

## **Meerilinga Podcast – Positive Childhoods**

Season 2 Episode 6 with Thomas Docking and Alan Wolfe

### **Belynda Smith**

Welcome, welcome to Meerilinga's Positive Childhood podcast. This podcast is recorded on the land of the Whadjuk Noongar people, and I'd like to respectfully acknowledge they continue in connection to land, waters, and community and honour First Nations people past and present and their elders particularly, in the spirit of reconciliation. I'd also really like to acknowledge that people have been parenting here for many, many thousands of years and doing it beautifully.

Positive Childhoods is produced as part of the Children's Week celebrations in WA, and we're funded by the Department for Education and Lotterywest. So, thanks to those funding bodies.

Thank you so much to the early educators, parents, and others that are tuning in today. We really appreciate every single thing it took for you to be here listening in. We know how busy you are, and we really appreciate you finding time to learn more about how you can support the needs of children.

I'm Belynda Smith. I'm a parenting facilitator with Meerilinga Parenting Service, and I'm really passionate about meeting the needs of parents so that we can support families and children to thrive.

Meerilinga it is a not-for-profit organisation and a registered charity, and we promote the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, working with children, their families, early childhood professionals, planners, and the community to raise the status of children in WA.

The 2022 Children Week theme is "All children have the right to a standard of living that supports their wellbeing and healthy development."

I'm thrilled to have a couple of great blokes on! Allen is here with me, Alan Wolfe, and we've also got Thomas Docking. So, thank you so much. I'm going to let you both introduce yourselves briefly. If you wouldn't mind giving us a brief overview of who you are and who you're here talking about, your organisation. So, Thomas, you want to go first?

### **Thomas Docking**

Yeah, sure. Firstly, thank you very much for having us here. I'm actually meeting the lands of the Gubbi Gubbi people over here on the Sunshine Coast. I'd like to pay our respects to those elders past and present, but also after the babies that are born on these lands and the babies will be born in the spirit of what we do with dads' group.

My role is the founder and the CEO of Dads Group, an organisation, and a charity. It's set up to bridge the gap between what's provided for new mothers and what's provided for new fathers in

that perinatal space. So, when we were established, there was no support for new fathers nationally and so we've spent the last eight years addressing that gap, running programs, designing programs, and co-delivering programs with the Department of Health, different hospitals, technology experts, people like Movember and some really great other grassroots organisations.

**Belynda Smith**

Great. Thank you. And Alan?

**Alan Wolfe**

I'm Alan Wolfe. I'm the proud dad of two kids: the lovely, gentle Lachy, and my extremely competent Cora, a four-year-old. I guess I've been invited on today to talk about dads' groups.

**Belynda Smith**

Yes!

**Alan Wolfe**

So just down the road from our recording studio is a beautiful part called Hyde Park. We live just nearby it and when my second was born I was just feeling a bit disconnected. Now, my friends were a car ride away, the thought of putting two kids into a car, it's quite daunting.

**Belynda Smith**

It is!

**Alan Wolfe**

Some of my friends had kids at different ages, they were already off doing their sports. And so, I was doing a personal development course at the time where they encourage you just to get out there and do something for the community. And I thought. You know what? There must be other dads like me.

We all head down to this playground every Sunday morning. So, I actually got a bamboo stick from the garden, a little A4 printed piece of paper. Gaffer taped it onto the pram, and I headed down there. First week it was just my brother-in-law, thank you, Leon. Second week we had two dads down and third week nobody came down. Now for me that wasn't an issue was like, "All right, we'll see where this goes!" You know, I was hanging out with my kids.

But a mum did see me, and she put me onto a mom's group which had 25,000 mums and said this poor bloke has rocked up, he's got a sign, no one else came down and it went viral from there. Got a bit of media. I don't know how many thousands of likes. Tom picked up on it, he gave me a call. We soon had 300 members on Facebook and, you know, would have a dozen dads meeting up. And so yeah, it's wonderfully successful. A bunch of us, during COVID, we

moved out of the city centre. We need a bit more space for our kids. And so, Belmont dads was born from that one, and Hilton dads as well.

### **Belynda Smith**

Great. I haven't heard that origin story. That's fabulous. Love it. Thank you.

So, Thomas, what about you? What's brought you to this work?

### **Thomas Docking**

So, we were planning – me and my wife were planning a two-year trip around the world and we were on Hayman Island and got a surprise shock when we realised that we were going to have a baby and that kind of turned everything upside down for us. Now I, I tell people about the fake smiles and the excitement that I was you know, pushing out, whereas behind those smiles were a lot of daunting, worried concerns, and thoughts. And since spending quite a bit of time in this space, I realised that so many other fathers had similar experiences with not knowing what to do, you know both to support a baby or to support their partner or even to know how to support themselves.

We just established an organisation to address that gap. It was really over the years that it's become an organisation that's redefined, I guess, a model of care. So, we call it in integrated model of care for fathers in the perinatal period and worked with health organisations to establish what is it that fathers need in that space, both at a community level, a hospital or health level, and a digital space.

And it's been people like Allen who have enabled us to grow, I guess, the movement not just in in one place. We saw that there's so many amazing people have done some initiatives but there's nothing to support that or continue that or just even have a community or practise of people who did that.

And so, Dads Group set about identifying where fathers were and a really simple model: "coffee, pram, park, baby, Dad" and just getting out there and you know replicating that as frequently as possible with incredible leaders. Now that's turned into a whole hospital, digital, and community program which is really changing lives. Addressing some of those issues around perinatal risks of family violence, you know, mums are at higher risk of family violence in that perinatal period. It's also the first time you're becoming a family.

That's the first time that those things become quite challenging, and then mental ill health and preventing those kinds of outcomes and also, I guess, preventing poor childhood development outcomes. Really, we want children to be able to grow up in a safe, loving environment and if you don't know how, if you haven't had a role model to help you know what to do in that fatherhood space or that partner space, that husband role, whatever it might be for you, you're very much handicapped and from the very start of the race you are so far behind because you haven't got those innate understanding to those roles. Dads' groups really fostered a space

where fathers can learn from each other, and we're not the first to create a dad's group by any means, but we are seeing and supporting people, leaders, and organisations to facilitate spaces where dads can do exactly that.

I grew up in an Aboriginal community and sitting under a tree doing special and important men's business is something that they do really well. And really, as Alan would say and share, the work that happens at the park in the different dads group community programs that he's been involved with, and lead, and established himself has really been a space where wisdom is passed. There's so much learning that happens there but from a really kind of healthy, community, shoulder-to-shoulder in a men's health approach so to speak.

### **Belynda Smith**

Beautiful really speaks to the power of connection, doesn't it? Just facilitating those spaces for men to connect in that way is producing all these incredible outcomes. I love listening to you talk with such passion about the way that this is a really simple – I don't know, it's not rocket science, is it?

And what is it, though, that dads need? Like you really passionately talking about meeting the needs of dads; what do you both think dads need?

### **Alan Wolfe**

Well, for me, that word that you just mentioned was connection. The biggest thing. It really is the biggest thing from Hilton Dads as well. You're not only connecting with your other fellow dads, you're learning and you're sharing the journey. Within our community, we then make wonderful connections with our families, so our partners get to be in touch.

Just yesterday, my wife and another of the Hilton dads' partners just went paddleboarding while we looked after the kids, and so then they've got that connection. And I think that's, that really is the number one word for it because so many things flow from there that learning with each other.

### **Belynda Smith**

Yeah, beautiful. What about for you, Thomas?

### **Thomas Docking**

Well, before I add anything to that, that is actually the core fundamentals of the research behind Dads. Beyond Blue and Open Mind and some research back in 2011 and identified social connection being a key issue or risk for new fathers. That gap from when you have your first baby to the time that children go to school – it's almost a four-to-five-year gap between fathers reconnecting socially. So essentially, you're off the cliff for five years and you're on your own.

As Alan was referring to before, you know driving to the other side of town for 40 minutes, it's not really an option with you know a screaming child in the car. Whereas pushing a pram is often a really healthy way of for both of you to connect, but also to get out in the environment and to connect with other people as well. So, it's understanding that social connections, firstly and foremost, the foundational need is that isolation and that's immediately addressed whenever dads get up, you know, get up to a Dads Group, have a coffee together. It's immediately done.

And even on those days and the rainy days when we run a Dads Group and no one rocks up, there's still a really beneficial space there where you're connecting one on one with your child and you know it's not shrouded by a whole bunch of different programmatic elements, it's just you intimately connecting with your child, I think. Speaking of which, here's one of the leaders...

**Belynda Smith**

I love it.

**Alan Wolfe**

Well, I can fill that gap there, Tom.

What Tom was just talking about the end is something that we've really seen as well, that connection with your child, that confidence. We've had a number of dads over the years who that was their first time solo with the kid. The mum sometimes hovered nervously, and we're like: "There's a cafe up the other end of the park."

And so, then they get that connection and if it happens regularly, they build that confidence. And it's critical for the whole family really because it's two people trying to do the job of a village now. If one person doesn't have the confidence to be a parent, you know that can be a real issue.

**Belynda Smith**

Absolutely. Yeah, it's really powerful, isn't it, getting dads involved in that earlier time does build that confidence earlier and leads to much improved outcomes for everyone, doesn't it?

**Thomas**

There's a really interesting curve called Heckman Curve and that outlines the earlier of father, or a parent, gets involved with an infant the better that relation connection. So, the neuroplasticity, I think it is, of the brain is developing [and] is more impacted positively and negatively in those early hours, days, and weeks. We will often say in our *Welcome to Father Hood Sessions*, which is like a general introduction to antenatal classes for dads, we talk about how an extra 10 minutes or half an hour skin-to-skin with your baby in those early minutes or hours or days or weeks of birth is going to be worth more than taking your weekend off and taking a teenager out, in terms of that relational benefit.

And if you do want to have what that special relationship when they're older, with your older children, these are the foundation of blocks of building that relationship. And so many of us never knew that! And so many of us thought we could engage with our child when they start to communicate verbally to us. But there's often three years' worth of, you know, incredible, incredible connections and relationship development happening. It may not be happening for you. But it's happening for them. And that's what's really, really important about the science behind connection in those early years.

**Alan Wolfe**

If I could just add on that, the science does show for men as well –

**Belynda Smith**

I was going to say the exact same thing, yes!

**Alan Wolfe**

Because not all of us, when our child is born, that we're instantly there and in love. We know lots of dads who were sort of shell shocked and not connected, but it's exactly what Tom was describing there. That skin to skin, that holding and touching, that actually triggers all the hormones and that's what builds on it. So, it's that self-reinforcing cycle.

**Belynda Smith**

Yeah, and it changes everyone, doesn't it? It has impacts on men's brains and how they are growing and changing as well. So, it's really good, you know, amazing stuff, isn't it?

Tell me a little bit more of that some of the initiatives that you're involved with, Thomas, with Dad's Groups.

**Thomas Docking**

We have a kind of three-pronged approach, or three programs that we run. They've been developed over 8 years with different types of organisational sponsors, supporters, or project funders, but essentially there is a hospital, digital, and community program.

The hospital is around that, welcoming fathers to that perinatal space, that fatherhood space. Helping them actually understand the basics of what is available to them because there are a few different supports available to all fathers isolated regionally, or rural, or remote, and also urban fathers. That's important just to know what is there.

The second thing is to know some simple fundamentals. Around 96% of mums turned to their partners in those early weeks and if you don't have anything to give in terms of support, capacity, or otherwise, or knowledge then you're going to be starting to feel like you are incapable of doing a certain role that you're there for. And that's a depressing situation that we've all been in, including myself. If you just don't know how to help someone that you love

when they need help, and you don't know where to go to get help, it's just, it's just so crushing. There are some simple things we do in that hospital program which address that point.

Then there's a digital program which is expanding from online Dads Groups in your Facebook, etc through to podcasts and inviting famous people, or intelligent experts in that fatherhood space, or you know Richard Fletcher and those types of people, to talk into fatherhood. Those personally with that experience, but also from expert opinion. It will allow other dads all over Australia to join those conversations with the expert in the room and share that that learning space.

That's part of the digital program, and then there's the community program which is largely what Alan established and a number of other amazing fathers and leaders across Australia which is a Dads Group program. That is Dads meeting up periodically for coffee in a park to connect with other dads while fathering and sharing that experience. And we found that program works – very much better, like, it works significantly more effectively when we have a hospital and digital program supporting it. Because you're getting the month in the hospital, understanding about the benefits, you're getting, the fathers introduced in the hospital, but then weeks later they might actually go down to a Dads Group program.

And in the hospital when they sign up to the kind of nudges and the email, they might be reminded, “Oh, there's that Hilton Dads thing, where was that - it was in my email.” [They then might recognise] Alan, saw him in the newsletter a few years ago or a few months ago. And those things have helped to build that kind of culture of fatherhood.

The overarching thing that with our organisation is aiming to do over 25 years is to change the culture of fatherhood in Australia. And that culture will become one where what Alan's done, and what many other incredible community leaders have done, is that establishing a Dads Group, that will just be normal, we hope. And one day our organisation won't need to exist anymore because it'll be standard for councils to run Dads Group, it will be standard for hospitals to run father-focused or father-inclusive programs. And it'll be standard to have those digital supports from the right organisations to help us navigate that parenthood space but particularly for those who have been not included unintentional and that is fathers.

### **Belynda Smith**

Yeah, I'm thinking, you know how amazing it is to think about a world where that is just a given. Because I think it's amazing that Alan just got out the gaffer tape and got out the sign and said come and meet. And there's not that many people with that kind of leadership to reach out and say “Hi. Anyone else want to join up?” It's quite a hard thing to do so, I really admire that. I think it's awesome.

I also love it that you guys are building a world where people don't have to put themselves out there. quite so scarily, they can just have these existing structures to tap into. And I know Alan,

you've then built upon the success of that and the interest shown to have a little bit of a side hustle, is that right?

**Alan Wolfe**

That's right.

**Belynda Smith**

What have you been doing there?

**Alan Wolfe**

So yeah, this is a program called the *Adademy* and that grew out of our conversations at Dads Group. Now we really looked around and we saw that there were programs, but they were generally from non-government organisations – which are fantastic, I love them, I think everyone should do Meerilinga and Ngala and every other prenatal and fathering in course you can get your hands on. We've done that. But what we really wanted to do was, much like the conversations with dads' groups, build something by dads for soon-to-be dads.

So, it's an 8-hour program. It's generally held over 4 weeks. Sometimes it's done on a on a weekend as well. And the goal of it is to create this space where men can come in, go quite deep if they'd like to, we'd like it to be a transformational program, so they leave a little bit different men as when they came in. But just really look at their story. Where did they come from? Where do they want to go as a father? What do I what do they want to take forward?

We've just crafted a bunch of activities and conversations that they can have with their parents or their father figure, which is very important, not just their father. With their partners, just to make sure that they're on the same page when it comes to parenting. The crucial thing is if they can walk out of that room being more confident about being committed and involved. That's what we're there for.

**Belynda Smith**

Amazing. I'm loving hearing all these changes, and I know in my role I was saying just before to another speaker that, in the three years that I've been working with Meerilinga I've really seen a huge, like hundreds of percent, increase in dads turning up to those workshops. And self-motivated, want to be there and I'm loving the value that's ascribed to fatherhood and the understanding from these dads what the science and the research is showing us, which is that fathers are primary parents, fathers are incredibly important. This is a vital role that you're playing.

**Alan Wolfe**

That's so good to hear

### **Belynda Smith**

It is, isn't it! And I'm curious about if there's a sort of a nugget of wisdom from the research that you both want to share around fathers and their importance for the wellbeing of children. What is something that that pushes you forward there.

### **Thomas Docking**

So, we're part of the Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium and in that space, you have the leading researchers in fatherhood across Australia. I mean there's a number of different key points that we highlight in the various programs that are, you know, around the postnatal depression for fathers is a very important one, that 10% of father with experience PND. It's also important to realise that if the mother is going through something like that, then the father is 40% more likely or 50% more likely to suffer as well.

So that's really important in that perinatal period. The Heckman curve as I mentioned before is a critical piece of research that we point to around just how important it is to connect, from even before when the baby is born, with your child. You can sing to your baby; you can talk to you baby and that that voice of the father is absolutely significant that father or father figure as Alan was highlighting before

I think the other really important point is just the way in which mothers benefit from that involved father is so important to highlight. Whilst I haven't got the quotable [statistics] for that, you know that piece of research, what I can speak to is something that's in some ways as equally as valuable and that is the number of mothers who their partners or husbands are involved in a Dads Group program who have testified towards the benefit to their family, towards their relationship between the husband and wife or partner and partner and also the relationship between the father of the child and the mother in the child. There is an important thing that's happening when a dad goes to a Dads Group.

Often the Dads Group is the first place where Dad has taken the infant without mum, that's what we have experienced in our dads' groups. So that in of itself is not a small milestone either for mum nor for Dad. Some of the guys are shared about their partners in tears as he goes off to Dads Groups for the first time, it's the first time mum hasn't been with the baby. They might be 11 weeks in and never been separated, and it is in an emotional time.

It's also a positive milestone that they're sharing together and experiencing together. And what safer place for the dad go to then with other fathers who also have nappies, wipes, and bottle with them if you don't remember something. And the amount of learning that happens in that practical space is very, very funny.

I remember watching a dad, and I'll never forget this, he rocked up here, he had the bottle, baby wasn't feeding, and another dad "Oh, use my thermos to warm the milk." And then I said, "Oh, that's a good idea, I'll do that next time." And it was just, you know, so fundamental, so simple.

He's equipped another father. There is no program, there's no leaflet, there was no education module. He just learned. And for the rest of that child's bottle-feeding life there's going to be a better connection and it's going to work.

**Belynda Smith**

Learning at the point of need without any kind of—

**Thomas Docking**

Exactly. Timely appropriate education.

**Belynda Smith**

Beautiful.

[To Alan] Do you want to add anything?

**Alan Wolfe**

For me, there's just two things that quite often stick out. One is that the science is really starting to come out about the importance of a village. It's almost like we're reverting against this 60 or 70 years of suburbia, nuclear family, and a house, and we're figuring out the importance of what how we used to live for 300 000 years, and how we can try and create that.

The other part that I always love talking about in the *Adademy* is the science is showing that fathers have a unique impact, so mothers do what they do, and we do it a bit differently. Not better, not worse, just differently. And it's not to say that a father figure can't do that. If a kid has two mums they can incorporate that sort of stuff but having those fatherly typical father behaviours does have a unique impact on the social, the health, the emotional development of a child. I love trawling through that just really adds validity. That we're not just a second person, but we have a unique impact.

**Belynda Smith**

Beautiful. And I wonder just to finish up, if either or both of you would be willing to share a personal story about the impact of maybe your dad on you or your role as a father, the impact you've seen on your child, just how fathers impact on the wellbeing of their children?

**Alan Wolfe**

Do you want to go, Tom?

**Thomas Docking**

I came from really an incredible background from fatherhood experience. I have an amazing father he's someone who really, you know, part of his vision for his life was always to have a family and family was so important to him. And in that space, he demonstrated that and lives that out and with that, Dad didn't have a problem with being emotionally connected to us. He still

had that generations, I guess, some of their cultural nuances around how he did that, essentially meaning- it wasn't like, I guess our generation is a bit more forthcoming with that, but for his generation he is definitely out of the box and really empathetic.

And I think one of the things that comes to mind about that is, that I have shared before, is that he not only was the father and the father figure for us as his children, and he had four children so it was quite a big role, but he also extended that care to broader of members of the community, especially those kids who either didn't have fathers or had fathers who are absent, or who had father who were challenging I guess in that fatherhood space.

For me, what we do in in Dads Group as an organisation is allow other people to play those roles of father figures to each other and to other people's children. One of the key stories that I often recall and reflect on personally is that I, like all of us, have my emotional handicapped elements of life. Essentially what I believe is that everyone has handicaps in different areas based on how they were taught, lead, shown the way, or weren't taught, so to speak. And so, in that space, no one has a perfect ten out ten in all emotional capabilities and raising children, but we can actually learn from others.

And as I saw some of my other members or dads were fathering, I remember one of the key things was just the way in which one of the dads there, he's my brother-in-law actually engaged, with his child when his child was not delivering the behaviours that you'd want him to. So essentially a naughty kid, how does dad engage with that? I just watched him and I just learned so much and to this day I continually reflect on that moment because he was showing a really positive, get down at the same level that child. But you could have told me 100 times that's what you need to do and I know that I can read all the research. Until he showed me, that's when it becomes a pivotal point for me to actually replicate those behaviours.

And that's so empowering, they're the moments that I've had, you know, hundreds of if not thousands of over the last eight years of running dads groups locally, but also running Dads Group organisation.

In hearing those stories there's just these moments of empowerment and they're really rich, they're really positive, and they go on to change. These tiny little ripples happening in hundreds, if not thousands, of people's lives across the country, we're actually changing the culture of fatherhood. And for me that was seeing, you know, my brother-in-law engaging with his child when his child was, you know, displaying challenging behaviours. Every single person I've ever spoken to has children that have displayed challenging behaviours

It just resonates so deeply with me because we feel so, I guess, incapable sometimes of knowing what the right thing to do is. The answer is not always a perfect right thing to do but the answer is to stick at it and commit to trying to work out how to deliver fathering or parenting in that space and be OK with it being a long process and journey.

And that's what I've had to reflect on. I'm still not where I want to be in my journey of fathering with my children, but I am committed to this space with my children, but also with a broader group of fathers nationally and experts to improving this space. That takes the pressure off, and we need to be able to, you know, take the pressure off ourselves in that parenting space because the pressure is always on so high.

Dads Group, I've always said, is like that little pressure thing on the side of an Italian coffee maker that just, you know, it lets us let off the steam, share a joke, share a challenging experience, share something that went horribly that week. Just saying it. My dad always used to say a problem shared is a problem halved. And it's so true. Just having that chat with someone who gets it and feeling like it's not going to go any further, is very, very, very rewarding.

**Belynda Smith**

Thank you. What about you, Alan?

**Alan Wolfe**

Well, I was going to blend my dad and my stepdad, I think for me.

So, my dad, I'm similar to Tom, you know, there's a generation gap, it's quite strong, but he came from a dysfunctional home. Not too majorly, but he didn't have any sort of strong fathering role model, especially, you know, growing up in the 80s and the 90s where it was all starting to change. But what was so clear to me as a child that I was always loved, he was always committed, and that he really worked hard to make sure that we had a stable home. But then we were talking about the things like the physical side of things, you know, it just didn't come naturally to him to hug his children, especially as they got older. But my grandmother married a lovely man, he would have been in his 70s, I think when they got married. Big Uncle Ted, I called him, big Teddy bear of a man. He didn't actually have kids of his own, but he was very affectionate, very loving, and so he showed me he was her fathering role model. You can pick your kids up; you can hold him on your lap when they're upset. And I think it's a combination of those two things for me really brings home the importance of a father and what you can do and what you can show.

**Belynda Smith**

So, to finish each of these podcasts in this series, we ask our guests a series of five quick questions. So, I'm curious about what was your favourite book as a child? Do you want to go first with your favourite Alan?

**Alan Wolfe**

Yes, easily. I remember writing an essay on this as a teenager. The Magic Faraway Tree.

**Belynda Smith**

Oh, gorgeous. Yep. What about you, Tom?

**Thomas Docking**

I'm not sure what aged child, but there was a book called Big Wheels, Little Wheels. I really liked that. But then when I could start reading myself, it was The Hardy Boys.

**Belynda Smith**

Hardy Boys! Yep, I liked Trixie Belden.

**Thomas Docking**

The adventures of the Hardy Boys, yeah.

**Belynda Smith**

Nice.

And what helps you to have a sense of wellbeing, what are the building blocks for your wellbeing.

**Alan Wolfe**

For me to slow down, just give myself some space. Don't always have to be productive, in fact, [then] you're more productive. Slow down. Go somewhere you can just breathe and be for a bit.

**Belynda Smith**

Nice, Thomas?

**Thomas Docking**

Yeah, similar. It's just getting out in the waves and going for a surf. I'm not connected to my phone, you know, I'm not connected to anything. I'm just at one, in creation, flowing with waves, but it's just an incredible space having the privilege to be able to get in waves and roll with waves

And it teaches you so much about life and the other ways of life. And I just you keep going back over these in every single wave is different and reading them and being present in them. So for me wellbeing is, in this stage in my life is, getting out there and disconnecting in the water.

**Belynda Smith**

Nice. And what's your happiest childhood memory?

**Alan Wolfe**

I think it would be my 5th birthday party, sitting on Uncle Ted's lap – who I'd just talked about. We've got a photo of it, you know, the huge grin, mum had made a cake and it was just, I think it was peak happiness for a kid.

**Belynda Smith**

Gorgeous! Thomas, what about you, what's your happiest childhood memory?

**Thomas Docking**

Yeah, when I read that question, I thought, ummm.

My dad took me when I was 10 to go camping for an overnight trip and we had this, I just remember sitting there fishing in the ocean, or a little estuary near the ocean, and just having some, I think it's CC chips in and ginger beer. Just sitting there on the car, you know, we had four kids in the family, you don't get any just-dad time and sitting there was just like, wow, this is about as special as life gets you know, and it was just cool.

**Belynda Smith**

Ginger beer, CCs, and your dad. That's awesome.

What's your favourite outdoor space?

**Alan Wolfe**

South Coast down near Albany, my soul comes alive at about Mount Barker, you just feel it in the air. It's just something down there.

**Belynda Smith**

Oh, gorgeous! And Thomas, what about you?

**Thomas Docking**

I don't really tell you on online because it'll probably attract, there's already too many people there, but there's a little place north of where we live up on the Sunshine Coast. You can drive up on the beach and you can camp there, and you just wake up and the waves are just lapping near your tent. Yeah, it's a very, very quiet place and it's beautiful in its remoteness and I think that's probably become one of my favourite places.

**Belynda Smith**

Keep it that way, yeah.

Thank you and complete this sentence: "To help them thrive, children need..."

**Alan Wolfe**

You. If you're committed and involved, everything else flows from there. If you don't have the full toolkit, if you're committed, you'll learn it.

**Belynda Smith**

You'll figure it, out. Yeah, lovely. Thomas, what about you? To help them thrive, children need?

**Thomas Docking**

I'm going to reflect on what Alan was saying before and yeah, they absolutely need a village. It's pertinent that a child can thrive with multiple different father figures and mother figures, mums, aunts, grandparents, and yeah, everything in between. Educators and health experts and just good old next-door neighbours. It takes a village.

**Belynda Smith**

How can listeners get in touch with you both, with your organisation or the things that you do? What's the best way?

**Alan Wolfe**

So for Hilton Dads, we're active on Facebook, we've got a group there, but we're far more active on our WhatsApp groups. We've just created a whole bunch of groups there; some guys do yoga on a Monday night, some play squash on a Tuesday night, we've got a DIY collaboration club going on there. So if you get on Facebook, we can add you to the WhatsApp groups, [and you can] really be able to participate there

For the *Adademy*, go to "The Adademy", just like the academy, but with a 'd' [www.theadademy.com/](http://www.theadademy.com/) And it's also on Facebook as well. Send us a message there will be happy to add you to the list.

**Belynda Smith**

Thank you. And Thomas, what about you? How can people get in touch with you?

**Thomas Docking**

Yeah. So if I want to get in touch with any of our programs, it's just on our website its [www.dadsgroup.org](http://www.dadsgroup.org) and if they want to engage with our community programs anywhere in Australia, you can search for the Dads Group and in a certain town. And if there's a Dads Group there it will pop up

If you want to be involved in hospital programs, I guess it requires at this stage and an email through our website [www.dadsgroup.org](http://www.dadsgroup.org). We also run an event that Alan's been you know championing and involved this with Belmont Dads leader, Sean, and that is Man with the Pram, so that's also on Facebook. So different fathers have engaged with Dads Group through events like Man with the Pram etc. But generally speaking, [www.dadsgroup.org](http://www.dadsgroup.org).

**Belynda Smith**

Great. Lots of ways for dads to reach out.

**Alan Wolfe**

If I can give a shout out to Belmont Dads as well for organising that event, but they're active on Facebook as well, so if anyone lives that side of the city it's closer to them, [it's a] massive, big welcoming group.

**Belynda Smith**

Great. Thank you so much both of you for being here today and talking all things. Dad, it's been really great to hear from you both and thank you so much to our listeners for tuning in. If you'd like any more information about Meerilinga, please contact [mycf@meerilinga.org.au](mailto:mycf@meerilinga.org.au) or visit our website at [www.meerilinga.org.au](http://www.meerilinga.org.au).

Thank you, Thomas, and thank you, Alan.

**Thomas Docking**

Thank you so much.

**Alan Wolfe**

Thank you, thanks for the work that Meerilinga does.