things young Aboriginal men need in order to learn how to become good fathers
- The qualities of a strong Aboriginal father.

Men were also invited to become involved in the project by having their accounts filmed over the following months. All the men indicated their willingness to be involved.

The key themes that emerged from the first session included:

- **Quop boodjar, quop maaman:** Healthy country is central for healthy men
- **Moort karnyiny gnulla quop:** Family and respectful values keeps us good
- **Boola Nyungar wangkiny yarn:** Noongar language and talking is critical
- **Ni ngarlang katatjiny wangkiny boondo:** Listening to and practicing culture and language is central
- **Ngulla deman wer dembart boorda baranginy koorlangka ngulla koorlangka quop karnya minniny wangkiny katatjiny boorda:** Old people carrying young people respectfully through knowledge (informing them by and by)
- **Buranginy katatjiny moordtij boordier maaman kura, yeye:** learning from the successful lessons of strong male leaders from yesterday and today.

From January to July 2016 six Noongar men and four of their children were involved in filming for the production of short films. The set of six clear themes that emerged from the interviews and the video footage would be used for short video productions as well as Noongar conceptual themes for a workshop series. The videos were specifically designed for use within this conceptual framework.

When Noongar men were asked to explain what Noongar maaman (fathering) looked like to them, they described it in the following ways:

PHILLIP COLLARD: Dad taught me that when you work you can get whatever you want. That's what I teach my children.

A lot learned from Dad was observed. Role modelling, learned hard work, integrity and dignity ... Dad was an embracing loving, nurturing man. We never grew up thinking you had to be tough and hard – without being loving and caring.

The biggest thing you learned from fathers and uncles was about caring. Going out hunting the food was divided up and distributed. Caring was so important.

DARRYL KICKETT: Another thing was understanding your own family tree. How you behave and speak to each other with dignity and respect. You teach how young people belong to this big Noongar club ... who their moort (family) are.

We was taught (by our fathers) caring, sharing and how to hunt. We were taught about moort (family).

ORAL MCGUIRE: Four questions are critical for Noongar fathers to teach: 1) who you are; 2) where you come from; 3) who you know and are connected to; 4) where you fit in.

DARRYL KICKETT: And because we were born into the family it's so important that we learn how to belong to it. Because belonging is caring and love if we aren't given that then how can we give it to our children and grandchildren if we have them? Noongar fathers are responsible for this.

We went out a lot with our fathers and uncles, we went out hunting, catching kangaroos and rabbits and hunting with dogs. We went to school sure, but on weekends, we went off with our fathers, uncles and our aunties, we learnt about culture, we learned about language, we learned about hunting and skin a kangaroo, you know? And then the thing about sharing, that kangaroo is really not yours, you gotta share it with other people, if you don't share it they'll pay you back.

INGRID CUMMING: Dad taught me what I wanted to be in life through his passion, the way he listened, the importance of family values. This cultural identity is what helped me turn my life around.

LEN COLLARD: The model of fathering is to raise the awareness of young people about who's who and reinforce that, that's just core business. That'll be

the challenge for the future, but that's part of the journey of Noongar fathering I think.

ORAL MCGUIRE: Being a father is a wonderful experience, for the first time particularly, but there's obviously a very serious responsibility with it. Being a father is not just about having a child, it's about knowing you're responsible for another human being in your life. So to me it involves being strong about family values, being strong about the things both as a man, as a Noongar, as an Aboriginal person as an Australian citizen.

SEALIN GARLETT: We always learnt to respect the bush, don't harm the bush, don't disrespect the bush. If you were to get food don't waste it, if you only want two kangaroos, just get enough for your family to look after, don't abuse it by getting more than you need to and wasting it because they used to say that that was warra (bad), we was told to respect the land, we were told when to burn, when it was time to burn, how to watch when the seasons come and where the two winds come that actually help to do that and they told us how to, if you go to a strange bush how to talk in language to tell other fellas who you is, who are your relations, and never take things for granted, you know if you look after the bush the bush will look after you.

In June 2014 draft versions of the videos and series of were presented back to a group of 11 men in a four-hour workshop. Four of these men had featured on the video footage and had participated in earlier discussion. These men were asked to watch six videos built around the following themes

- Wangkiny wer maaman – language and fathering
- Moort wer maaman – family and fathering
- Bulla maaman – many fathers
- Boodjar wer maaman – country and fathering
- Katatjiny wer maaman – learning and fathering
- Boorda djinanginy – looking forward into the future

A set of activities was also presented and the men were asked to discuss the strengths, weaknesses and merits of each and were invited to make suggestions for new ideas. The workshop offered a strong opportunity for the men to extend their involvement in the creative development and design of a workshop that is Noongar-relevant and Noongar-centric.

The feedback was then carefully incorporated into the design and writing of the final set of resources. The workshop series (outlined in detail in a set of instructions for facilitators) includes the following themes, activities and videos.

<b>Workshop</b>	<b>Noongar concepts and themes</b>
1	<b>Wanjoo wanjoo – welcome and introductions</b>
	Activity: Ngeern nguny – Who am I?
	Activity: Maaman wangkiny – Words for fathering and what they do
	Video: ‘Wangka – The importance of Noongar language’
	A gift for maaman (men)
2	<b>Moortaluniny ngeern nguny doorndookaniny nguny moort – Who is my family and how do I connect to my relations?</b>
	Video: ‘Moort – The importance of family and connections’
	Activity: Moortaluniny – who is my family and community?
	Activity: Bulla maaman – many fathers or dads
	Video: ‘Boola Maaman – many fathers’
3	<b>Nyinniny boodjar darboort – sitting quietly on country</b>
	Video: ‘Boodjar – the importance of Noongar country’
	Activity: Maia wangkiny nitja boodjar – singing out and communicating to country
	Activity: Nyinniny boodjar darboort – sitting quietly on country
4	<b>Katatjiny yarn koorl quop wangkiny ngulluck maaman – telling stories about our good fathers</b>
	Activity: Katatjiny koorl woornbininy – making things and going

	along together
	Video: 'Katatjiny – learning and fathering'
	Activity: Daabakarn katatjiny quop maaman – steady stories about good healing men
5	<b>Maia wangkiny quop maaman – singing and talking up good fathering</b>
	Activity: Maia wangkiny maaman – singing up good fathering
	Video: 'Gina Williams – Maambart'
	Activity: Milli milli benanginy quop maaman – picturing good fathering using drawings
6	<b>Ngulluckiny boorda koorliny – We are going together into the future</b>
	Activity: Koorliny koodjal bidi – going two pathways
	Activity: Quop maaman – elements of good fathering
	Activity: Boordawan nguny djinanginy noonar – I will see you later on
	Video: 'Boorda djinanginy – looking forward into the future'
	Activity: Ngarniny damper, meriny dartj – having a feed of bread, fruit, vegetables and meat

In addition, the group of men were invited to discuss how the workshop series could/should be carried out. Recommendations included the following:

- As this workshop series is grounded in a Noongar 'cultural framework' it is critical that facilitators are those Noongar men who are senior cultural men with a solid knowledge of moort (family) systems, boodjar (how country is important), wangkiny (language and Noongar concepts).

While workshop resources need to be designed to support senior cultural Noongar maaman (men) it cannot be assumed that simply anyone with access to and/or knowledge of the resources can facilitate this work.

- Ideally the workshop series should be either offered as a number (i.e. six) of short workshops of no more than two hours duration or as part of an ‘on-country’ camp. Men consistently expressed the view that being ‘on-country’ is a critical part of the features of successful work with Noongar maaman (men) and their koorlangka (children).
- Another crucial element in the work must be key use and involvement with food so that men and their children follow old practices of doing parenting while providing for their children and talking around food and fire.

After changes and additional suggestions for the second group of men had been incorporated, a third workshop was convened with six men invited to bring a young person to ‘test out’ or trial the Noongar maaman program. This session (with 12 men) ran over five hours and was facilitated by one of the men (not from the project team) who had been involved in each of the workshops and in the filming. As well as testing out the resources, the third workshop provided the opportunity to test out the accessibility of the program to a facilitator not directly involved in design work.

During the course of the workshop those present were asked to provide feedback on the value of each activity and video, and in the final session the group was asked to talk about the strengths and weakness. At the conclusion, each individual was invited to note final evaluation remarks on a question sheet designed for this purpose.

After the third workshop, six men met to run over a final draft of the videos and workshop content.

Finally the videos, activities and information sheets were redrafted with feedback incorporated into the design of the workshop plan.

## **The resources**

Resources developed and included as part of the ‘products’ of the Noongar Maaman Project include:

- 6 short videos
  - ‘Wangkiny – language and fathering’
  - ‘Moort – family and fathering’
  - ‘Bulla maaman – many fathers’
  - ‘Boodjar – country and fathering’
  - ‘Katatjiny – learning and fathering’
  - ‘Boorda djinanginy – looking forward into the future’
- Facilitator’s guide for the workshop (including details about the activities, structure and rationale)
- 7 information sheets
  - Fathering and Noongar culture and traditions
  - Why do we need to support Noongar maaman (fathers)?
  - The importance of culture, country and language
  - The contributions of Noongar maaman – some good stories
  - Indigenous men on the move again
  - Organisations involved in supporting Aboriginal fathers
  - Features of successful Fathering Programs
- A PowerPoint for the workshops

## **Evaluation of the work**

It was decided early to adopt a ‘formative’ evaluation design, allowing for a constant flow of feedback between the project team, men consulted and those who were specifically recruited to trial the workshop materials. In this way a formative evaluation allowed for judging the worth of the work while the program activities and design were forming or in progress. As videos were being edited those involved were asked to offer feedback. As meetings progressed activities were suggested, tested and redesigned. At least two of the project team took detailed notes during sessions with the men. This allowed for a strong element of co-designing to emerge. As mentioned, at the conclusion of the trial workshop men and young people were invited to provide further feedback. This allowed for a

‘summative’ evaluation of the work, judging the merit of the workshops at the end.

At the conclusion of the workshop trial ten men and young people provided the following feedback:

- On rating the session on a scale of zero to five (with five being outstanding), 8 out of 10 rated it five and 2 out of 10 rated it four.
- On noting highlights of the sessions: ‘connecting families exercise’ x 3, ‘seeing the videos’ x 2, ‘language and culture’ x 4, ‘seeing my people have a yarn’ x 1.
- On commenting on what they had learned: ‘family connections x 3’, ‘what was then and what is now’, ‘seeing elders talk on video’, ‘some new language’ x 3, ‘different views on fathering’, ‘bit more on other family’.
- On which activities were useful and why: ‘all of them’ x 6, ‘on people and families’ x 4, ‘listening to videos’.
- On things that could be different: ‘nothing’ x 6, ‘perhaps have a plan in place for those who are not confident speakers’, ‘get some more elderly people involved like pops’, ‘put this into schools’, ‘more yarning and interaction’ x 2.
- On which videos were useful men said: ‘all of them’ x 8, ‘going forward’, ‘many fathers’.
- On suggestions about how to build on the videos: ‘no suggestions’, ‘build more’, ‘feature a few more families’ x 2, ‘maybe do a video with boys and men that have had little cultural experience’.
- On other suggestions for an Aboriginal fathering program: ‘taking it into corrections centres’, ‘more cultural activities’ x 2, ‘putting a song and film together’, ‘be aware of the different circumstances men may have in their lives’.

Although this part of the evaluation was largely summative (towards the end of the process) it still proved useful in reshaping the design and final features of the resource package. All the feedback was used to shape another meeting with men and helped with the editing of the videos and design of activities. For example: comments about the use of music in the videos were taken on and footage and images from more senior people have now been included in videos; in consultation with the last group of men two additional activities with a strong emphasis on culture and country have been included; plans for activities have been adjusted to include opportunities for more ‘yarning’ sessions for men.

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Anthony Lawrence	Ashley Pickett	Brian Pickett

## **Guidelines**

- As this workshop series is grounded in a Noongar ‘cultural framework’ it is critical that facilitators are Noongar men who are senior cultural men with a solid knowledge of moort (family) systems, boodjar (how country is important), wangkiny (language and Noongar concepts).

While workshop resources need to be designed to support senior cultural Noongar maaman (men) it cannot be assumed that simply anyone with access to and/or knowledge of the resources can facilitate this work.

## **Recommendations**

- Ideally the workshop series should be either offered as a number (i.e. six) of short workshops of no more than two hours duration or as part of an ‘on-country’ camp. Men consistently expressed the view that being ‘on-country’ is a critical part of the features of successful work with Noongar maaman (men) and their koorlangka (children).

- Workshops should include use of and involvement with food so that men and their children follow old practices of doing parenting while providing for their children and talking around food and fire.
- The Fathering Project build a list of Noongar men who can facilitate use of this resource kit in sites such as: schools (in conjunction with Aboriginal Education Officers), corrections facilities (in conjunction with Aboriginal Liaison staff), non-government organisations (such as Clontarf Academies; Anglicare programs etc.), Aboriginal health agencies, and as part of cultural development program delivered by Aboriginal businesses and consultants (note: there was considerable interest from men involved in this project in the delivery of the workshop resources).
- The Fathering Project seek funding to work in conjunction with the groups outlined above to deliver the workshops and/or on-country camps (note: there was considerable interest from men involved in this project in leading an on-country camp series that draws on the workshop resources).
- The Fathering Project consider linking with the emerging Aboriginal Men's Wellbeing Research Network (representatives from UWA, ECU, Murdoch, Notre Dame and Curtin) to support further research and development projects that extend the scope of this work to other groups of Aboriginal men in other regions.