

RAISE Conference 2014

Breaking the Barriers

*supporting and engaging mature
age first-in-family university
learners and their families*

Sarah O'Shea

Cathy Stone

Josephine May

Janine Delahunty

Overview of today's workshop

Who are we?

Background to
the research

Preliminary
findings

Paired
discussion

Where to
next...?



Who are we?

Dr Sarah O'Shea

School of Education, Faculty of Social Sciences

The University of Wollongong, Australia

saraho@uow.edu.au

Dr Cathy Stone

Division of Tertiary Education

Open Universities Australia

& the School of Humanities and Social Sciences

The University of Newcastle, Australia

cathy.stone@open.edu.au

cathy.stone@newcastle.edu.au

A/Prof Josephine May

English Language and Foundation Studies Centre

The University of Newcastle, Australia

josephine.may@newcastle.edu.au

Dr Janine Delahunty

Project officer

The University of Wollongong

janined@uow.edu.au

Collaborative research between 3 institutions

Background to the research

- Significant growth in student numbers in Australia; many of these are older learners from a diversity of backgrounds (ACER, 2013).
- Participation benchmarks are in place in Australia: 40% of all 25 to 34-year-olds attaining a qualification at bachelor level or above by 2025 but this attainment target is likely to be reached prior to 2025 (Kemp & Norton, 2014).
- Approximately half the university student population in Australia (51%) is derived from first in family backgrounds (OECD, 2012).

Background to the research

What do we know about the first in family cohort?

1. Reported as not achieving to the same level academically as non-first in family cohort
2. Deficit thinking - a 'group at risk' (Spiegler & Bednarek, 2013, p329)
3. The lack of an educational memory or “transgenerational family scripts” (Ball et al, 2002, p57)

Research design

- For the purposes of this study, first in family status has been defined as:

no-one in the immediate family of origin including siblings or parents having previously attended a higher education institution or having completed a university degree.

- Mature-age defined as 25+
- Inclusion of family members – looking at this return from the perspective of the student and their family members
- Survey and interview methodology
- Three cohort groups – online learners (OUA), Access program participants (UoN) and domestic on-campus undergrads (UoW)

Research design

Location	Cohort Group	Numbers
University of Wollongong (UoW)	U/G students Gender mix / FiF	40 students plus 10–15 family members
University of Newcastle (UoN)	Foundation / Access students Gender mix / FiF Over 25	30-35 plus 8-10 family members
Open Universities Australia (OUA)	U/G students in the first year of online studies. Gender mix / FiF Over 25	40 students plus optional survey for family members

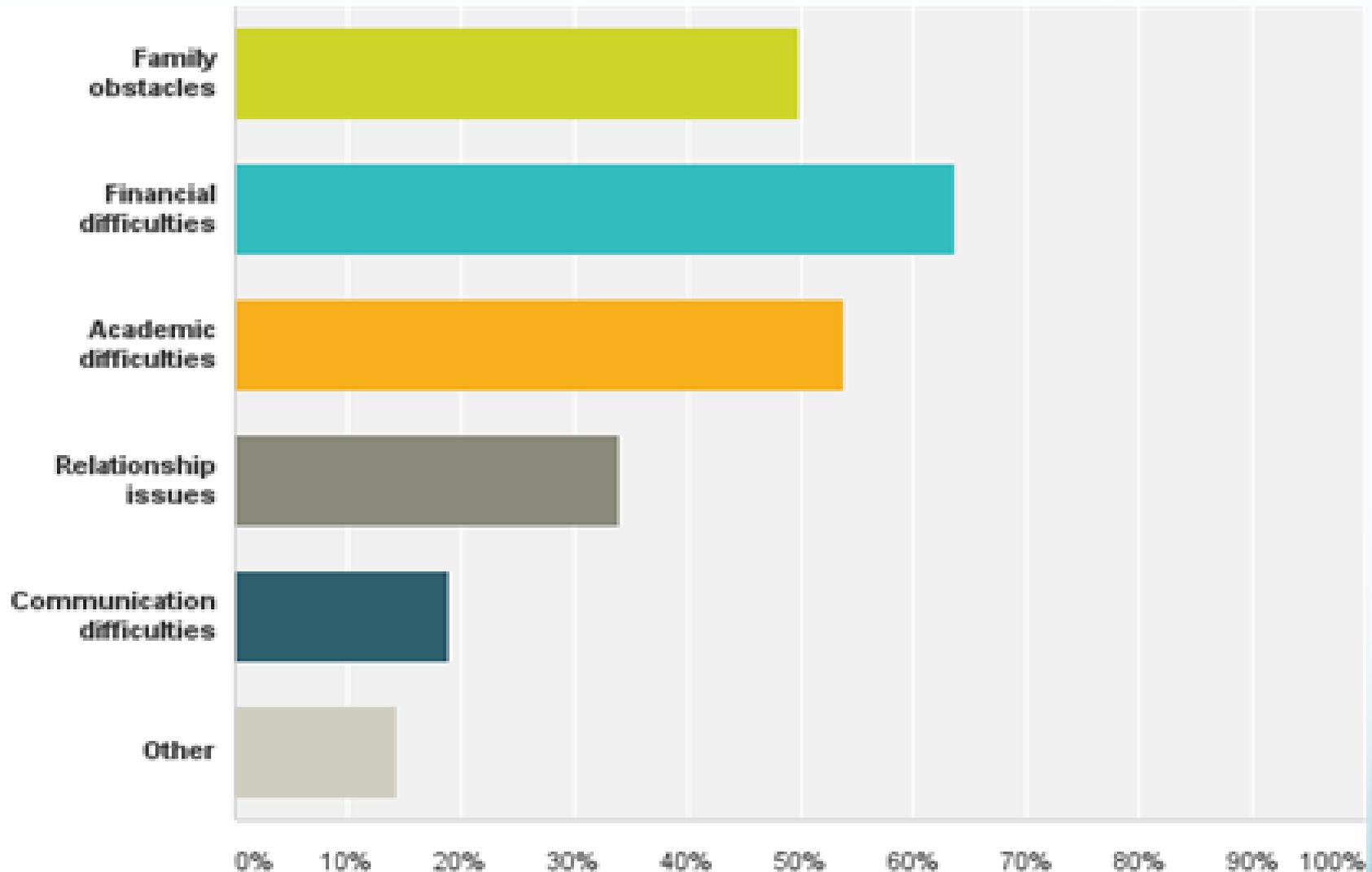
Findings so far

*Survey analysis – 164 returned:

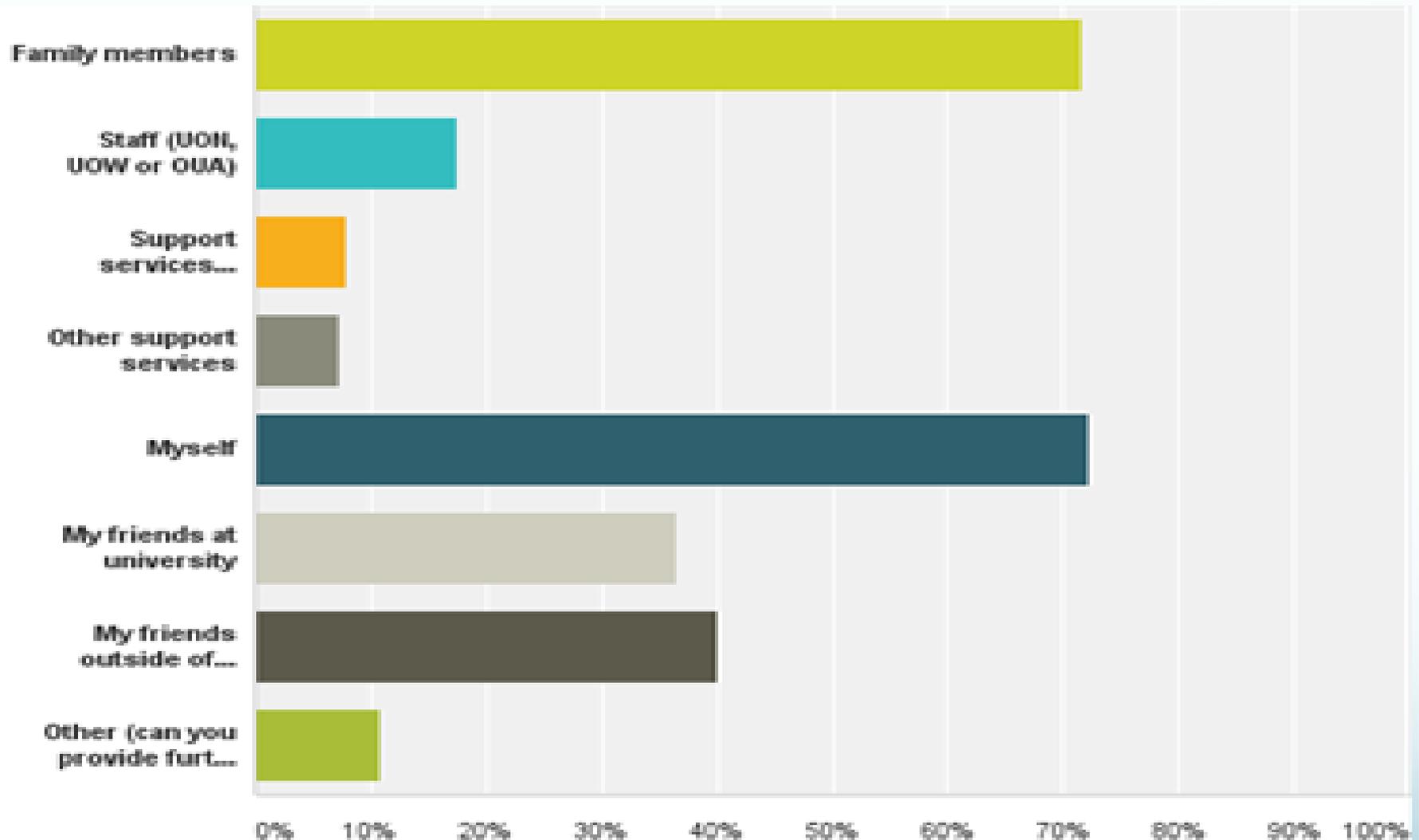
- **Participants:** 80% female; 77% studying full-time and 60% in the first year of study
- **Financial Support:** 42% receive some government support; 58% work part-time or full time; 38% supported by a partner or family

*with thanks to Janine Delahunty for the information contained in the following slides

Hurdles and Obstacles



Sources of Support



Reasons for returning to education

always wanted to ...

... ever since I could remember all I ever wanted to do was go to University

... do something for myself. I have always regretted not having the chance to go to Uni after high school

... when I felt that it would fit in with my family. Now is that time

... but our family was poor

... but could never decide just what it was that I wanted to be "when I grow up!"

... it was just a matter of when circumstances allowed

... but thought I wasn't 'smart' enough

... I come from a town of low socio-economic status, and I didn't want to be stuck there all my life, I want to get out and explore the world.

Reasons for returning to education

I want to prove/give something to myself:

education is the greatest gift you can give to yourself

I felt that I had nothing holding me back except myself

I had regretted not staying in school and going to uni and he said it's not too late and said he believed I could do anything I want to do

I love the idea of being at University, I love learning, I love that I can do anything.

I have the intelligence but not the confidence and I needed to challenge myself to prove I'm not stupid

I sold myself short through high school, not thinking I was 'smart' enough to ever get into university ...

I also want to be the first in my family to have gained a higher degree

I just wanted to do something more with my life. Be something more

I wanted to do something for myself. I ... wanted to prove to myself that I could do it

... it finally dawned on me! I can give it a shot ... I am surely not that stupid. I tried a unit, and to my own shock, I got a credit!

Impact on family

It has strained home life a little in the delegation of chores

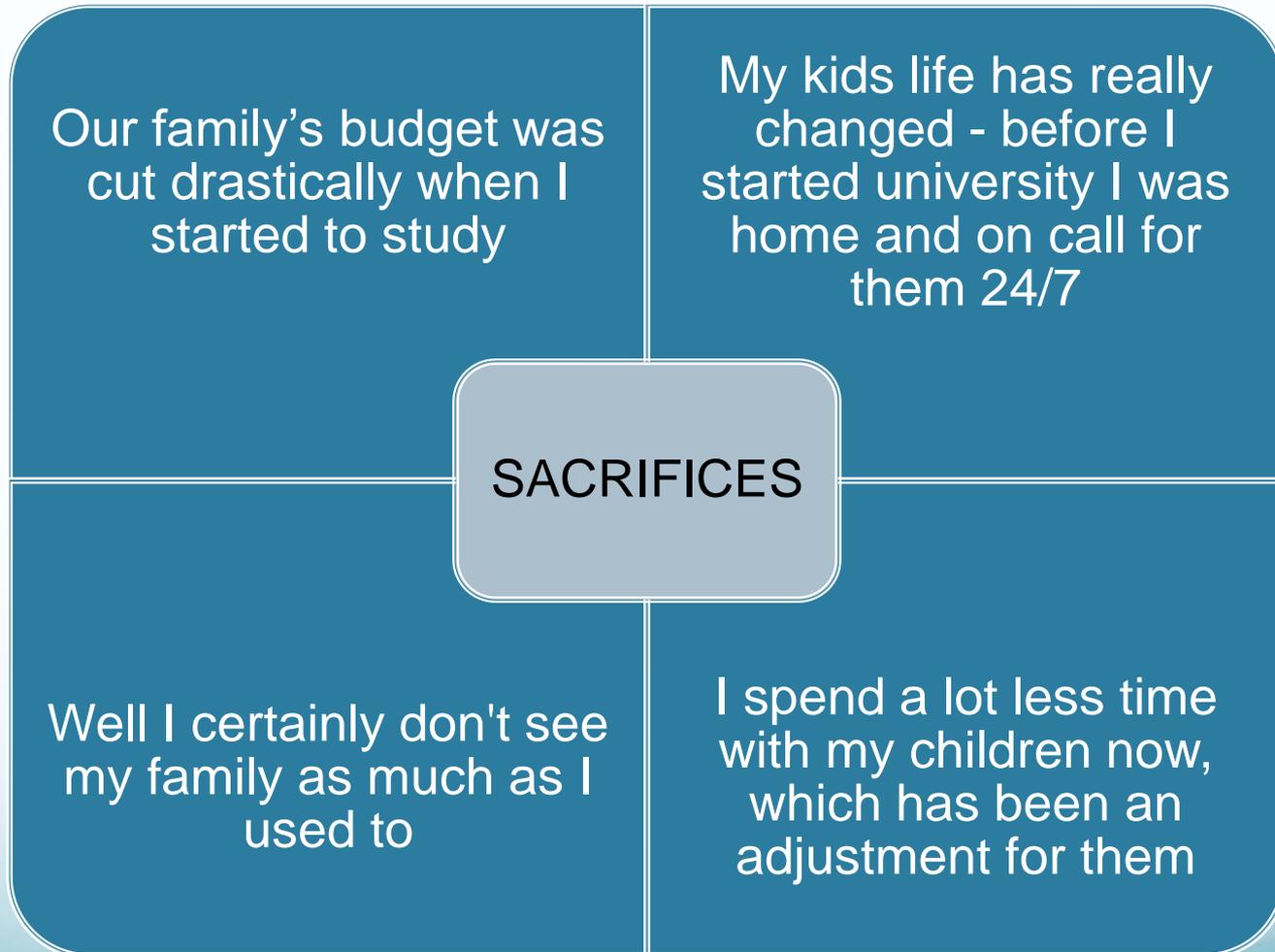
I have had to depend on other people for caring for my children as child care is not affordable for me

**ADAPTING
TO NEW
ROLES**

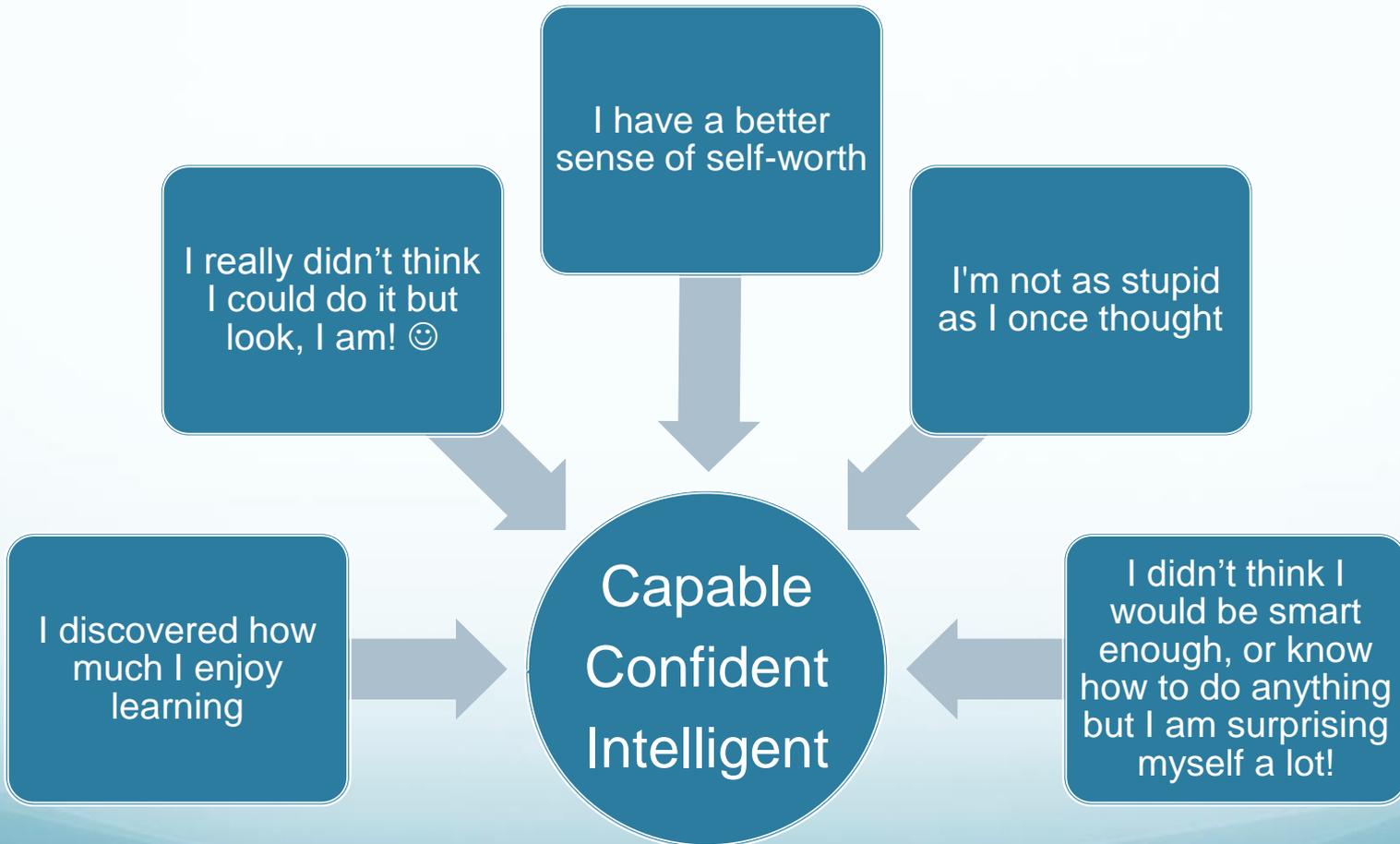
My husband has become much more involved with domestic chores and our children, which has been fantastic for all of us

My children have taken on a more committed role in household duties

Impact on family



Self-discovery



Family Survey

Total Responses

- 39 as at 17/8/14
- Range in age from 9 to 69
- 25 female / 14 male

The student is my:	No.
mother	8
daughter	15
son	3
brother	1
sister	4
grandchild	1
partner	7

Family reactions

Positive:

I felt fine when mum decided to start university (14 y/o)

I thought it was good ... I thought that she was going to be very busy (15 y/o)

I have always known that she can achieve anything so to see her completing this makes me the happiest mother

Ecstatic! That would be an awesome job to have, I thought, I wish I had it!

Mixed reactions:

A little sad to have her move away ... but happy that she was doing something she wanted to do (sister)

I am proud that she is trying to further her education, however I do worry about her supporting herself

Influential:

it made me want to follow in her footsteps (sister)

it made me consider furthering my education (sister)

Changes

Different conversations

Mum is very busy and stressed. Mum talks about her studies a lot, and it gives me a good insight into what i should look forward to when I go to university. (14 y/o)

She tries to talk me into doing more homework and study (15 y/o)

her views on everything have developed She has even started challenging common or normal aspects of life.

She seems happier and motivated

She's more willing to make friends and is more sociable

Positive changes

Already she is starting to discuss very in-depth global topics and starting to observe the way people behave around her

negative:

more anxious

She became confused with her career choices

Findings so far

Interviews:

- Students have been encouraged to ‘story’ their perceptions, expectations and motivations about university
- 119 interviews conducted so far – analysis just beginning

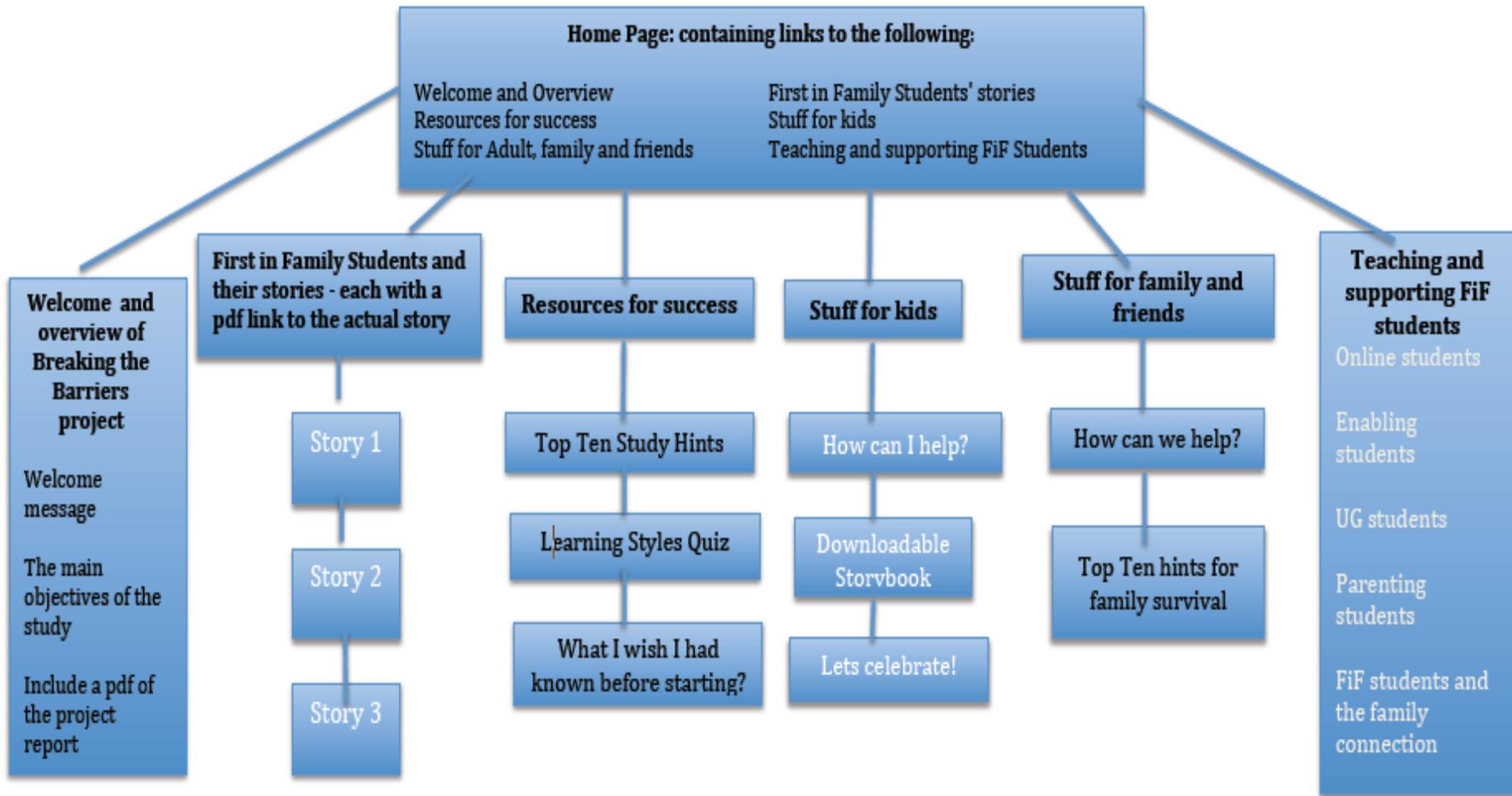
Paired Discussion

- How do these preliminary findings reflect your institutional context and the experiences of students at your university?
- What types of targeted support are offered by your institution for first-in-family students?
- What might it be like from the family's perspective when no-one has been to university before, and then a close family member starts?
 - What issues might this raise? What conversations might take place? What impact might this have on family relationships?
- How might institutions better engage with the families and communities of first-in-family students?

Where to next?

- Analysis of interview data
- Develop best practice guidelines for support of mature-age/ first-in-family students - a range of versions to be developed depending on learning context
- Website for first-in-family students and families
- Dissemination of initial findings including a national forum in early 2015
- Implementation of developed guidelines
- Finalise guidelines, produce in hard and soft copy for national dissemination

Plans for First-in-Family website



Questions/Discussion

We are seeking Expressions of Interest for international collaboration on further development of this research

Please let us know if you would to be involved

saraho@uow.edu.au

cathy.stone@open.edu.au

josephine.may@newcastle.edu.au

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