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Red Dust Healing: Acknowledging the Past, Changing the Future

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We may not be responsible for the past 200 years but we can choose to be responsible for what happens now.

Barry Toohey, personal communication, 2012

OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a view from a new angle. It briefly describes a critical perspective on how a history of dispossession, rejection and powerlessness negatively affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family structures and individual development and behaviour, and gave rise to the intergenerational transmission of trauma.

However, it is important to note that conveying the events of history and the impacts of colonisation is not about pointing the finger and blame. It is about giving an understanding about the impact it all has had on our families, especially our men. All of this history has removed a key ingredient for a strong family—resulting in the taking away of the man as a source of love to family and the critical role and responsibility of that man. This chapter describes *Red Dust Healing*, an innovative and highly effective approach to assisting men and women in their efforts to heal and make better choices for themselves and in their relationships.

A primary experience of those who have suffered trauma and grief, is rejection. Like an infectious disease, rejection has reached epidemic proportions in many communities, not just Aboriginal communities but wherever a person's capacity to lead a meaningful life has been crippled by the feeling of being unloved or unwanted. *Red Dust Healing* examines the nature of rejection, the causes of rejection, the results of rejection and most importantly the remedies for rejection. We conclude our discussion with some outcome data and anecdotal reports on the life-changing and sometimes life-saving effects of this program.

INTRODUCTION

Two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (authors Powell and Ross) decided that they had had enough. For many years they worked in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander juvenile justice and came to the conclusion that locking people up was not changing anything. So from their own family and work experiences they worked to piece together the *Red Dust Healing* program, to help their own people, and to, also increase non-Aboriginal understanding of the issues. *Red Dust Healing* has demonstrated that it can light up the healing fire in the heart of the most trauma and grief affected individual to become a healthy, culturally strong person who can build a strong, loving family. This healing benefit is for anyone across the world and so the program's potential is universal.

The *Red Dust Healing* program is targeted at the heart, not the head. It promotes healing of the persistent effects of rejection and grief and loss common in the Aboriginal community but also

throughout modern society. Key features are the methods for engaging participants, the *Red Dust Healing* tools, experiential components that foster deep exploration of one's own history of rejection and loss, and the support offered after training. *Red Dust Healing* is not just another Aboriginal program, but a powerful healing tool that should be made available to everyone no matter what race, religion, class or gender. While the tools are described below, in practice it is essential that they are presented in an individualised and personalised manner so how they relate to solutions in one's own life is apparent.

Finding effective solutions to the pervasive and persistent negative effects of Australian colonisation on Aboriginal peoples has plagued communities, Elders, governments, scholars and healthcare providers for decades. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent on a wide range of interventions, programs and services with and without guidance or direction from those supposedly being helped.

CONTEXT

Colonisation changed our world. The horrific history of how Aboriginal people were treated by those colonising this country and how government-sanctioned and church-sanctioned systems perpetuated the trauma into the 20th century is described in several chapters in this book. The goal here is not to reiterate these facts but rather to offer a thesis on the psychological and social mechanisms by which they changed the mind-sets and behaviours of Aboriginal men and women for generations.

For too long now some Aboriginal men and women have survived in a state of oppression; whether by choice or circumstance is a matter of perspective and opinion. The authors and others³ propose that those who colonised Australia purposely applied four main tactics—attacking four core values—that irreparably changed the culture and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by specifically targeting the role of men in their families and the community. These **four core values** are: *identity, responsibilities, relationships and spirituality*. Below we explain what we mean by these domains and how the *Red Dust Healing* program and prescribed tools help undo the effects of these tactics and promote healing.

Core Values Explained

Identity

By changing their names, and removing them from their role as the source of love and resources in the family, Aboriginal men and women lost their sense of identity. For example, as late as the 1960s, some people were given dehumanising names such as 'Diesel Engine' or 'Pox' when they were required to make their mark to receive rations or welfare support. Any identity related to their role in the community was also obliterated as many were removed from their homes and placed in missions, institutions and on secluded islands far from their families and communities.

Responsibility

Men were the protectors, teachers, Lore-makers and providers of the basic necessities for their families (food, safety, security, and affection), but these responsibilities were forcibly removed. Family-based responsibilities were shifted by external forces to governments that determined to whom and when resources were delivered. Men were stripped of their traditional roles as skilled hunters, keepers and sharers of cultural and traditional knowledge, toolmakers, builders of shelters and canoes, etc. Men and women had been responsible for educating the next generation but significant chasms in the communication network for transmitting traditional knowledge and social values were created.

Continued . . .

Relationships

Fractured relationships led to lost opportunities to learn how to be a father, husband, son, etc. and lost opportunities to share that wisdom with their family and young people in the community. They lost the opportunity to observe and learn from Elders so they could pass on ways of conducting oneself in relationships that fostered meaningful connection rather than just control. Many of the men grew up not knowing how to show emotion and build relationships in their own families and with other men.

Spirituality

The centuries old connection to the land and the traditional spiritual sense that permeated Aboriginal life was attacked as part of the tactics noted above. Spirituality (the feeling felt within) was replaced by an imposed religion (an external, man-made interpretation) that was linked to accessing resources. This tactic is summarised by Powell as, 'Religion defined us, confined us and controlled us.' Many Aboriginal people had to possess an exemption certificate known as the 'dog tag.' They had to seek permission from the controlling mission or reserve superintendent if they wanted to leave the place of control, however, the exemption certificate still incorporated strict guidelines which one had to comply with if they were to reside amongst the general population. The new religion simply did not serve the same meaningful role in Aboriginal life. The Aboriginal spiritual sense provided continuity and an understanding of how to live in harmony. Religion did not provide appropriate tools to replace traditional ways of thinking or behaving.

Fathers Taken Away

Former Aboriginal Senator, Neville Bonner stated:

“ As parents, uncles, cousins or brothers, we (Aboriginal males) must take responsibility for the future of our young people...emphasis is placed on sporting personalities, but the best role model a son can have is a patient caring father. The attitude towards life of the son will mirror that of the father, which is the way things used to be done before white settlement...I am convinced there is absolutely no reason why a system that worked so well in the past cannot work today.”^{5(p53)}

Ross describes his own experiences that helped him understand how to possibly help others. He acknowledges that while he had a father growing up, his father was unable to serve as a role model or a source of love. Ross says that he came to realise that his father's failure to properly, lovingly parent him was not his father's fault but maintains that as men we must still be accountable and responsible for our choices and actions. He acknowledges that others have sadly lost their sons, partners, brothers, cousins, uncles, grandfathers, husbands and fathers to tragic, frequently unpreventable circumstances. Ross and colleagues argue that in all these situations surviving adults and children raised in the aftermath of these losses would have felt a sense of abandonment or rejection from absent partners or husbands, and more importantly from those in the family who were fathers.

Ross speaks of the tradition in his family:

“ One of our key roles as men is to link a child back to his past in order to shape his future. Many of my Elders said to me, if we do not know where we come from, we will not know where we are going (Grandfathers and Uncles). ”

Men have had a crucial sustaining role within our families, which has maintained balance within our families and environment for thousands of years. Not only did we have men's business and women's business, but men have played crucial roles with responsibility within the family that positively affected the community and the nation. The importance of fathers and the detrimental effects of father's being absent, have been studied in the predominantly white culture in Australia and among urban and rural poor and minority groups elsewhere. Although a comprehensive review of this literature is beyond the scope of the current chapter, the results all seem to support the point made here: the role of the father can be critical and its loss has widespread negative effects on family and community.

Men's roles in the Australian Aboriginal community were to instruct, teach, train, nurture, shape character and culture, control, rule and, most importantly, to love. Today many of our men still struggle to serve some of these essential roles for their loved ones as their own experiences have left them unprepared as cultural practices and families were broken. The Noongar Men's Manual states:

The role of the man was held in high esteem. He performed ceremonial rites and guided the young boys through their initiation into manhood. We guided our young men to understand their world, to know their country, to make their tools, to dance and paint, to learn our stories, to know the spiritual world. Men were providers for their families...^{8(p51)}

Writing about a traditional custom practiced within the Kutjungka region, in the southeast of the Kimberley region of Western Australia, McCoy states:

When boys (marnti) become men (wati) the manner of kanyirninpa changes. No longer do young men seek to be held by their mothers and female relations. Instead, they seek to be held by older men: brothers, uncles and other males.^{4(p4)}

McCoy explains that 'holding' has been a recognised tradition for thousands of years but also writes about how this practice is disappearing due to the lack of men to fulfil this sacred role for our next generation of men.

By holding them, older men induct younger men into the social meanings and behaviours of desert, male adulthood. A generative and generational male praxis is disclosed.^{4(p4)}

Law and Justice

This issue has been dealt with by applying a damaging, ineffective judicial or punishment model on a national level. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males are imprisoned at an alarming rate (discussed in Chapter 10, Heffernan and colleagues), but worsening individual and social problems in the community indicate the severe negative impact of applying this *Law and Justice* approach to address longstanding complex social problems that have grown since the time of colonisation. Already Aboriginal adults are almost 14 times more likely to be incarcerated than other Australians. High arrest rates among Aboriginal males create challenges and high costs for all tiers of government and heartache and sorrow in the lives of many of our Aboriginal families. Sadly, Aboriginal women also have high arrest rates.

In a snapshot of the *Law and Justice* statistics concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples,^{6,7} four major life stressors are highlighted. Members of the community:

- are frequently witnesses to violence;
- are victims of abuse or violent crime;
- have trouble with the police; and
- have a member of their family who is at current risk of being sent to jail or is currently in jail.⁷

Life Cycles of Violence and Rejection

With regard to witnessing violence at home or in their community, younger generations are at increased risk of then practicing the same violence in their homes as adults and parents. This lifecycle is discussed by Hayes and colleagues (Chapter 20). This is particularly true for young males who will serve as the next generation of fathers. Understanding transgenerational patterns of violence begins with this experience of intergenerational violence at home.

The following statistics outline the common stressors and risk factors in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community including witnessing violence:

- In 2002, 16 per cent of Aboriginal people aged 15 years and over reported that they, a friend, or family member had witnessed violence in the 12 months prior to the survey;⁷
- Aboriginal people in remote areas were three times as likely as those in non-remote areas to have witnessed violence (30 per cent compared with 10 per cent);⁷
- Almost half (45 per cent) of Aboriginal people who had been a witness to violence also reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence.⁷ Rates of hospitalisation, as the result of spousal assault are 35 times higher in the Aboriginal population;⁶
- Ninety-one per cent of the total Aboriginal population incarcerated are males.¹ Almost one-half of Aboriginal prisoners are under the age of 30. Nationally, one-in-fifteen Aboriginal males aged between 25 and 29 are in jail.⁷ The most common offence by Aboriginal prisoners is *acts intended to cause injury* (32 per cent).⁷

Conversations with many previously violent offenders in the Aboriginal community (e.g. *Red Dust Healing* attendees) indicate that normalisation of violence when they were young was a major contributing factor to their current behaviour. If our next generation of Aboriginal young people have witnessed violence, whether it be at home, at a friend's place, within the community or in an institution, what are the chances of them becoming perpetrators in the future as opposed to accepting and fulfilling their important role as men? As children grow up with this underlying generational hurt referred to above, they see and feel the hurt in all its forms. Unconsciously their individual hurt may become suppressed, but comes out at some point in their lives and is directed at others.

In the authors' experience with young Aboriginal males, when the issues of violence and anger do surface, many are young fathers and they tend to release their suppressed hurt as anger directed at other family members, peers or others in the community. Aboriginal sons and fathers who have been exposed to these hurts through no fault of their own during their childhood may have no knowledge or understanding of how or why the hurt occurred. The effects of this deep-seated, powerful hurt appears to fuel family-based and community-based violence, drug and alcohol misuse, and subsequent homelessness, incarceration, family separation, multiple failed relationships and unemployment as discussed in detail in several of the chapters of this book. Many never learned what else to do with overwhelming thoughts and feelings about what has happened to them and those they know and care about. Unfortunately, this deep sense of rejection or hurt that many have carried in their hearts has been so detrimental that they do not realise as sons and now fathers that they are hurting the ones that are close to them or, if they do, feel helpless to do things differently.

If there is to be recovery, it is critical for governments to acknowledge or face the fact that future generations of families are growing up without fathers, and that decades of hurt are at the basis of many of today's social and personal difficulties. Families have been abandoned with the pain of the past, and future families are being left with absent fathers. It is this frightful underlying ignorance that poses a great threat to all families from all walks of life within Australia whether you are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Australian South Sea Islanders or other. How do we address this major threat of creating a fatherless nation?

Currently we have approximately 30 per cent of Aboriginal families in our population that are headed by single parent families.² In addition, anecdotal reports in workshops indicate that there is a growing sense of anxiety that many of our single parent families are headed by our women trying to manage the tasks of child-rearing alone. Ross suggests that this trend signals a silent death for cultures based on the essential role of the father that will negatively affect future generations. He further suggests that this trend will create a tsunami of blindness within this nation to the true needs of, and solutions for, Aboriginal communities.

The authors propose that a key cause of hurt among all Aboriginal people is a history of rejection that continues in their daily life. All of us may have experienced rejection and pain at one time or another. The rejection may have been minor or so crushing that it affected one's whole life, the many family and intimate relationships, and the capacity to show emotion with loved ones and in the community. As noted above, many of our men suppress the pain suffered at the hands of others but, most importantly, we believe that many of our men have suppressed the pain from rejection.

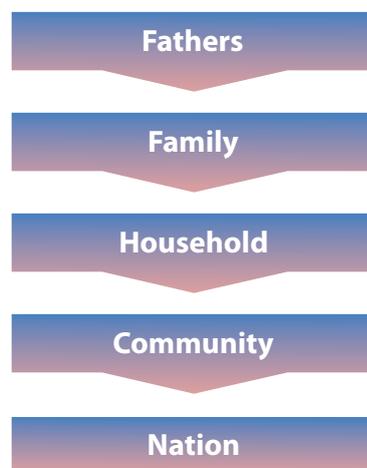
Today, in order to reverse the effects of rejection, we must turn the hearts of the fathers back to their sons and the hearts of the sons back to their fathers to restore a bond that had been practiced by over two thousand generations prior to colonisation. One such program called *Red Dust Healing* is allowing this process to begin so our men can stand as a man, husband and father.

Red Dust Healing identifies a model of oppression and how this oppression worked to remove the four core values (*identity, responsibilities, relationships and spirituality*) from man as the individual. The program addresses oppression in ways that reverse the colonisation process.

REVERSING OPPRESSION

The primary authors of this chapter (Powell and Ross) understood the model of oppression and the removal of the four core values (*identity, responsibilities, relationships and spirituality*) from man as the individual. They knew it was time to develop a model which would address oppression by reversing the oppressive colonising process represented in the schema below.

Figure 27.1: Reversing the Oppressive Colonising Process



The first critical step is to start with the individual—each man. It is vital, more than ever, to heal Aboriginal men, and support them as they begin to remove the deep wound of rejection so they can reclaim their position in the family, community, culture and nation. The cultural program, *Red Dust Healing* has been achieving outstanding results healing men and also restoring families. We need our individuals to step up and see themselves as a man, then see themselves again as husbands for our wives, fathers and role models for our children, and leaders of our communities. They can make a nation proud again. We believe that if you fix a man you fix a family and all things that stem from this foundation.

RED DUST HEALING PHILOSOPHY

The *Red Dust Healing* program is based on six philosophical principles that guide the work by trained facilitators.

Philosophical Principles Guiding the *Red Dust Healing* Program

- Ancient traditional practices, morals and values should be understood as a way of addressing issues in today's society;
- Exploration of one's personal history addresses the question: *If we do not acknowledge who we are and from where we came, how can we know where we are going?;*
- Healing is defined as a spiritual understanding of self, identity, love, belonging, family, security, hurt, heartache, good times and laughter;
- Healing is a renewed grasp for hope that grows from developing love, respect and understanding of ourselves and others who support us. Healing comes from telling your story in a place and with people that offer acceptance and tools for going forward;
- Healing does not happen immediately. Time and personalised support are required to learn and practice the new tools, negotiate systems that may still feel foreign or threatening, and refine one's ability to trust the heart over the head; and
- Helping men heal, in particular, will have a spreading positive effect on his relationships with his children, partner and family, as well as the community.

RED DUST HEALING PROGRAM

The *Red Dust Healing* program has already been delivered to over 5,300 attendees in 300 different communities in rural, remote, regional and urban Australia. It has been commissioned by various agencies and community groups to address a range of presenting issues including sexual assault, suicide prevention, grief and loss, family and domestic violence, harmful substance use, law and order concerns, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing, anger management, education, employment and housing issues, encouraging community contribution and more independent governance. It has proven valuable in the education sector, justice and juvenile justice, community mental health settings and the general community where the persistent effects of trauma exist. Although designed for Aboriginal Australians, it applies equally well to those from other cultural backgrounds who have themselves suffered loss and rejection in the context of their families and communities.

It is a challenge to engage those most hurt in their past to have another go at healing. The credibility and community recognition of the facilitators and the widespread success of the program play an important role in getting attendees to show up. Many attendees have a lengthy history of negative experiences or at least non-helpful exposure to standard social agency, psychological or other mental health interventions including psychotherapy, case management, psychoactive medication, job training, career counselling, and in their experience with the juvenile and adult justice systems. This is a tough crowd for delivering any kind of program. Most believe they have heard it all before. However, the key appears to be that the participants are quickly engaged as contributors and active members of a group trying to understand common themes in their lives and potential solutions that fit their individual concerns. They receive information about history and some important tools, but the personalised approach and the opportunity to come away with something that immediately applies to their daily troubles and deep personal unmet needs, reportedly drives the success.

Utilises Visual Holistic Learning Modules

The *Red Dust Healing* program encompasses visual holistic learning modules (see below) that engage the participants on an emotional level by having them create images and tell their story. Cultures are linked to personal stories to encourage participants to gain individual insights into their identity, belonging and self-belief. Pro-Social Modelling arises naturally as facilitators and attendees learn about their culture and apply new tools for resolving conflict and getting their basic personal and interpersonal needs met.

The program facilitates the understanding of *Rejection* and *Grief and Loss* as the possible foundation of all hurt. Although written from an Aboriginal perspective, *Red Dust Healing* also applies to other people. Rejection knows no bounds; it is the same for young and old, for male and female, and for black and white—it hurts us all.

Participants are supported as they examine their own personal hurt which allows them to heal from within by closely considering and sometimes discussing family and personal relationships. Many describe life-long patterns of violence, abuse and neglect. The *good* and *bad* nutrients that were part of their young life are examined and related to their present day behaviour.

The program facilitator places the participant both in the position of being hurt (victim) and then as the one doing the hurting (perpetrator). They identify the powerful, and in some cases crippling, emotions felt as the victim and then the hurt they cause as the perpetrator and perpetuator of intergenerational trauma. Participants are asked to examine the effects the rejection, abuse and neglect may have had on their lives while growing up, and question whether they are repeating the same tactics that may have hurt them.

Encouraging People to Heal

The program encourages participants to heal so they can build stronger family relationships. It promotes the philosophy that taking responsibility for making the best possible choices is essential and the way forward that allows for growth in personal self-respect and meaningful connections to others. Numerous topics are covered, depending in part on the purpose of the group and the needs of the attendees. They include: Religion (man-made interpretation) versus Spirituality (felt within), Aboriginal history and the impacts of colonialism on personal identity, family roles and structure, relationships, Elders, and men's business. These challenging topics are discussed openly—along with the wide range of symptoms and behaviour problems that stem from this history such as drug and alcohol issues, family violence, grievances and loss, stress and damaged mental health—with the goal of finding solutions rather than solely reliving the hurt and rage.

Promoting Ownership, Self-determination, Sustainability and Autonomy

The program promotes ownership, self-determination, sustainability and autonomy. Although many participants have participated in a clinical/controlled environment, *Red Dust Healing* attempts to empower people to retrace their childhood memories to address much of the hurt which they have encountered growing up. By allowing participants to share their stories, many of the participants are able to identify the specific hurt/s. Once they are able to 'lay the axe' to their root cause of their problem, they are then able to move forward with a number of strategies that empower positive lifestyle changes personally. Too many clinical settings don't address the heart issues which see many participants incarcerated in a mental health facility or jail. *Red Dust Healing* empowers the individual and communities to participate and contribute to solutions within the individual and their families, households and communities.

Developing Individual Case-Management Plans

Each person is supported in developing an individual case-management plan to meet their personal needs. *Red Dust Healing* promotes follow up by directly providing links and referrals to relevant services. The case-management plan can be supported by a buddy and mentor system that can assist and enhance completion of individual case plans.

Utilising Existing Mainstream Services

The program also utilises existing mainstream service providers, Aboriginal service providers and Aboriginal Elders to assist with the delivery of relevant service modules. For example, relevant Elders may assist with information on cultural and traditional ways; Aboriginal health workers may provide information on healthy lifestyle and diet; Sexual Health workers and Drug and Alcohol workers may assist with case-plans if required. In other words, this program recognises and adopts an interdisciplinary approach, as described in detail in Chapter 13 (Schultz, Walker and colleagues).

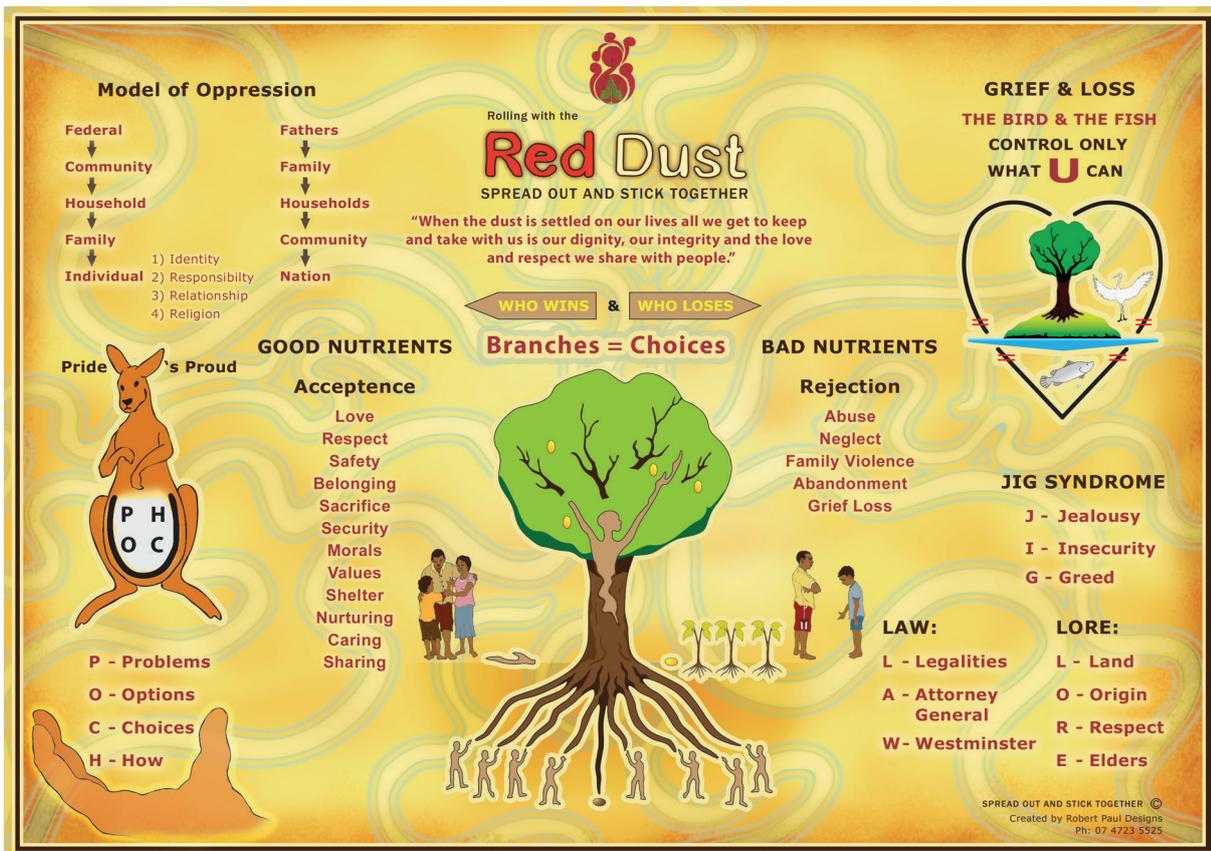
Modes of Delivery

Versions of the program can be delivered in one or three day formats with most requiring a second session within four to six weeks. Of note, however, is that the facilitators and buddies/mentors who come from the same community and have been trained with the tools of *Red Dust Healing* are available for individual support between sessions and after the program is complete. The program is delivered to groups of eight to ten participants, with more basic descriptive programs available to larger groups. Two trainers are typically present throughout the program. Trainers travel to communities to offer the program as most attendees are unable to travel elsewhere to seek resources. Providing support within a community beyond what is offered in the sessions is also frequently essential.

THE RED DUST HEALING TOOLS

The most innovative and powerful feature of the program is the description and personalisation of the tools and the support provided as attendees apply them in their own lives. Some *Red Dust Healing* tools may seem like common sense, some overlap with Buddhist or other cultural teachings regarding acceptance of our limits in life, and some stem from Aboriginal traditional culture. Together they arm attendees with strategies and ways of examining the challenges in their life and their relationships in a way that can be clarifying and simplifying. The program links personally defined values to what they *choose to do*. The tools give them a method for achieving their goals. Through these visual modules the participants acquire an understanding of who they are, where they come from and from where and whom they get their strength. The *Red Dust Healing* tools are depicted in Figure 27.2.

Figure 27.2: Tools of the *Red Dust Healing Program*



© Spread Out and Stick Together
Created by Robert Paul Designs

Understanding the Visual

The key visual learning modules: the 'Family Tree', 'the Bird and the Fish', 'Law versus Lore', 'the JIG Syndrome', 'Pride versus Proud' and 'POUCH' as depicted in the *Red Dust Healing Tools* Figure 27.2, are further described below.

Family Tree

The *Family Tree* gives participants an understanding of the people who were, and maybe still are, important to them in their lives. It also confirms from where they get their strength and also gives them an understanding of where some of their rejection may have come from. It outlines through the branches, the choices each person made and the consequences of these choices for themselves and others. The family tree also helps them understand grief and loss. It is explored initially as a group but then, importantly, each participant examines his/her Family Tree individually with the support of a skilled and compassionate facilitator.

Bird and the Fish

With *the Bird and the Fish*, participants come to further understanding how to deal with grief and loss. This concept and tool also imparts knowledge about the limits of their control and what they can and cannot control in the environment. For example, you cannot control other people, the forces of nature or life events not within your direct control. If you keep trying, welcome to stress! Participants frequently acknowledge that they have all been in the situation of trying to control things they cannot and how it has stressed them.

Law versus LORE

Law versus LORE demonstrated that as Indigenous people we may have to live and abide by two laws—the law imposed by society and cultural Lore (Figure 27.3). However, the authors of the program (Powell and Ross) propose that if you maintain your LORE, this being the foundation of your dignity, integrity, power and freedom, then it makes the other Law redundant and irrelevant. But if you give up your LORE to LAW then this law will make a judgement on how you live your life.

Figure 27.3: The Characteristics of Law and Lore



© Powell and Ross

JIG Syndrome

The *JIG Syndrome* stands for Jealousy, Insecurity and Greed. Participants recognise why and how these human feelings bring down families, relationships, agencies, organisations and communities and relate JIG to their own work, home and community environments.

Pride versus Proud

Pride versus Proud is an evaluation tool to deal with preoccupation with one's self (termed self-consciousness in the program). Letters are used to make the distinction between the destructive and isolating effects of *pride* as opposed to the more healthy and community-oriented sense of feeling *proud*. There is an 'I' in pride that makes it all about I, I, I. There is a 'U' in proud making it about US. *Red Dust Healing* is about US, not 'I' or 'me'.

POUCH

POUCH is a solution-based, problem solving concept that allows participants to deal with the issues and difficulties in their own lives. It stands for what **Problems** U have, what **Options** U have, what **Choices** U have and **How** are U going to deal with them. Discussing this tool encourages participants to look at solving some of the concerns that they may have and helps put the responsibility back on the person without being in their face or pointing the finger.

PARTICIPANTS COMMENTS

We have attempted to understand how both male and female attendees of the *Red Dust Healing* program view its value and the personal effects on their life. We used a few different approaches, each with its own limitations and strengths.

We have filmed conversations with those who attended in various locations for various reasons around Australia. We wanted to get their story in a culturally sensitive manner about how

things were for them before, and how things might have changed after attending the Red Dust program. We wanted to determine if what we offered was meaningful or helpful but also to gauge what follow-up support might be required as they attempted to apply the tools. We have included some quotes from attendees below:

“ I have had a lot of pain and hurt due to life’s circumstances, which has seen me attending all sorts of counselling over the years, none which seemed to help me see my way through to inner peace. I felt I did not deserve a happy life because my mum did not have one. I did not know my dad. Mum passed, I did not get to ask for her forgiveness. It is from this point my life spiralled into darkness. My children did not see me as their mum anymore, the alcoholic shame. Then today...you gave me hope to heal the wounds of my past and change direction with confidence. To accept all that has happened as it is. To cry, whether they be tears of joy or sadness. Today I can say for the first time in 35 years I feel I can choose and believe with conviction, I deserve love and happiness as much as anyone else. I deserve the love of my family. I can be all that I want to be. ”

“ I have learnt what a man really is (through the Red Dust program). I thought a man’s role was dominating. I now realise that a real man is someone that cares and loves his family and is also a good role model. ”

“ I grew up with my mother’s people most of my life and never had much to do with my father’s side and that was playing on my mind for a very long time. My mother past away, I was nineteen the baby of mum’s children. At this stage in my life I was going through some very difficult stages being diagnosed with bipolar and very bad case of manic depression. I used to smoke Yandi day in day out, as a result of my habit for this drug I lost my job and was starting to lose pride and dignity and became a man that scarred my family a lot. I landed at a mental health clinic for three, one month visits over two years. Attending this Red Dust Healing program gave the very thing I was missing all my life, two men that I never met before listening to my pain and sorrow. I sounded like a baby bird crying out for my father to come and save me. Red Dust Healing opened my eyes to a world of different approach methods on decision making right through to respecting Lore to defeat law. They cleared my thought process and helped me understand simple things from a different angle. Leaving Nambucca was a good feeling, a lot of unhappy feelings were left behind and I felt free again and a chance to redeem myself. Today, I live on the Gold Coast and my new life is deadly and my father and family is very proud of me and I love them very much so. ”

“ I did not realise that my pain had a name called rejection, I am glad that I understand how rejection works, so now I can move forward with my life. ”

In addition we have asked attendees to complete questionnaires after the program to rate its usefulness, the presentation style and methods, and also each of the program components. Some preliminary data on 118 attendees regarding the tools is included in Table 27.1 and Figure 27.4 below:

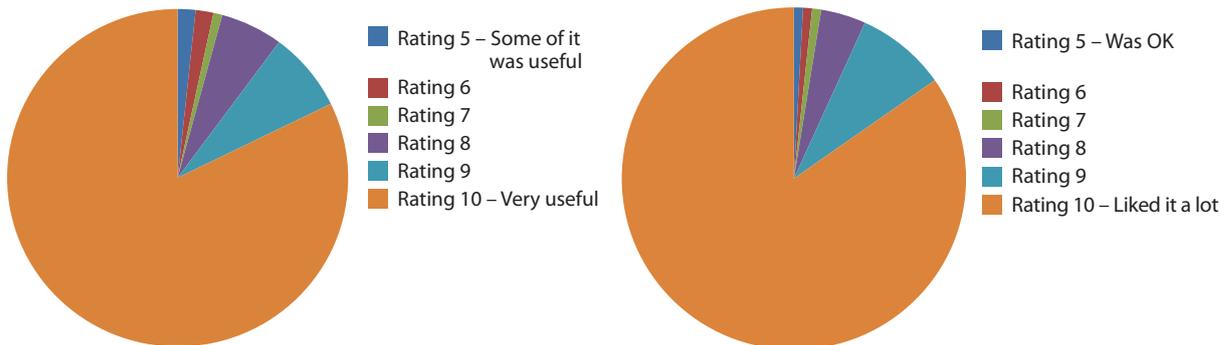
Table 27.1: Attendees Endorsing the Use of Each Red Dust Healing Tool

Will you use in the future?	Family Tree (%)	Bird and Fish (%)	Law versus Lore (%)	JIG (%)	POUCH (%)	Understanding past rejection (%)
Yes	71	66	52	49	55	45

Table 27.1 shows the high percentage of respondents who reported that at least one of the tools was helpful and likely to be used in the future. Given that many of the attendees had experiences in mental health and social services that reportedly gave them no useful information or strategies, the finding that *Red Dust Healing* is providing useful tools that attendees are willing to apply is notable. Future work is required to understand who is endorsing the usefulness of which tool and for what issues they thought that tool was appropriate in their own lives. This may allow for programs to be customised for those presenting with specific issues however, in the opinion of the program developers, the entire tool kit may be necessary as life and challenges unfold in the future. It is therefore probably better to arm them with the full complement of tools and skills, along with the capacity to reflect on the contents of their own head and heart.

Figure 27.4 depicts the proportion of respondents who ranked the program and its presentation at various levels. The overwhelming majority ranked both very positively.

Figure 27.4: Proportion of Responses to the *Red Dust Healing* Program and Presentations



The authors have also developed a questionnaire (Donnelly, Powell, Ross and Kickett, *Red Dust Evaluation Form*, unpublished, 2012) for assessing how attendees think and feel *before* the program and then again after the program. The idea was to assess whether ways of thinking and social and emotional wellbeing change as a result of the Red Dust content and experiences. Piloting of this questionnaire has demonstrated that asking attendees to report on very personal feelings *before* they have developed rapport and trust with the presenters over the days of the seminars may be unreasonable. Many required some sense of what the program was about and who the presenters were before they would share what were personal and possibly painful details. Even discussing these issues with other men also seemed inappropriate for many at first as it was inconsistent with whom they believed they needed to be. For example, reporting on their perceived level of choice in their life or how they would rate their level of social and emotional wellbeing seemed premature in the relationship that needed the development of the trust that formed as part of the program. The openness and sincerity of post-program videos indicated that a willingness to discuss their past and the effects of the program was established. A questionnaire that asks attendees to rate themselves on items relative to how they felt or thought before the program compared to how they would rank themselves afterwards, all completed after the seminars, is now being implemented.

WHEN THE DUST SETTLES

For over two hundred years, all tiers of Australian government have been trying to create solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Islander Australians. As founders and promoters of the *Red Dust Healing* program, we believe that governments have not got it right. However, we would like to work with governments to supplement many of their existing solutions to restore a vital balance between ‘head and heart’, for all Australians. There has also been an underlying current of alienation, with many other Australians thinking that First Nation Australians always receive benefits whether they are financial or through services. The *Red Dust Healing* program focuses on changing ways of thinking and behaving that moves people toward a more powerful, self-sufficient role in their lives. It helps them make better choices that are in line with their values and culture.

This new approach has been a long time coming. In the past we have shared resources, had numerous consultations, held conferences and gatherings to exchange information and ideas, and have even been researched over and beyond as individuals, families, communities and as a nation. There have been numerous recommendations from individuals, communities, agencies, professions and government bodies for Aboriginal people to develop programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in our Nation. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have also heeded the call and responded with the development of a number of programs appropriate for the needs of many of our people.

Red Dust Healing is just one such program that has been developed by two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who have had extensive experience working with juveniles and their families in New South Wales and Queensland. However, in developing the *Red Dust Healing*, there are some basic philosophies that make this program unique in supporting individuals and their families, households and communities, and a range of agencies both non-government organisations and governments at the state and federal levels. Chapter 5 (Zubrick and colleagues) outlines the various commissions and enquiries that have been carried out to address the wide ranging impacts of colonisation and the nine principles of practice required to move forward that are echoed in *Red Dust Healing*.

Some of the aspects of *Red Dust Healing* that have helped it become a huge success were the cultural tools that First Nation Australians could understand and relate to. Most importantly, those that complete the program can utilise the tools and knowledge in their lives as they may for the first time feel empowered to make life style changes for the better. *Red Dust Healing* is about life. Living can be simple but sometimes we are prone to complicate our lives when we stress or worry about things that we cannot control. Both of the founders believe in people and their ability to fix the problems in their own lives, if given the right tools. The *Red Dust Healing* challenges people to think with their hearts and to look at history and problems from different angles. It allows First Nation Australians to tell their own stories, and caters to the young and old of both genders. It is adaptable, so it can complement any service or existing alternative program. However, a key principle of *Red Dust Healing* is that the program must be facilitated by a properly trained, First Nation Australian.

The Red Dust program is not just about healing but also incorporates law and justice, health, mental health, education, drug and alcohol, unemployment and employment, social and emotional wellbeing, family violence, cross cultural issues, disability, trauma, grief and loss and rejection. Even amongst First Nation Australians there is a mentality that we must compete to develop the best program for our First Nation peoples instead of being complementary with one another’s programs and be grateful that a broader spectrum of programs can only enhance and improve the lives of many of our people. The surprise impact that *Red Dust Healing* offers is that it is also appropriate for all Australians. *Red Dust Healing* provides an understanding of how rejection, ‘the sense of being unloved or unwanted’, can negatively affect all individuals and families.

Red Dust Healing has now been operating for six years and has had over five thousand participants complete the three, two or one day program. The participants have ranged in age from eight years through to Elders over seventy years of age. Participants have varied in terms of ethnic or cultural background (Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, multicultural); both genders; from urban, regional and rural communities; and from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

The *Red Dust Healing* founders have been fortunate. As a part of their own personal journey, as one door closed, others have opened with the assistance and persistence of people and their communities. They want others and communities to experience real lifestyle changes. The time is now to heal our Nation so we can support those who have been lost, due to the hurt of the past, to regain direction and purpose. The future vision of the *Red Dust Healing* founders is to establish *Red Dust Healing* centres to cater for the whole family and develop appropriate individual case plans which will then support the family unit.

“ We must turn the hearts of the fathers back to our children and the hearts of our children back to their fathers’ so we can see each other right as a nation. ”
Randal Ross, 2006

The *Red Dust Healing* motto encapsulates what this program is about,

“ When the dust is settled on our life, all we get to keep and take with us is our dignity, our integrity and the love and respect that we share with people. ”
Tom Powell, 2006

RESOURCES

The *Red Dust Healing* Program

If you require further information pertaining to *Red Dust Healing*, simply log on to the following website: www.threddust.com

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