

The Circle of Courage

A strategy for building resilience in our young people

CIRCLE OF COURAGE



Perth to Sydney = 4456 km

April 5 to May 5 = 31 days

6 cyclists and support crew

www.cyclingincircles.org.au

Building a CIRCLE OF COURAGE



An unexpected answer

A small town in Idaho had one of the highest rates of teen pregnancy and drug and alcohol abuse in America. For two years they trialled costly social intervention programs that proved to be ineffective. In desperation they called a town meeting. It was decided that every adult in town would learn the name of every child in town. Each adult would go out of their way to talk with the young people and address them by name. Over a short period of time the at-risk behaviours of the young people diminished significantly.

The experiences for young people living in rural communities are quite different to those of urban young people. While acknowledging the broad diversity of rural communities and young people within these communities, many issues remain common. These issues are compounded by the economic, environmental, educational and health disadvantages, and the lack of services, employment and training opportunities.

At school, our children learn about the dangers of drug and alcohol use, teen pregnancy and Internet safety. Yet knowledge about the dangers of risky behaviours does not always translate into the avoidance of those behaviours. For example, 21 per cent of the Australian population smoke tobacco. It would be surprising if even one of these smokers is not aware that smoking is dangerous.

Instruction about the obvious harm of alcohol, drugs, teen pregnancy and other high-risk behaviours is essential. All

young people need it. But information alone will not prevent young people from participating in these dangerous behaviours. Like the initial experiences of the small town in Idaho, if education is all we do, it probably won't work.

Compared to urban youth, Australian rural youth are:

Up to 4 times more likely to commit suicide.

Up to 5 times more likely to be involved in a motor-vehicle accident.

Up to 4 times more likely to commit an alcohol-related crime.

Up to 3 times more likely to die from external causes and injury.

Up to 2.5 times more likely to be hospitalised due to pregnancy.

Up to 11 times more likely to experience physical abuse if female (as compared to males) living in a rural community.

More likely to use illicit substances.

1 in 3 rural youth aged 14-19 have been victims of alcohol-related verbal and/or physical abuse.

—from "Influencing the Lives of Rural Young People," *Revolve*, September 2004, No 7.

The Circle of Courage

It has long been known that American Indians reared courageous, respectful children based on the values of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. Europeans coming to North America tried to civilise indigenous children in boarding schools, blithely unaware that the indigenous peoples possessed a sophisticated philosophy that empowered children.

The philosophy has become known as the Circle of Courage. Each quadrant of the Circle of Courage invites one to see themselves as belonging to a whole, using generosity to contribute their wisdom to their community, drawing on their inherent mastery of life to share ideas and thoughts, and taking the step forward as independent people, able to make wise choices about how to live life.

The spirit of belonging:

In American Indian culture, significance was nurtured in a community that celebrated the universal need for belonging. Anthropologist Deloria described the core value of belonging in Indian culture in these simple words: "Be related, somehow, to everyone you know."

Treating others as kin forged powerful social bonds of community that drew all into relationships of respect. Another observer reports that throughout history the tribe, not the nuclear family, always ensured the survival of the culture. Though parents might fail, the tribe was always there to nourish and come to the aid of the next generation.

The spirit of mastery:

Competence, in American Indian culture, was ensured by guaranteed opportunity for mastery. The first lesson in traditional American Indian culture was that one should always observe those with more experience to learn from them. The child was taught to see someone with more skill as a model for learning, not as a rival. One must strive for mastery for personal reasons, rather than to be superior to someone else.

Humans have an innate drive to master their environment. By identifying challenges and developing a strategy to meet those challenges, the progress of development and mastery can be measured. When success happens, the desire to achieve is strengthened. When young people are encouraged to develop their talents, pursue their interests and fulfil their potential, they become more confident and better equipped to contribute to the community.



The spirit of independence:

Power was fostered by deep respect for each person's independence. In contrast to obedience models of discipline, American Indian teaching was designed to build respect and teach inner discipline. From earliest childhood, children were encouraged to make decisions, solve problems, and show personal responsibility. Adults modelled, nurtured, taught values and gave feedback, but children were given abundant opportunities to make choices without coercion.

In Australia, young people are often protected from making decisions and taking responsibility for the consequences. Often the result of having to make a decision is peer-driven because they do not know how to make wise decisions independently.

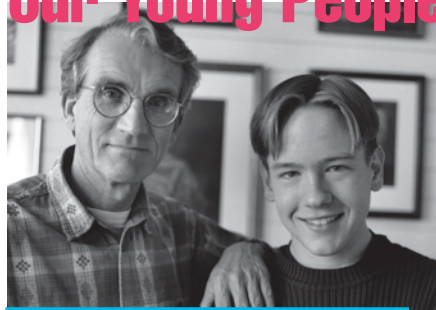
The spirit of generosity:

The central goal in American Indian child-rearing is to teach the importance of being generous and unselfish. In *The Education of Little Tree*, Forrest Carter recounted his grandmother's overriding principle: "When you come on something good, first thing to do is share it with whoever you can find; that way, the good spreads out where no telling it will go." In helping others, young people create their own proof of worthiness: they have the power to make a positive contribution to another human life.

Young people often look inwardly for happiness and peace of mind, but as a community we need to challenge them to look outwardly and find their purpose in sharing their lives and resources with others.

The description of the four quadrants of the Circle of Courage are adapted directly from www.reclaiming.com/about/index.php?page=philosophy. Circle of Courage was founded by Dr Larry Brendtro and Dr Martin Brokenleg. For more information, go to www.reclaimingyouthatrisk.com

Building Resilience and Self-Esteem in Our Young People



Resilience is the ability to maintain competent functioning in spite of major life stressors. It develops over time, and appears to be a result of environmental support. Resilient individuals are those who, despite severe hardships and the presence of at-risk factors, develop coping skills that enable them to succeed in life.

Researchers have explained resilience in terms of hardiness, and suggested that resilient individuals live with strong commitment and are willing to take action to deal with problems. They also have a positive attitude toward their environment, hold a strong sense of purpose, and develop a strong internal strength that enables them to see life's obstacles as challenges that can be overcome. Resiliency seems to be all about hope; it is the sense that adversity can be overcome, that there is life beyond the obstacles of today.

Valuable, sincere and enduring relationships with individuals who provide care, warmth and unconditional love provide young people with a sense that the odds in life can be overcome.

Resilience to the stressors of life—such as drug-abusing peers, media violence or the influence of a less-than-ideal home environment—appears to come through supportive relationships.

We don't teach a kid how to become resilient. We educate them and give them knowledge, but we know that alone won't solve the problems they face. In addition to education, we must surround them with social support of a loving and caring environment. We learn their names and greet them personally, and we develop enduring relationships with them. Through these steps, the young people build strength and improve their ability to defeat the overwhelming odds they face every day.

Self-esteem is a person's attitude about himself or herself. It's a person's estimation of how capable and worthwhile he or she is. It isn't pride or conceit, nor is it an overinflated opinion about a person's own ability. People with positive self-esteem generally perceive themselves realistically. They understand their strengths and are ready to admit their weaknesses. People with positive self-esteem do not compare themselves to others or devalue the success of those around them.

Self-esteem has been described as something that comes from the feedback—real or imagined—we receive from others. We tend to value ourselves in the way we believe other people value us.

If self-esteem comes from others, young people must have "others" around them. If they grow up in a socially isolated environment where there is little contact with other people—especially adults—the opportunity to develop a positive self-esteem is diminished, unless their parent or parents are adept at pointing out their true strengths and reinforcing their successes.

Many—maybe most—kids are growing up socially isolated. The lives of parents are often



so busy that only a few moments are spent each week with their kids in meaningful conversation. That is social isolation.

Here are four simple ways to help develop positive self-esteem in our children:

- 1 Focus on loving them, rather than judging their behaviours or academic successes.
- 2 Spend quality time with them on a regular basis. At least 20 minutes each day, talk, listen and enjoy their company.
- 3 Develop an honest interest in them; be interested in what they are doing.
- 4 Identify what they do well and help them discover their strengths and weaknesses.

For kids to develop positive self-esteem, they need other people in their lives. Parents are essential, but other adults matter too. You can make a difference in the lives of young people without much effort on your part.



This is the key



When you are at the shops, at school, at any public or social event, pick out a few young people and learn their names. Walk up to them with a smile, greet them by name, and ask how their week went.

At first they'll behave awkwardly—after all, they don't really know you. But keep doing it, again and again, from one week to the next. Eventually they will come to you because they enjoy friendly people.

Kids need knowledge and information. But they also need significant adults in their lives in order to develop a sense that they are valued. They need to have people to whom they can turn, and unless you have a well-established relationship with them, they won't even know they could go to you for assistance.

Do you know the names of the young people who live next door to you? Do you know the names of the young people in your street? Do you engage them in conversation and listen to them? Do you contribute in a meaningful way to their self-value through your interaction with them?

Explanation of resilience and community involvement has been drawn from the work of Dr Gary Hopkins of Loma Linda University, California, USA. See www.llu.edu/llu/sph/hpro/garyhopkins.htm for more information.



For more information

Mind Matters

cms.curriculum.edu.au/mindmatters/index.htm

A resource and professional development program to support Australian secondary schools that deals with fostering resilience.

Andrew Fuller www.andrewfuller.com.au

Information on training sessions, books and research on resilience and youth.

Project Resilience www.projectresilience.com

Discusses core concepts of resilience and offers access to materials such as books, cards and videos.

Head Room www.headroom.net.au

An interactive site divided into sections relevant to children 6-12, teens 12-18, parents and youth workers. Provides information and deals with risk factors, getting help and resilience and how to foster it.

Makin' it Happen www.makinithappen.org

A list of 40 protective assets required for resilience and ideas on building upon them.

Reclaiming Youth at Risk www.reclaiming.com

or phone Adventist Health on (02) 9847 3368

Introducing the Circle of Courage cycling team



Jonathan Duffy is currently director of Adventist Health in the South Pacific region. He has 24 years of public health experience in school, community, hospital and corporate settings. He has a passion for helping young people live happy, meaningful lives. He has two children and understands many of the pressures that young people face. He has the ability to take complex health principles and put them into simple, practical and doable steps. He is the main presenter at the town meetings.



David Hobson is married, with two lively boys. He is a secondary school teacher, specialising in Industrial Arts and IT. He is involved in sports and outdoor activities in many forms and narrowly missed qualification for the 2005 Australian Ironman (Forster).



Keith Hughes will turn 69 on April 14. He has one wife, two children and one recently born grandson. He believes that intergenerational relationships are an important component of healthy communities. He has an active interest in, and has had many years involvement with, church youth groups.



Kevin Judge has worked most of his career as a school principal in New Zealand and is currently employed at Avondale College, New South Wales. Kevin is passionate about the immense potential of each young person if given a positive environment. He is also an avid participant in sports, with a background in long-distance running events, cycling, triathlon and basketball.



Quentin Oaklands is a high school teacher at Carmel College in Western Australia. He is married and has two preschoolers. His hobbies include photography and most sports. He sees the effects of today's society on young people and wants to be a part of helping them.



Stephen Andrews is the commercial manager at the Sydney Adventist Hospital. He is married with two children, and lives on the Central Coast of New South Wales. He has been working with young kids and teenagers for a number of years and is currently the leader of an "outdoor adventure" youth club.

and support crew



Col and Gwen Cooney: Col has had 22 years serving as an ambulance officer, working in remote areas of Queensland. He has seen the results of youth risk taking, and is committed to making a difference and helping young people reach their potential. Gwen has spent 16 years as a cook in aged-care facilities, so she provides the meals. She is a mother and grandmother and believes that every young person is special and needs to be valued by their community.



Barry and Val Zimmerman: Both Barry and Val have an active interest in young people. Like Col, Barry has seen what goes wrong when young people indulge in risky behaviour. Val's love of children is reflected in her 27 years of service with the Education Department.

Follow the Circle of Courage riders' progress on

www.cyclingincircles.org.au

The Circle of Courage

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