



Image: Dja Dja Wurrung birthing tree, Talbot • shantiworks newsletter • march 2020 • 210 Bridge Rd, Richmond VIC 3121 • [www.shantiworks.com.au](http://www.shantiworks.com.au)

**Acknowledgement to country and to our Aboriginal colleagues and communities who teach us to listen and be with the land:**

**dadirri: “ We call on the deep, and the deep calls on us, so we connect and feel that we belong still. And nature plays a part in your becoming a whole person. ”**

**“ In our Aboriginal way, we learnt to listen from our earliest days. We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened. This was the normal way for us to learn – not by asking questions. We learnt by watching and listening, waiting and then acting. ”**

**“ My people are not threatened by silence. They are completely at home in it. They have lived for thousands of years with Nature's quietness. My people today, recognise and experience in this quietness, the great Life-Giving Spirit, the Father of us all. ”**

words from **Elder Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, Aboriginal writer**

ref: Dadirri - A Reflection By Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann, Emmaus Productions

Source: Deep listening (dadirri) - Creative Spirits, retrieved from <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/education/deep-listening-dadirri>

## **ENACTING COLLECTIVE CARE – WITH EACH OTHER, WITH THOSE WE SERVE**

Coronavirus means a different world.

Our world has changed in days. And continues to change daily. The entire world has entered an uncertain climate, with new dictates and safety guidelines resulting in unsettling feelings. People in the Western world are being asked to make decisions based on the wellbeing of those all around them, and actually enacting civic, collective care at the local, community level.

Collective care means sustaining one another and sharing our challenges, trying new approaches to continue to work for social justice and to support those more vulnerable during difficult and unsettling times.

It is important to consider how language is used under these circumstances where there is an environment of fear and uncertainty. The language of “social distancing” needs to be examined as what is really required is “physical distancing”. What we need to do is develop new ways of renewing and extending our social and community connectedness to ensure we support each other through this crisis.

### **Connection option:**

- Connect just not face to face, just not in gatherings. There is an increasing commitment to have phone conversations, whereas previously there may have been short SMS messages.

We as a community, as social justice workers and activists - can be more resilient and resourceful than a virus! Let's find ways to make things better - for each other. This calls for us to be creative in ways which we develop and embrace new ways of connecting and continuing our social justice work. Neo-liberalism and capitalism are based on theories of individualism and competition and a hierarchy of worthiness. It requires continued resistance. It is essential we remain connected with each other, our communities and our social justice work.

“ The lotus actually emerges from the mud. So we’re talking about wisdom emerging from the chaos, the ignorance, the suffering because we’re learning to transform this relationship to what is around us. ”

So, rather than trying to deny any ignorance, let’s embrace it, let’s illuminate it so that we may actually learn. Let’s be willing to fuddle around in the dark and the mud for a while. How else can we truly blossom the lotus that we are?

**Joanna Macy**



## 1. Recognising and permission-ing deep experiences

Find ways and people to share:

- Why this work matters to you
- What your struggles are as social justice work needs to change form
- Name, explore, make sense of your pain, your fears and your hopes for connection and collective care
- Note your strong responses and reactions and consider what has activated particular issues for you
- What ways might work for you to stay connected or improve and deepen connection?
- Consider other communities/groups that may experience vulnerabilities, and how the COVID-19 virus will cause increased vulnerability and risk?

For example, I feel deeply pained by the racism that purposefully lands on new migrants and refugees. I am from India and so I am easily activated by blaming and profiling of south east Asian peoples as the problems and the cause!!

## 2. Developing new discourses - new stories

Any and every social problem impacts people differently based of their position in their world, their position in the unfair hierarchy of power. So, it is critical that we place COVID-19 within a social context. COVID19 is causing suffering and inequity across the world: to people’s bodies, their livelihoods, their spirits and emotional wellbeing. Whilst “physical distancing” is critical for safety at this time; “social distancing” presents the risk of reinforcing privilege and prejudice to further disadvantage those more vulnerable.

Marginalised groups face the potential for increased vulnerability, and emotional and structural isolation given systemic discriminations and barriers as they are exposed and may feel that they have to explain their circumstances yet again.

The assumptions and theories we hold make a difference to our engagement in social justice work. People of marginalised groups – whether by gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, socio-economic background, (dis)ability, age, health vulnerabilities, or any other factor – already understand oppression. They have learnt from their families, communities, and experiences how to survive in an environment that fails to support them and at this time they are further burdened to try harder. They have to further adapt in order to survive their every day.

There is a need to resist how the fear of COVID-19 can be used to foster racism and othering of anyone who is not “white” and privileged. We need to exercise critical thinking when exposed to public relations; community messaging and media campaigns which can fall into a pattern of blaming the victims who are living in fear and uncertainty.

### Options for action:

- Critically think about who holds the responsibility and who is making the decisions around our safety and survival.
- Examine which discourses and public messages are privileged over others. Consider who is rendered visible, whose needs are valued and who is rendered invisible, de-valued and undeserving. For example, the discourse and principles of economics is linked to a particular assumption that “flattening the curve”, by prioritising some people’s lives over others (those who are more vulnerable such as those who are aged & disabled), will ease the burden on the health system and the economy.
- Consider possibilities for new stories: examine what forces are shaping our imaginations right now. Beyond the next three weeks, what are our notions of “normal”? What does it mean to “get back” to a “normal” that privileges dominant groups over others? What do we want to be our future “normal”?

### 3. The organisation - it's mandate and culture matters

In a critical time let us not let funding and service contracts limit our creative and risk management assessment and caretaking practices.

#### ***i) Isolation:***

is a key strategy of coercive control in family violence and it is important to resist isolation amongst ourselves whilst maintaining physical distancing. While “social distancing” is a necessary strategy to help flatten the curve of this virus, it will only be effective if it's grounded in an ethics and practice of connection and solidarity and collective care. COVID-19 clearly shows that only by deeply looking out for each other — valuing everyone's life as worthy of equal care, justice, and support— will we actually be able to lessen the spread of the virus. We need to hold dignity for all of our community, specifically those who are vulnerable, voiceless, and limited by social and structural discriminations.

#### ***ii) Connection and collaboration - integrated models.***

It was really important to focus on creatively activating integrated models in real terms.

Making integrated models an actual partnership practice is at this point in time is critical for safety.

Isolation and social entrapment that victims are subjected to, is not only enacted by perpetrators, it is also enacted and reinforced by systems - systems that we are all a part of, and continue to challenge. Therefore, making sense of the construct or concept of isolation is critical for our integrated models and partnership practice:

- it is more than just a safety issue
- it is a tactic
- it can disrupt connection and survival/management strategies for victims
- systems can buy into it and then it becomes another form of social entrapment

#### **Options for action:**

- We as a community need to centralise risk and not buy into the isolation tactic.
- We need to find new ways to manage communications and safety contacts in a shared way across the partnerships, as well as creating and developing social and community connections.
- Meet your partner agencies to share risk and accountability
- Develop creative risk management practices.

#### ***iii) Centring those most vulnerable***

Whilst it is important for teams and colleagues to be creatively finding ways to connect and care for each other, we need to continue to centre our focus and work on responding to the people and communities our organisations serve. Although we might be unsettled with the current context of our worlds, we still have accountabilities based on our role in teams and organisations, and our sites of privilege and power: these sites do not ‘disappear’ at times of crisis. We can put victims at greater risk when we do not continue to ask how our work is centring victims of domestic violence and those who are most marginalised in our current systems and practices.

#### **Options for action:**

- Developing systems where victim survivors can have contact safely.
- What new systems can be expanded or developed to reduce isolation where there is family violence including continuing to hold perpetrators in view?
- Extending phone services and developing training for volunteers who can step in in this crisis or use some of the government funding to propose new models; perhaps employing students who are studying or have studied family violence either MBCP or women and children & family violence.
- Strong advocacy - taking positions (publicly and in our daily practices) on white-racist-capitalist responses that only serves victims who are deemed the most ‘deserving’ or ‘worthy’: refusing to serve only those who are deemed ‘good’ or ‘compliant’ victims.
- Pooling collegial resources (leave entitlements) so that organisational resources can be directed (and re-directed) to victims that are most in need of economic stability: for survival and dignity.





#### **iv) Gender power relations - collegial care and accountability**

There is a gendered impact of the COVID-19 lockdown: what collective responsibilities can we do in our homes, in our own relationships during self-isolation?

The COVID-19 outbreak has pushed us all to organise our homes in ways that allows for extended periods of self-isolation. Everything in our social world is gendered, and so it is with COVID-19.

Human Rights Watch reports that front-line health professionals and workers most exposed to coronavirus are likely to be women: nurses, nurse aides, teachers, childcare workers, aged-care workers, and cleaners, as well as unpaid caregivers. These paid roles are likely to be causal and part-time roles, ones without paid or sick leave and, inevitable school closures across Victoria are likely to add to the workload of providing domestic care and childcare responsibilities for women at home. Women who are from lower socio-economic communities and blue collar workers who are employed in jobs that cannot be done from home, and therefore, are especially vulnerable to economic dependency on their partners, family members and welfare systems.

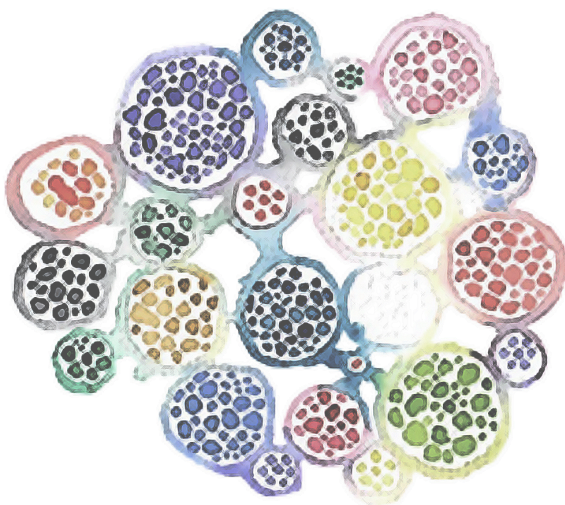
Family violence is an indirect impact of coronavirus and so women and children in self-isolation or in quarantine are especially vulnerable to male family violence. Not all homes are safe. Enforced periods of isolation in the home will put many women and children at further risk.

Now, more than ever, men must work with other men to explore, examine and challenge ways that male privilege, entitled thinking and abusive behaviours are enacted with the women in our lives. How can we hold ourselves and other men accountable to values such as equality, safety and compassion?

With extended periods at home and limited face to face communications – there are actions we can still take! We have greater access to online forums such as social media, or private group discussions such as Zoom: men can work together to ensure that they offer accountability processes for themselves by openly discussing male sexism, privilege and entitlement in our lives; how it shapes men's values, belief systems and behaviours in these times which present unknown and unprecedented risks to women and children.

- What are we noticing about male privilege and entitlement as COVID-19 spreads?
- How might we step in an offer respect and care when we witness unsafe or disrespectful attitudes and behaviours?
- How can we join with, encourage, inspire action and conversation that is grounded in dignity and safety for those most vulnerable?

These conversations can be complex and require ongoing supportive spaces for men to discuss gender power relations in a way that is purposeful, mobilising and informed by collectivist, feminist and anti-oppressive ideas.



**“ I can remember watching fascinated as our mother talked with her mother, sisters, and women friends. The intimacy and intensity of their speech - the satisfaction they received from talking to one another, the pleasure, the joy. It was in this world of woman speech, loud talk, angry words, women with tongues, touching our world with their words, that I made speech my birthright - and the right to voice, to authorship, a privilege I would not be denied. ”**  
**bell hooks**



#### 4. Collective accountability - Collective hope: these are actions

We live in a damaging individualistic society, a symptom of colonisation and capitalism, wherein the status quo has lost its concern for the collective.

At times like this we need to remember to think with love, care and kindness. This is a scary time that we wouldn't have expected to happen. It's ok to be scared, but don't let that make you lose your care and love for others. Here are a few videos that might bring joy and hope to your day.

#### Option for actions:

- Share the videos, poems....
- Watch them together – virtually of course!!
- Even though we are all struggling and scared and physically isolated at the moment, even though our lives have changed: we are not alone!

#### Gal Gadot

“ We are in this together, we will get through it together.

Let's imagine together. Sing with us.

All love to you, from me and my dear friends’ ”

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B95M4kNhbzz/> · Watch

#### Julia Michaels

“ ‘If You Need Me’ - We are not sharing this to invoke more fear in people about losing their loved ones - while you listen hold on to the message that you are not alone, that someone is there. That you are there for someone. None of us alone.

This time is hard, but we will be never be alone. ”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gwLKAq9PIsQ> · Listen/Watch

#### Rupi Kaur

Rupi took to Instagram to share a poem she wrote to remind us the beautiful things of life, the best parts of humanity - the strength and love and care we all have.

The beautiful things that come from this crisis. That we are in this together.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/B91uyphybUq/> · Watch



“ You may not control all the events that happen to you,  
but you can decide not to be reduced by them. ”

Maya Angelou



Poem by **Kitty O'Meara**

And the people stayed home. And read books, and listened, and rested, and exercised,  
and made art, and played games, and learned new ways of being, and were still. And listened  
more deeply. Some meditated, some prayed, some danced. Some met their shadows. And the  
people began to think differently.

And the people healed. And, in the absence of people living in ignorant, dangerous, mindless,  
and heartless ways, the earth began to heal.

And when the danger passed, and the people joined together again, they grieved their losses,  
and made new choices,  
and dreamed new images, and created new ways to live and heal the earth fully,  
as they had been healed.

So let's bring all of our experiences together, the good and the bad, so that we learn  
more quickly about how to best support those who are managing in wildly different and  
difficult times.

What creative social justice action can you do?  
How can social distancing not mean emotional distancing?  
How can you maintain solidarity and connections with social distancing?

In solidarity,

*Maya, Lisa, Sue, Shivani, Anthony, Eshwar and Tracy*



**ShantiWorks**  
Equality Peace Justice

I stand  
on the sacrifices  
of a million women before me  
thinking  
what can I do  
to make this mountain taller  
so the women after me  
can see farther

*Legacy - Rupi Kaur*