SHOW PROPER RESPECT TO THE IMPORTANCE OF ELDERSHIP...

“ It’s a very Aboriginal thing to do, to give younger people greater responsibility within the community as they become able to take those responsibilities on. It is a culturally appropriate transfer of roles that involves respect in both directions...from the younger to the older and the older to the younger.”

Jackie Huggins

WhiteFella Thinking Is Not Wrong – But Does It Work For You!

What I have noticed is that when we begin to decolonise the mind we become aware of just how much of our thinking and ways of doing things is dominated by the culture/s of Whitefella ways...

I am not suggesting this is wrong, certainly we live in a very different time and a new way of thinking is required. The demands on us as First Nations people to assimilate and fit nicely into the mainstream are greater than ever before. The political-socio system is designed to ensure this.

This is not THE place to start, it is only A place to start...

Wendy Watego

Cultural Integrity Begins From Within...

If however, you are finding yourself in conflict – caught between the Blackfulla world and the Whitefella world then making time to critically reflect on questions such as “what does my culture mean to me”, “who am I as a (Quandamooka) First Nations person,” “how can I successfully practice my culture,” are vital questions which begin to awaken the cultural codes of our Ancestry which are encoded within our DNA©.

If you are seeking ways to keep your cultural connections strong and build vibrancy and integrity from which to express your identity as a First Nations person, then perhaps it is
beneficial to begin recognising that there are also aspects of who you are and what you do that are not Blackfulla way.

For example this very first resource - “Show Proper Respect To The Importance Of Eldership” encourages you to really think about what do your Elders, and all First Nations Elders, mean to you and your Mob?

In developing this resource I know there are going to be many who will not agree with me and I am not asking you to. One of the intentions of this first resource is to encourage you to begin critically reflecting on how the modernisation of colonisation has taken us so far away from our own cultural practices and protocols that we don’t even notice they’re missing anymore.

**Our Old People Are Sacred...**

Continue to build strong relationships with your First Nations Elders and Senior people.

Spend time with Elders and listen to their stories. Elders are our Spiritual gatekeepers and they groom and shape our cultural identity.

Even in modern times Aboriginal culture is still based on gerontocracy where our Elders hold a governing power and authority within our communities. Traditionally they were the holders of sacred knowledge and they had the responsibility to educate the younger generation with this knowledge.

Colonisation has interfered with this cultural leadership system, weakening the position of Elders and the responsibilities they have – special knowledge can no longer be assumed to be passed on. Our responsibilities to our Elders has also become compromised and the lines of proper respect have become very muddied.

As a younger person I have had to learn to listen deeply when my Old People talk. This often means I am to remain silent in the presence of Elders and Senior women / people until I am invited to contribute. I am there to learn to listen with my heart and spirit – not listen with my head and mouth moving...

I have probably made and poured a thousand cups of tea in my short life time in absolute silence. A look from the Senior women or Elders in my family and community indicates whether I am invited to stay or leave after the tea has been poured.
Nowadays I am sometimes asked questions by my Elders and Senior People, and sometimes I am even able to ask questions of them. My questions are always answered, even in silence – if I don't understand the answer I have been given, I know to sit with it – answers will always come…. This is our way!

**Know And Respect That You Too Have A Place**

This may sound old school to many younger, and my age, leaders in the 21st century, but “knowing your place” brings with it a profound respect for what you have been given thus far... for me it also serves to ground me in a profound appreciation for the people who went before me and paved the way - and as a reminder of what it means to belong to the oldest surviving culture in the world.

I also acknowledge that being given authority to speak by Elders and Senior people is not only proper according to our lore, it is liberating. Being surrounded by Elders and Senior Women who are my watchers, teachers, mentors, advisers, has taught me to deeply respect the wisdom they and others hold and give when the time is right.

Knowing my place has also empowered me to be highly effective in developing the work we do with First Nations peoples through the STARS Institute.

I am 3 years off the big 5-0 and I am considered a baby. I still smile whenever I am called Bub – I love it and appreciate it. It tells me there is still ways to go – and keep going, you are not alone, we’ve got your back...

I was told in no uncertain terms at 19 years of age, by my Spiritual Ancestors, that until I can actively demonstrate that I am responsible with and for the knowledge I have been given I will get no more...

I am so honoured to have my Mum, Aunty Judy Watego nee Newfong, and Dad Uncle Richard Watego, be part of the STARS Institute Leadership Team – just their presence alone grounds me and Vicki and brings a sacred energy and strength to each program we have worked on together.
In the last seven years you would be surprised at how many Aboriginal Elders, particularly from New South Wales and Queensland, have said to us “you know us Elders like doing Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country - yes that is important. BUT we can do more than that, we can empower our communities in so many other ways...”

Our Elders and Senior people have an important place that our spirits and hearts know and long for. This knowing what is right is part of our cultural DNA.

During your journey from colonisation to liberation, we urge you to hold the space of Eldership as Sacred.

In our book “Out Of The Box Thinking On Indigneous Leadership: simple strategies to create an empowering future” there are many further suggestions for how you can begin the process of de-colonisation.

We acknowledge you for having the courage to look within.

Love and Unity

Wendy and Vicki