

Te Hikuwai Rangahau Hauora
Te Kura Kāwanatanga
Te Whare Wānanga o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui
Pouaka Poutāpeta 600
Te Ūpoko o te Ika 6140, AOTEAROA
Mēra hiko: lynne.russell@vuw.ac.nz

Health Services Research Centre
School of Government
Victoria University of Wellington
PO Box 600
Wellington 6140, NEW ZEALAND
Email: lynne.russell@vuw.ac.nz

INDIGENOUS STRENGTH: A BEAUTIFUL STORY

Healing Our Spirit Worldwide

The Seventh Gathering

15th - 19th November 2015

Kirikiriāroa, Hamilton, Aotearoa, New Zealand

Dr Lynne Russell RCpN, MA(Appl)SocScRes, PGDipPubHlth, PhD
Kāi Tahu, Ngāti Kahungunu, Kāti Māmoe, Rangitāne, Ngāti Porou

Hoa Kairangahau Hōnore | Honorary Research Associate

Health
Services
Research
Centre

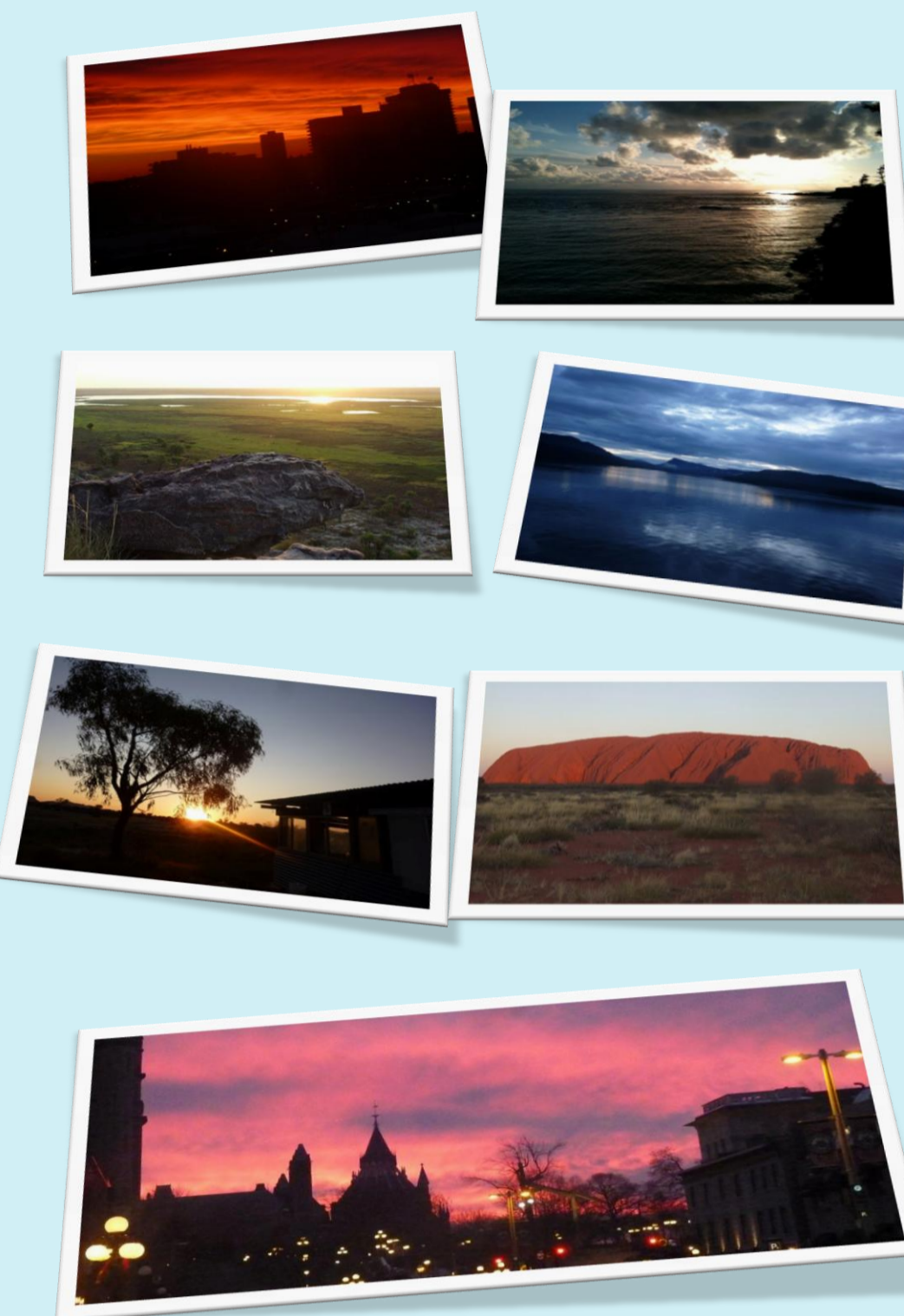
Te Hikuwai Rangahau Hauora



THE COMMONALITIES OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LAY NOT IN OUR POOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS, BUT IN THE STRENGTH OF OUR HISTORIES AND THE PROMISES OF OUR FUTURES.

Between 2008 and 2012 I had the amazing privilege of meeting with many elders, health service providers, workers, researchers, scholars and other experts in Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing across Australia and Turtle Island and listening to their stories. I watched the sun rise and set over their lands.

What began as postdoctoral research to examine how mental health and wellbeing is understood by Indigenous peoples from Aotearoa, Australia and Turtle Island, and the significance of culture in these understandings, became a journey of discovery that could never have been foretold. Through shared storytelling that began by learning to retell my own story, a much richer appreciation of Indigenous wellbeing evolved.



The research exposed barriers that inhibit Indigenous health and wellbeing and generated findings about successful approaches to healing through examination of Indigenous knowledge and healing practices. More than that though, it brought us together – Indigenous Peoples of Aotearoa, Australia and Turtle Island – and allowed us to talk freely, and in our words, about the racism we internalise and the lateral violence we witness in those we love, perhaps resulting from our multi-layered losses; of language, of place, and of hope in those relations we lose to suicide. Although we may not have used the same words to describe our similar experiences, we were able to speak of the effects of the intergenerational trauma we have borne, about where our silence comes from, and of the importance of giving ourselves voice and of being heard. Most importantly though, we were able to savour our knowledge of the utmost significance of our relationships with one another, of the truth of our creations and of our sovereignty, and we were able to bathe in our cultural resilience.

This poster uses quotes and photographs from the research to tell the beautiful story of our collective strengths; those smothered in Indigenous potential.



It has been said that we are formed, informed, sometimes deformed, but always reformed through relationships. If there is one single learning above all else from my postdoctoral research, it is that very little matters beyond these relationships; with our *whānau* (families), tribal nations, 'countries', lands, rivers and with *Papatūānuku* (Mother Earth), the ancestors, the Creator, our totems and our languages.

Indigenous Peoples are built on these relationships with each other, our environments and our cultures. The importance of our connections cannot be underestimated. Health derives from sustaining them; ill-health from losing them. As *Opaskwayak Cree* academic Shawn Wilson states: "relationships don't just shape Indigenous reality, they are our reality."

<https://fernwoodpublishing.ca/book/research-is-ceremony-shawn-wilson>



"... come from your spirituality ... stand on your community, they hold you up ... reflect everything back through culture, hold your head up high and reach forward to the experiences that life has waiting for you." Prof. Helen Milroy (Palyku)



Throughout our lives, Indigenous peoples have demonstrated our resiliency and ability to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances which form so much of our histories.

From the time of our Creations to the imposition of our colonisations, we have responded to these challenges "with the same tenacity, dignity, resourcefulness and hope which have guided us throughout time."

<http://www.kahnawake.com/community/history.asp>



The resilience of Indigenous Peoples is built upon generations of traditional knowledge of balance and harmony with the universe.



STANDING ON THE SHOULDERS OF YOUR ANCESTORS AND CLOTHED IN MAURI ORA, NEVER FORGET - YOU ARE PHENOMENAL!

If you would like a copy of the book (almost completed!) that shares the stories of this research, please email me (address at the top of the poster)

"THERE'S A GOOD REASON WHY INDIGENOUS PEOPLES HAVE SURVIVED IN THE WORLD. BECAUSE WE'VE GOT A HUGE AMOUNT OF STRENGTH AND KNOWLEDGE. LOOK WHAT WE'VE BEEN THROUGH, AND WE'RE ALIVE AND WELL. YOU DON'T SURVIVE 80-100,000 YEARS IN A LANDSCAPE FOR NO REASON. IT MEANS THE BASIC STRUCTURE TO SOCIETY WAS PRETTY GOOD."



Whether it was the *Akeyulerre Healing Centre* in Alice Springs, Australia that "make bush medicine" and "teach kids about their culture and keeping their language strong" by "connecting [them] back to 'country' and learning from the old people," or *Anishnawbe Health* in Toronto, Canada that have the equivalent of a pharmacy full of traditional medicines available for their patients alongside Western remedies; whether it was *Danila Dilba Health Services* in Darwin, Australia delivering the 'Bringing Them Home Programme' that facilitates the reconnection of the Stolen Generation with their 'mob', or the *Pacific Association of First Nations Women* in Vancouver, Canada delivering programmes based on cultural identity to Indigenous children who continue to be removed from their families by the State in droves and placed with non-Native caregivers; whether it was *Yorgum's Grandmothers' Group* in Perth, Australia that use their traditional knowledge to connect with young Aboriginal children who have been sexually abused to help them feel safe again, or the *Native Counseling Services* of Alberta, Canada delivering programmes around lateral violence to Aboriginal Peoples; whether it was services delivered on reserve like the *Six Nations Health Foundation* on Kahnawake Mohawk

Territory in Ohsweken, Ontario, Canada or services delivered in the mental health institutions like the *Statewide Indigenous Mental Health Service* in Perth, Australia – all described the same motivation for, and significance in outcome of, their work. All were driven by tenacious Indigenous strength that refuses to subscribe to the coloniser's belief that they know what is best for us. We have always desired to determine our own lives. It is our sovereign right. Colonisation may have stolen our ability at times to do so, but it has never claimed our resolve. We are the ones best placed to HEAL OUR SPIRITS.



"IN ORDER TO HAVE AGENCY IN OUR LIVES, AND TO GIVE OUR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES VALIDITY AND WORTH IN THEIR LIVES, WE MUST EXERCISE OUR RIGHTS TO SELF-DETERMINE OUR FUTURES. WE OWE IT TO THOSE WHO HAVE GONE BEFORE US."

