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From: Brian Butler [mailto:Brian.Butler@nationalcongress.com.au]

Sent: Friday, 27 January 2012 11:42 AM

Subject: Underpinning Youth Destruction

Importance: High

LATERAL VIOLENCE

I believe from my own experience, that every suicide in this country, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, is the end result of Lateral violence.

On the night of the 23rd January 2012, I asked 2 questions of the Facebook community across the country.

1. All of you who know what Lateral violence really is please LIKE - 110 responses and counting

2. Now all of you who know what the opposite of Lateral violence is...Please LIKE - 36 responses and not counting quite so well

So the point of this exercise was to gage the community response regarding the awareness and understanding of Lateral violence.

The legal definition of Lateral violence as found via USLegal is: Lateral violence happens when people who are both victims of a situation of dominance, in fact turn on each other rather than confront the system that oppresses them both. Lateral violence occurs when oppressed groups/individuals internalize feelings such as anger and rage, and manifest their feelings through behaviors such as gossip, jealousy, putdowns and blaming.

And another one taken from Paul Memmott's Community Based Strategies for Combating Indigenous Violence 2001 'unresolved grief that is associated with multiple layers of trauma spanning many generations'. Some of these 'layers of trauma' include: colonial aggression; genocide; racism; alienation from tribal lands; breakdown of social structure; loss of spirituality and languages; removal of rights and responsibilities; labour exploitation; and large-scale removal of Aboriginal children from their families ('stolen generations'). These and other factors have contributed to the erosion of social structures and traditional values, and a range of social problems in current Aboriginal communities' (Memmott et al. 2001).

Then the Frequent manifestations of lateral violence which include:

- nonverbal innuendo (raising eyebrows, face-making),
- bullying,
- verbal affront (overt/covert, snide remarks, lack of openness, abrupt responses, gossiping),
- shaming,
- undermining activities (turning away, not being available, social exclusion),
- withholding information,
- sabotage (deliberately setting up a negative situation),
- infighting (bickering, family feuds),
- scapegoating,
- backstabbing (complaining to peers and not confronting the individual),
- failure to respect privacy,
- broken confidences,
- organisational conflict,

- physical violence.

In a moving email received from Cheri Yavu Kama Harathunian proud Kabi Kabi, Gurang Gurang, Terabalang Bunda Elder, Lateral violence is perfectly described in a way that resonates with me and the definition I am talking about. Cheri states that "Lateral violence is more than behaviors such as gossip, jealousy, putdowns and blaming, resentment, spite, envy, suspicion, distrust, protectiveness, bitterness, hatred, antipathy, racial superiority, taking on of another cultural expression - the Americanisation of Aboriginal youth - because of self shame, offence, umbrage, anger, acrimony, animosity, hostility, enmity, and other negative expressions is the fact that these expressions often have their basis in oral histories, those negative stories of our past that are handed down to us and that are projected into our present living', she also goes on to talk about the types of violence we know a lot more about and the way that Lateral violence is often ignored because of this...'the strategies that are making a difference with regards to 'domestic violence; personal violence; community violence and corporate violence have very little if any impact upon 'lateral violence'. Often, the symptoms are or can be considered to be expressed as one of the above. But the motivators for lateral violence are embedded deeper in the psyche of Aboriginal and Islander peoples than behavior or cognition. What is missed is the spiritual scars that motivate the cognitive systems to the connection that is demonstrated in the behavioral outcome.' Every behavior and situation is tarnished by Lateral violence, we need to understand this.

What to do about the situation? Well we have started the process. The process in place to be followed is to call together learning circles/yarning circles within your communities, families and networking groups, create these from the absolute grassroots level and continue them all the way through to all levels of society. Come together as a group and openly discuss the realities happening for each and every one of you. Then with an open mind embrace the concept of Lateral violence and how this has shaped the world as we know it in this space and time, then move towards discussions about what we can do to improve our situation by eliminating this negative practice through education and understanding. Resources are light on the ground, primarily because society has brushed this issue of Lateral violence under the carpet for 200 years plus in this country, nobody has written about the damage that is done to families right throughout the Nation, and because of this, Lateral violence has become the norm and generations have grown up with this as a normal part of life. So much so that the people who are doing the most damage to each other are mostly unaware of the causes and the long term repercussions of their actions. We have dysfunctional families unable to cope with or find the answers to deal with the destructive nature of this type of violence!

I don't believe Lateral violence is a new western sabotage or smoke screen, not the type of violence I am talking about. Accepting, understanding and sharing is the key to us moving forward as a strong and healthy Nation and to do that MUST examine Lateral violence. It is not acceptable to keep blaming the 'other' for how we treat our own, understanding how we all got to this point is important for us to begin healing.

Some people have questioned the way to approach this topic when addressing Elders within their communities. To each and every one of you I say this, by tackling this taboo topic we are trying to alleviate Lateral violence which is showing the highest respect for our Elders. Every single Elders abuse case that I know of is derived specifically from unchecked trans-generational Lateral violence. We need to encourage greater respect for Elders by the elimination of this negative practice and to get there we are all going to have to participate in some very open, confronting and frank discussions along the way. Every single individual in our society has a role

to play. Lateral violence is very personal and we need to start getting personal in stamping out Lateral violence.

What have we tried to date? In my opinion, I believe that we have failed miserably in our attempts at Cultural Awareness Programs throughout this Nation. We need to focus on the educating and understanding the true meaning of Lateral violence. By 'true meaning' I will share with you once again the wisdom of Cheri, 'the violence born from the outcomes of the manner in which our parents and their parents learned to survive, the historical violence perpetrated upon our ancestors from so called settlement, through the policies of the past and too you and to me in this present time. Our families' oral histories are filled with smatterings of ways and means of survival that carried over from one generation to the next'. Every single issue we face today is underpinned by this negative collective consciousness and the well-known manifestations of this Lateral violence. The effects are devastatingly apparent. All of the millions of dollars poured into Cultural Awareness have not worked because Lateral violence is on the increase. 'Our young people have the right to live life to the full, not carry victimisation, or survival techniques that they watch their parents use and once again perpetrate the cycle of lateral violence upon themselves and others'.

Please take the time to seriously consider Lateral violence and what it means to you and your families.

Talk about it, talk to everyone and participate in this monumental shift, join your ancestors in this Spiritual Awakening.

If we want to seriously address the issues of Youth Suicide in this country, Lateral violence MUST be acknowledged, understood and addressed!

Lateral violence knows no love, understanding or compassion!

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