

FATHERING GIRLS

For this month's Awareness Spotlight, *Retail Pharmacy Assistants* spoke with the co-founders of a charity committed to connecting fathers of only girls to create a network of like-minded dads. Fathers of Girls shows how important something as simple as 'sneaking off to get a smoothie every Tuesday' can meaningfully build a relationship with your daughter.

By Samantha Crawford.

Fathers of Girls was founded by four gentlemen, including Sean Lowry and Luke Whistler following a lightbulb moment during a hot Queensland summer attending a football game with their mates.

"Myself, Luke and two close friends were walking to a match one afternoon and realised we had 9 (soon to be 12) daughters between us," Mr Lowry said. "We needed to create a movement for dads and their girls, so we began thinking about doing something like what Mothers of Boys [a charity run by mothers of only boys] had done in the past. If they can do it, we can, too."

"We came together and hosted our first lunch, more than six years ago. There were only about a dozen or so at the initial lunch, and it's grown from there. We had close to 150 in October at our sixth annual lunch."

Fathers of Girls (FOGs) encourages dads to spend quality time with their daughters, enlisting experts who have researched the challenges for young girls, and have developed useful parenting tools and help champion a pathway for their daughters and other young women.

According to Mr Whistler, the father of four girls aged four to 13 years, the mission of FOGs is "to shine a light on the modern father of girls". The charity "supports, encourages and provides the tools for fathers to raise their daughters to become confident, independent and strong in a modern world".

Mr Lowry, a father of four girls aged eight to 13 years, added: "Fathers of only girls get together to support our daughters and fellow dads across Australia. We provide fundraising and advocacy to help less privileged families and girls. We do that predominantly by fundraising through the Confident Girls Foundation, to help vulnerable girls find a sense of community, opportunity and safety – something we all want for our daughters."

FOGs seeks to provide dads with a support system for issues that confront them in parenting their daughters – leaning on one another for support and guidance and providing helpful tools to assist them in being active parenting figures.

"There are lots of big business lunches and things like that you can go to, but none of them are aimed at having a good conversation about how

you can be the best dad you can be," Mr Whistler said.

"That's pretty hard when you're juggling a career, looking after your health and doing your double best as a parent. We all need as many tools as we can get, so we like to think that we create an environment where we can listen to a few experts and have a good chat about what we get up to every day in trying to be the best dads we can be."

"Our girls get a lot from seeing us dedicated and seeing their dads getting together to develop something that's just about them. They love it when we get together to have a big event, whether it's a netball day, riding together on the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail, or camping."

Unique challenges

Fathering daughters presents unique challenges, but according to Mr Lowry, these provide the opportunity for fathers of girls to learn how to be the best dad they can be.

"I think more broadly the acceleration of the expectations of the young female is through the roof now," he said. "They're expected to become the lawyers and doctors of tomorrow, and they're doing that, which is great."

He continued: "They're expected to be aware of their health and have greater body awareness. They're facing the significant pressure and bombardment via social media of the very traditional measures of what a female could or should be. So, there's the double whammy of challenging the historical and societal norms, and the emerging expectations that they must have it all. It's more challenging than ever for young females."

Mr Whistler adds that the biggest challenge he sees when it comes to raising girls is within the space of friendships and relationships.

Among the collaborators of FOGs are Madonna King, author of *Fathers and Daughters*, and Rebecca Sparrow, author of *Find Your Tribe (and 9 other things I wish I'd known in high school)*.

"We're learning from Madonna King and Rebecca Sparrow that, with boys, you have these conversations and you move on," Mr Whistler said. "You know, for boys you'd never ask your surfing friends to the rugby party, and vice versa, and you don't have to cross them all over. Madonna helped explain that it's not as easy or as clear as that

for girls, and helped give us some tools to deal with friends when you are having a hard time.

"I think we, as dads, are trying to help out with the right tools, with relationships and media. I think that's one of the biggest [challenges]."

Mr Lowry reveals that FOGs has worked extensively with Ms King "who has spoken at our lunch twice". "Madonna," he added, "has produced a number of books on eight-, nine- and 10-year-old girls and is developing another one for the middle to late teenage years."

"The books are very well researched and are evidence based around the challenges facing girls and teenagers and young women," he said.

Breaking the boundaries of traditional roles

Household gender roles traditionally place the father as the provider, but this is being challenged in the shift towards active parenting, which embraces vulnerability and encourages risk taking.

"If the male becomes the typical provider and earns the money, and the mum stays home, the girls will start to think this is normal in life," Mr Lowry said. "I read somewhere that if we're serious about balancing our gender roles in the workplace, when we get a tradie in, we should try to get a female plumber or female sparky in, just so it starts to rebalance each side of the conversation."

"When something breaks and we typically say, 'we need to get a man in', even small things like that can form a strong example for the daughters about what they want to be and what they don't want to be in the future."

He continued: "I think fathers of only girls provide other avenues for the girls to open up. Participating in sports or being out in the yard? Maybe your daughter isn't into that. So, what other avenues are there in which girls can feel free to open up? That's why we go to experts who undertake research and write books about it. They tell us that routines like, on the way to school, when you sneak off and grab a smoothie every Tuesday, that these moments are priceless, and repeating these routines and creating these occasions allow for that relationship [to develop]. When you have four girls, there are either lots of smoothies,

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or you've got to be creative, but just allowing that space that is theirs is so valuable."

Mr Lowry explains that whether the daughters are saying, 'Dad, I need to chat about something', or the fathers themselves need to chat about something, "we need to get to that point where we don't need to hide our issues".

"We've been getting challenged by some of these experts to make sure we don't become these stoic dads that many of our dads have previously thought they had to be," he said.

Another point to consider when parenting girls is teaching them to take calculated risks, which, according to Mr Whistler, appears easier with boys because "they love doing it". However, he says it's important not to "leave girls behind or be overprotective" when it comes to learning about taking calculated risks.

"There's a comfortable stretch, and you go and tackle it, and you fail or win, either way you learn," he said. "It's about consistently encouraging them. You can do it in whatever outfit, wherever you are, but just that constant calculated risk – and different risks – will [increase confidence] on a different level. And keeping that going for girls all the way through is really important."

Another message to be conveyed when it comes to raising daughters, as underscored by Mr Whistler, is the importance of being present and engaged at home.

"As soon as you're out working endlessly, you quickly disengage, and it's really hard to get back into the rhythm of the family," he cautioned. "Being a parent, as well as a provider, it's hard, there's no doubt, but it's certainly more rewarding for everyone in the family, and I think everyone who's part of FOGs has taken the first steps to realise that."

Events

Fathers of Girls hosts several events throughout the year, bringing together fathers and raising funds for organisations that support girls' futures.

"We host three events a year and that's growing," Mr Lowry said. "We have a 'Give for a Goal Day', which is a netball event supported

by our main charities, Confident Girls Foundation, Netball Queensland and Netball Australia. They'll send along a player representative, be it local or national, to talk to the girls. The girls will raise money through their website and get paid per goal that they've shot.

"We have a barbecue and arrange one of the sports stars to talk to the girls. The girls love asking questions and finding out about becoming a success and what the journey has been for those professional sports stars."

Mr Lowry continued: "This year, we included a ride on the Brisbane Valley Rail Trail and a lunch afterwards, which was fantastic. The girls enjoyed spending time on the bikes with their friends and their fathers."

"The premier event is our annual luncheon, which we run in mid-October every year, which is our major fundraising event. We typically have a guest speaker at that, some raffles or some charity options, and enjoy a lunch and raise funds there."

FOGs' partner, Netball Australia's Confident Girls Foundation, encourages girls to engage in sport through netball. In a recent media release, Mr Whistler

said: "This year, Netball Queensland's Diamond Spirit program has been selected as our benefactor. Through netball, this program provides opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls in rural and remote communities."

Fathers of Girls will donate more than \$33,000 this year to the Confident Girls Foundation to help assist with the Diamond Spirit program. In 2022, they are planning to make an even bigger impact.

For more about Fathers of Girls, visit:

LinkedIn [FathersofGirls](#)

Instagram [fathersofgirls](#)

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Join Fathers of Girls at:

[fathersofgirls.org/join-fogs](https://www.fathersofgirls.org/join-fogs)



Fathers of Girls



Sean (right) and Luke (top left) in action at the 2021 Fathers of Girls luncheon.



www.fathersofgirls.org

FATHERS OF ONLY GIRLS (FOGS)

FOGS are a nonprofit organisation made up of a group of fathers of only girls.

Mission

Our mission is to grow a community where fathers of only girls (FOGS) can engage, share and learn from each other. FOGS was formed to shine a brighter light on the importance of a modern father role model in a daughter's upbringing.

We create events to grow our network, learn about leading fatherhood methods, have fun with our children and raise awareness and funds for our charity partners.



5 tips for FOGS from Madonna King (author, journalist, speaker & specialist in father/daughter relationships) from our 2021 annual lunch.



Love her unconditionally. She will only know that if you tell her.



Value her opinion. Listen to her, and consider it a privilege that she's testing out her views on you.



You have responsibility to be there. Do not - despite encouragement - take a step back.



Pick a project to do together - eg. park run, vegetable patch, a love of INXS music.



Don't fix her problems; that's not your job. But listen to her, and offer alternatives so she can see her way out of a problem.



JOIN FOGS



Join the community, it's free, come and get involved in one of our events

Socials: [@fathersofgirls](#)