

Diffrent – an example proposal

Using new insights into how the brain works, this four-day encounter will give Indigenous men all they need to be different, fighting against aimlessness, abuse, and addictions – not each other. The insights help us make sense of ourselves, others and our world, and the encounter will restore respect, dignity and purpose to men who have lost their way. The insights are radical; the results will be too.

What Insights?

Insights from foundation truths or 'givens' (a 'given' is something that is universally accepted as true) that apply to humans everywhere regardless of race, gender, culture or status. Called the 'human givens', a set of ideas that better explain emotional health.

It is a given, for example, that all humans dream. Perhaps better phrased as all humans experience the rapid eye movement (REM) sleep phase – if they didn't they would die. No exceptions.

The REM sleep phase is when mental housekeeping takes place, discharging unfulfilled expectations and freeing up processing capacity for the new day.

Another given is: *every living organism interacts with its environment to get its needs met*. No exceptions. If it is alive, this law applies.

Now humans have more in mind than staying alive, so their interaction is more involved and their needs are more complex.

Emotional health relies on effective interaction, and needs, particularly emotional needs, being met appropriately. Appropriately, because one can stay alive with poor sleep, no friends and a diet of coke and chips, but problems will arise. Problems like abusive and addictive behaviours.

Understanding REM sleep has also told us something else important. It gives us an insight into the emotional brain which is below

awareness and before thought. We make sense of ourselves and our environment through a process called 'pattern matching'. We match what we see hear taste touch and smell through our sense organs with a pattern already on file. It's a bit like a bar-code scanner but not that accurate, it is approximate. Sometimes, far too approximate and people cannot make sense of their life, leading to men losing their way and beating each other instead of fighting porn, grog, and gunja.

What encounter?

A culturally enriched therapeutic encounter that leads men to finding their way again. Using the insights into how emotions influence everything we do, and understanding ways to make positive changes, the men will be able to see themselves and their world differently. They will also be given a passport for a journey away from shame toward dignity. A journey toward someone to love, something to do, and something to look forward to.

The men, accommodated at CDU Katherine for four days, will participate in a culturally enriched therapeutic encounter involving yarning circles where, relaxed and without coercion, they will experience the profound effects of therapeutic storytelling.

The stories will be told and read by Indigenous men, some who can speak forcefully about prisons, about despair and hopelessness, and, best of all, how it is to be different.

What men?

Men who have lost their way. Men who have all but given up their will to stand tall and face the real dangers to their people. They have lost their warrior heart, their sense of meaning and purpose, and above all, their dignity. The demons of grog, violence, porn and drugs have overwhelmed them, led them to prison full of more demons, and released with no equipment or understanding to break the tragic cycle. They need a new sense of self, a new sense of hope, and a resolve to replace what is with what can be.

The men will be nominated by their case workers, who will be suitably prepared and provided resources to use in follow-up encounters with their clients.

What fight?

The media focus on domestic, family and sexual violence has prompted one academic to claim 'the nation is in the midst of a national crisis of murder and violence against Indigenous women'. As with the Coronial Inquiry, much attention has been given to protection and policing failures, and little to the perpetrators – men who have lost their way. Men who may pay lip service to 'education and counselling' but still be overwhelmed by a sense of powerlessness, addiction, and an all but complete lack of meaningful purposeful action. Abuse, like all behaviour is needs-driven, and springs from the need for control, volition, and status being met, albeit in a damaging and ultimately futile way. While recognition is given to the ongoing impacts of multigenerational trauma, the effects of discrimination, marginalisation and racism, the men, like in the investigation, remain on the sidelines, irrelevant and alienated, and for all intents and purposes defeated warriors.

The proposed fight is different. At its core it is a fight to restore a sense of hope, purpose and dignity through a new awareness of who they are and a vision of what they could become. It is a battle fought, not with weapons, but with stories. Stories (and the metaphors embedded in them) are the language of the emotional brain, and have the capacity to impact a person's behaviour at the deepest level. It becomes, in a very real sense, a script leading the players to act out roles they never thought possible. Real change in relationships, activity and contribution to community are possible, because this encounter enables a new message to bypass any intellectual resistance and impact the emotional brain in a profound and enduring way. The warrior has a reason to stand tall again, for

he now fights what destroys relationships and family, and is admired for his courage and bravery by those around him. A battle worth winning.

What results?

The writer of this proposal has a long-held mantra: *I get paid for my results not my methods*. Without paper, powerpoints or whiteboards, nobody up the front, and a distinct lack of structure and no break-out group discussion, the methods could be considered unusual – but not in the light of a ‘culturally enriched therapeutic encounter’. The lack of structure and training aids will probably attract some attention and the question will likely arise “How can training be effective without these?” It may probably raise some concern that ‘sitting around talking’ is a poor idea of ‘training’. It isn’t.

The training is based on a robust theoretical framework. Research shows repeatedly that intervention that does not impact the emotional brain (limbic system to be more precise) will result in intellectual assent – head nodding and agreement – but no real change in behaviour. The problem of violence is not an intellectual one, it is driven by emotion not thought. To deal with emotional problems one must recognise that emotions are pre-conscious – before thought and language. It has a language all its own: metaphor, or stories with metaphors embedded in them.

In addition to a sound theoretical framework, this training is based on the power of targeted stories to make significant change in those in prison and seeking parole for domestic violence offences. There are numerous instances where change has been immediate and lasting. Indigenous men are particularly responsive to stories using their individual totem, and based upon success achieved in prisons and small groups we are confident that similar results can be achieved in a larger group.

The results will be immediate and quietly dramatic. The men may not articulate the change, but they will know something deep and

profound has happened to them. Like emerging from a good dream - after all it is an understanding of why humans dream that underpins much of the theoretical framework. They will see themselves and their world differently and embrace the change not resist it. No longer tired and defeated, they will feel empowered and stand tall. Different indeed.

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Note: A therapeutic encounter almost identical to this proposal has already been offered, and results, while somewhat inconclusive, provide enough indications that the ideas are sound. This proposal raises the importance of support service engagement before the encounter, and with follow-up engagement with resources provided.

It is envisioned that several agencies be involved, with support workers and managers being exposed to the ideas and rationale underpinning this process of therapeutic change.

If you recognise in this proposal things you would like to explore further, I am happy to work with you to adapt it to your specific setting. It could help you make a difference.

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