

First Nations Dads: Documenting the Journey

by Amanda Farrell

When the University of Victoria's Jessica Ball began working on the Indigenous Fathers Project, she asked aboriginal dads what they wanted to see. The answer? Other dads.

"They said, 'We need to see more positive images of aboriginal fathers and we need to hear stories from actual aboriginal fathers who have been able to make it as dads,'" says Ball, a professor in UVic's School of Child and Youth Care and head of the project.

Fatherhood: Indigenous Men's Journeys offers just that. The DVD... looks at six different First Nations dads around B.C. and their takes on fatherhood through interviews and footage of the dads interacting with their children in their own environment. The men, who range from ages 27 to 60 and live both on and off reserve, speak openly about everything from trauma in their past to the joys of being a father....

The DVD wasn't originally a part of the project, but after getting input from First Nations dads and receiving an offer from Asterisk documentary filmmaker Paul Wu to put the piece together pro bono, they managed to scrape together some funding from the Canadian Independent Film and Video Fund to make it happen. Ball was overwhelmed by

the response she got from the indigenous community.

"There was no shortage of guys who wanted to be in it, which is very unusual for aboriginal research, she says."

All six of the men share intimate details about their life, from a history of substance abuse to stories of growing up without a dad of their own. Ball says this was particularly moving, as the interviewers didn't ask any direct questions about the past.

"Every single one, 100 percent of the guys brought it up spontaneously. They said, 'Because of what has happened to our cultures, our families or to me personally, I have no idea what to do as a dad.'"

The documentary's format—each dad is featured on his own individual six-minute segment—makes it easier to use in workshops and helps people identify with the fathers.... "It's the only thing that's filling the gap right now because there's nothing for aboriginal men becoming fathers in the whole country," says Ball. "It feels really good that we've done something important."

Jessica Ball will be presenting this resource in person at the fall Head Start conference. The BCFNHS Regional Office is purchasing a copy of the DVD and kit (including the two booklets) for each Head Start site.

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Fatherhood: Indigenous Men's Journeys. Documentary DVD; 40 min.; 16-page screening guide.

Aboriginal Fathers: A Guide for Community Programs. Full-color 60-page booklet. Discusses challenges facing Indigenous fathers and how programs can reach out to welcome and involve them.

Beginning the Journey of Fatherhood: A Guide for Aboriginal Men. Full-color 60-page booklet. Indigenous fathers share stories of their social and personal challenges and how they are learning to be fathers.

For more info, see: www.ecdip.org/fathers.

