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
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)
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

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

- Family obstacles
- Financial difficulties
- Academic difficulties
- Relationship issues
- Communication difficulties
- Other
Sources of Support

- Family members
- Staff (UOH, UOW or OUA)
- Support services...
- Other support services
- Myself
- My friends at university
- My friends outside of...
- Other (can you provide further?)

Graph showing the percentage of participants who received support from various sources.
Reasons for returning to education

always wanted to …

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

… 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

… 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.

… but thought I wasn't 'smart' enough
Reasons for returning to education

I want to prove/give something to myself:

- I wanted to do something for myself. I... wanted to prove to myself that I could do it
- 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 felt that I had nothing holding me back except myself
- I have the intelligence but not the confidence and I needed to challenge myself to prove I'm not stupid
- I have the idea of being at University, I love learning, I love that I can do anything.
- I just wanted to do something more with my life. Be something more
- I also want to be the first in my family to have gained a higher degree

education is the greatest gift you can give to yourself

... 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!

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

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

Our family’s budget was cut drastically when I started to study.

My kids life has really changed - before I started university I was home and on call for them 24/7.

Well I certainly don't see my family as much as I used to.

I spend a lot less time with my children now, which has been an adjustment for them.

SACRIFICES
Self-discovery

I discovered how much I enjoy learning.

I have a better sense of self-worth.

I'm not as stupid as I once thought.

I didn't think I would be smart enough, or know how to do anything but I am surprising myself a lot!

I really didn't think I could do it but look, I am! 😊
Family Survey

Total Responses

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The student is my:</th>
<th>No.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mother</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>daughter</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>son</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brother</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sister</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>grandchild</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>partner</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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

**Mixed reactions:**

- Ecstatic! That would be an awesome job to have, I thought, I wish I had it!
- A little sad to have her move away ... but happy that she was doing something she wanted to do (sister)

**Influential:**

- I am proud that she is trying to further her education, however I do worry about her supporting herself
- it made me want to follow in her footsteps (sister)
- it made me consider furthering my education (sister)
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)

Positive changes

She seems happier and motivated

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

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

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

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

Home Page: containing links to the following:
- Welcome and Overview
- Resources for success
- Stuff for Adult, family and friends
- First in Family Students' stories
- Stuff for kids
- Teaching and supporting FiF Students

Welcome and overview of Breaking the Barriers project
- Welcome message
- The main objectives of the study
- Include a pdf of the project report

First in Family Students and their stories - each with a pdf link to the actual story
- Story 1
- Story 2
- Story 3

Resources for success
- Top Ten Study Hints
- Learning Styles Quiz
- What I wish I had known before starting?

Stuff for kids
- How can I help?
- Downloadable Storybook
- Lets celebrate!

Stuff for family and friends
- How can we help?
- Top Ten hints for family survival

Teaching and supporting FiF students
- Online students
- Enabling students
- UG students
- Parenting students
- FiF students and the family connection
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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