Building Resilience
Building Resilient Communities

By Roger F. Peters

"Great paper, but it is obvious you would require more time to present a more comprehensive presentation. Just a few notes from my experience in the "staffroom". You are right, so many teachers are jaded!!! They are <u>so</u> cynical (sometimes rightly so) they have change and they play helpless/hopeless person so well. I think this will improve somewhat when we get rid of the last of those teachers in Ada and Al's era, ie, the fifty odds, who are so burnt out!!! It is also hard for many teachers to get motivated or be optimistic, when their employer seems less than supportive – I am not talking about the principals, but the government!

Julia is a 30-year old primary school teacher

Brief Resume

Roger Peters gained Degrees in Arts (Sociology) and Science (Psychology) with Honours from Newcastle University in 1980. Later, Roger gained a Masters Degree in Science, then graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy, his dissertation, "The Psycho-physiological Cost of Irregular Working Hours".

Roger has been in private practice for 20 years and his firm, HEAS – Consultant Psychologists, have offices in Gosford, Singleton and Newcastle. Aside from being a general psychological practice, HEAS' core activity is the provision of Employee Assistance Programs throughout the Hunter and the Central Coast. In addition, Roger is an authority in matters relating to trauma and recovery.

Roger consults with many organisations, but in particular advises the NSW Police Department, Department of School Education, as well as previously the Department of Defence (Army), especially in matters relating to training, personal development, and psychological trauma. Roger served for 30 years in the Army Reserve, retiring in 2000 with the rank of Major.

Roger was a member, for three years, of the National Health and Medical Research Committee (Alcohol and other Drugs in Workplace Accidents, a sub-committee). He was Australia's international representative on the Employee Assistance Professional Association based in Maryland, USA. He is a Fellow of the Employee Assistance Professional Association in Australia and past President. Roger is a member of many professional bodies, including being previously Vice President, now a Doctor, of the Australian College of Private Consulting Psychologists, as well as a foundation member of the Australian Critical Incident Stress Association and the Australian Society for the study of Traumatic Stress.

Roger has a strong interest in sport having worked with the Newcastle Knights for seven years and the Hunter Mariners for two years. Now, through with the NRL, Roger continues to assist many individual athletes develop both on and off the field.

Roger and his wife, Michele, also a psychologist but now retired, have five adult children and five grand children. Roger loves to travel, cook, build rockets, follows Rugby League Football and works in his local Catholic Parish of Newcastle.

About this Seminar

This seminar was a long time in the making, taking some 20 years. I say this from the outset because I am not sure I could have written it any earlier. I think it has been a process that has been contingent on me completing 20 years of private practice, which included seeing hundreds and hundreds of people, working with countless relationships and working with many organisations throughout Australia.

1. Catching Up With the Past

It's interesting, when you leave university how you feel you come out "full bottle", a term we use to use in the Army for being full of knowledge, theories and ideas. In this way you believe you are ready and equipped to "fix" everybody's problems. Interestingly enough, many of the ideas that I was taught as a younger man at university are now not only obsolete, but were probably not correct in the first place. When I left university in the 1980's after teaching psychology, I entered a world where the buzzword was "stress". You as consumers of matters psychological have been hearing it now for twenty to thirty years. It wasn't a new term then, nor did it ever quite mean just stress, as it is always used to connote distress, which in turn usually means "anxiety". Many people asked questions then (and still do today), "How is it that we can be less stressed?, "How do we make our environment less stressful?" We all ask questions about whether we could manage our stress better. For instance, is there any one in this room who has not attended a stress management seminar or workshop? In fact, not only would you have all been to a stress management workshop, but you may have also bought books and even relaxation tapes.

One of my favourite questions that I ask in seminars of this type today, is "How many people have a tape?" I recall in Wollongong where I addressed 600 people, and when I asked this question more than two thirds put their hands up. Then I said, "Now how many people have listened to that tape in the last month?" and got just one or two hands out of all those people. Then I said "What about once every 6 months?" and again I got a few more hands. And then I asked "How many of you have honestly never ever completed the tape, not even once?" and literally scores of hands went up.

You see, I think the madness industry in the 70's, 80's, and even 90's were very effective in selling the idea of stress. I think it was in the late 90's that my friend, Barry McNamara from Wollongong, wrote a paper, "What does it mean if I'm not stressed?" Barry has a very dry sense of humour.

I look back and ponder and question just how effective we were, did people really benefit from those types of workshops, (mine were called "Stress Management 101, 201 and 301")? I wondered about the practical application of those workshops, sure you felt great while doing them, but what about afterwards, when they next encountered a stressful situation? I think providing these types of workshops were useful in keeping the issues in respect to stress on everyone's mind. It's my belief that persistently repeating the messages (the simpler the better) impact in terms of public knowledge and in the longer run can cause changes in behaviour. "Do the right thing", "Buckle up", "Quit" are programs that give some strong evidence of this. I also think these stress courses added a different form of personal knowledge, the type referred to as intuitive knowledge.

So I pacify myself somewhat with the idea that while these courses may have not made significant changes to all the participants and certainly not entire organisations, they did help install more intuitive knowledge of the participants. In this way the courses on stress management did contribute in some way to a larger community awareness of the deleterious impact that distress can have both on individuals and communities.

2. Care of the Self

In between my stress management course and the resilience course that I present here today, came another series of courses that were entitled "Care of the Self". I borrowed this title from Thomas Moore's wonderful book, "Care of the Soul". I changed "soul" to "self" because I think some people are quite uncomfortable when we talk about the soul. The soul has religious connotations for some, but I think that can be inaccurate at least in part, because ultimately it's not only in a religious context, but a spiritual context that we can and should talk about the soul. Some people might have studied some Greek here and know that psychology is derived from the Greek word "*psyche*". The word "psyche" actually means "soul", so a psychologist's work is literally a study in soulfulness. In these courses I took and treated the word "self" and "soul" to be synonymous terms.

Secondly, I chose the theme, "Care of the Self", because it seemed to me that in reviewing the under-pinning philosophies of legislation like the Occupational Health and Safety, Anti-Discrimination and Workers Compensation Acts, there was an almost myopic focus on the responsibility of the employer in the workplace. Indeed, as it remains today, employers are to provide a safe place, psychological and physically in the case of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, further that an employer will take out insurance for their employees in relation to Workers Compensation. An employer will also be an equal opportunity employer. So I asked myself in the 90's whether this emphasis was somewhat one-sided? Where was the personal accountability and responsibility in all of this? My program, which is still available, "Care of the Self", is very much focused on helping individuals take control of their lives, be accountable for their own behaviour and take responsibility for the outcomes which are so often created by their own decisions.

You may even think of people at your workplace that have that "poor me" mentality, or "everyone's against me", "that no-one's doing what they should", "it's my entitlement", how many times have you ever heard, "it's my right". Viktor Frankl makes an insightful statement in his book "Man's Search For Meaning", saying that on the East Coast of America they have the Statue of Liberty, but suggests that on the West Coast that they build a statue of responsibility.

So we arrive at this workshop about resilience, after my own personal and professional journey and to the next step of not just building resilience, but building resilient communities.

I want to first describe to you one of the key connections between being individually resilient and having resilient communities. I take communities as being as small as a family, then of course there are larger communities such as a school, a workplace, or even a larger community such as a town or city. Within any community there is a sense of wellbeing, a sense of what is termed esprit de corps, a sense of morale, a sense of belonging. For instance, a fully functional family may be identified by its internal and external healthy relationships.

The Bishop of Newcastle, Roger Herft, was once giving a talk and he told the following story. He said that an African was visiting Australia and went to one of our very large properties, you know the kind, thousands and thousands of miles, and he noted, that unlike his own property back home in Africa, that there were no fences. He asked if there were no fences, "How did they keep the animals from straying?" The farmer said there was no need, as they had dug very deep wells, as well, they had very large dams, so there was no need for the animals to wander off. The African then inquired, "What about other stray animals coming onto the

property?" The property owner told him that the answer was that they built wells deep enough to supply the water for all the other animals to drink from as well.

So I believe that in a healthy functional family there are deep wells of living water. Water such as knowledge, self-respect, wells that are full of water such as affection, wells that can also accommodate friends that come into the family, where there is a reciprocal relationship of unconditional love in abundance. However, we know that if a person in any family is unwell for a lengthy period of time, either in a physical or mental sense, it has the potential to effect the dynamic of the family, usually in a quite adverse way.

3. Co-dependence

We have a notion and understanding of this, its called "co-dependence". If for instance, an alcoholic lives in a family it is not necessarily so much that other members will drink, but because of the alcoholic behaviour, others will be affected and indeed go on to develop other forms of psychopathology.

Let me perhaps give you a more light-hearted example of this co-dependency with another community I worked with, a rugby league football team. The coach, who in fact was a teacher, was an anxious type of person. He had a great fear of failure and in so doing, developed a fairly sizeable neurosis. His idea when the team failed was to in fact become more anxious and train them even harder. When probably the best answer to their performance slump was to give them some time off and to get them re-charged. Coach Michael Hagan's team at the time of writing this workshop has just had a four match-loosing streak. After loosing the previous Friday night's game, he sensibly gave them off until the following Thursday. In the case of the neurotic coach it was his anxiety that hampered the team and contributed to their poor performance, if you like, their "dysfunctionality". However, I remember on the occasion of last game of the year they were playing a team at the top of the competition and they were coming at the bottom, he told them all, "It doesn't matter, just go out and have a good time". Needless to say his team won, much to his surprise.

Another phenomenon in society is the prolific nature of mental disorders. Many names have been made up, but in fact cover any range of meanings of unhappiness. No one ever says simply they are unhappy any more, but suffer from not just any type of depression but "clinical depression". This seems to be at epidemic proportions and if the Federal Government project "Beyond Blue" is correct, now as many as 20%, or one in five people, suffer sufficient symptoms to warrant diagnosis using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

Just as a matter of interest, back in 1987 in a previous edition of the DSM, homosexuality was considered to be a disorder, it was removed after lobbying by homosexuals. While Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was voted into the DSM, as you might guess, by lobbying by the Vietnam Veteran Association of America.

You may have caught some cynicism already, but I think we over-medicalise what are so often existential problems. Yet I am sure that depression and anxiety are real conditions. But I am equally sure that people are also misdiagnosed and certainly too easily put on medication. However for those who suffer the profound sadness of clinical depression, for them I have significant compassion.

Like alcoholism and the model of co-dependence, it's understandable if you live with someone who has a condition of depression, then you may develop symptoms and anxieties in respect to that condition, even depression itself. There are now many families effected by depression, and there are communities affected by people with depression. The French have a term, *"le folie au deux"*. This literally translated means "the insanity of two", or "the silliness of two". The term is meant to describe what happens to a person who lives in a family with others who are mentally disordered. So, as indicated, you might expect to find, if one partner has depression, then the other partner would show symptoms.

Through 1999 to 2001, we tested this theory, with police officers and their partners. My son, Martin, was completing his thesis at Armidale University, so what he did was take a group of "civilians", these were miners engaging in 12-hour rostering, and Newcastle Port Corporation employees, whose organisation was going through major change and formed what is called a "control group". We wanted to include in our control group, a comparison group that would account for variables such as 12-hour rostering and massive organisational change, both of which are features and stress factor for the NSW Police Force. We then took another group (the experimental group) of police officers, as well as their partners (none of whom were in treatment for any physical or psychological disorders). We had both the control and experimental groups complete a number of questionaries, one of which examined anxiety and depression. These were returned anonymously and separately. The results were quite stunning.

Partners in the control group had similar depression and anxiety symptoms as their spouse, but were within the normal expected range of anxiety and depression for the general population. In the case of the police, or the experimental group, their anxiety and depression scores also correlated with their partner's, but were as much as three times higher than their civilian counterparts or the general population.

4. At Last getting Started!

When Ian asked me to give this workshop, he told me he wanted me to be motivating and uplifting. I suppose by now you may have started to become a tad depressed yourself! However I need to stress the importance, not just of caring for yourself, but the critical and core element in all of this, developing a sense of resilience. If people, who are depressed, anxious, unhappy, cynical, negative can impact on their communities of reference, then it must be equally likely that motivated, optimistic and resilient people may positively impact in their communities. That is, if you want to build resilient communities, you have to be resilient yourself. If you are depressed and anxious, you will create depressed and anxious communities.

I spoke earlier about morale and esprit de corps; the critical elements of morale are healthy and functional interactions. Thus, if the interaction is unhealthy, even by one party, but especially if they are the leaders, then the impact on morale will be self evident and contagious at that!

I said at the beginning of this workshop that this particular idea was part of an ongoing professional development and part of my life journey, reflected at first by the stress management type programs I presented in the 80's, and in the later part of the 90's when I presented workshops I called "Care of the Self". Now in the new millennium, I have developed

the concept workshops and seminars in resilience. So it might be worthwhile, in developing this notion of resilience to first draw from what I learned in conducting these other programs.

Aside from my scepticism and some real concern about the sometimes shallow nature of stress management offered by the madness industry, there were nonetheless some principal components that are self evidently essential if one is to have a physical, emotionally, and mentally healthy life.

5. Relaxation Revisted

The first of these concepts that were promoted by these types of courses was the importance of relaxation. One of the things I managed to do in my courses was to suggest that relaxation was simply more than good for you, but further explained how intimately the endocrine system and our overall physiology interacts. In examining the physical issue, first its important knowing that the dichotomy between mind and body is now more accepted as an integrated notion, then it's plain to see that if you want to improve your opportunity and participation in relaxation, there are some essential mental and physical ingredients. It is impossible for the body to be relaxed and stressed at the same time. You have two competing systems, the sympathetic nerve system, and the para-sympathetic nerve system. Simply put, the sympathetic system is the 'accelerator', and the para-sympathetic nerve system is the 'brake'.

Simply by closing your eyes and slowing your breathing will have a resultant effect on your adrenal glands, and an increased effect on glands such as the pineal gland, which is responsible for both the relaxation and the sleep response.

This workshop is not a stress management course, but simply put, if you haven't got relaxation as part of your repertoire, then I think you'll find it hard to become resilient. It is the ability to be able to relax and sleep well that is essential if we are to achieve focus in our day.

Short periods of sleep deprivation, such as when you have a cold or a particular arduous period of duty, seems to have little effect on the human being in the short term. However, it is the chronic and persistent nature of this kind of deprivation that leads to illness and perhaps provides the reason why shift workers have a higher mortality and morbidity rate than other people.

Hinted in those first courses was the connection between relaxation and our spirituality. I point out that 20 to 30 years ago, 23% of Catholics, for instance, attended mass. Now it's down to 13%, and in my local parish, it's as low as 8%. I am not suggesting to people that they return to their church that's a personal decision that they make. I am not suggesting you take up religion. What I am saying here is that the ritual and prayer that accompanied most religious activities has been abandoned by many and leaves open the question "What then have they replaced it with?" David Tacey says that there is a new worldwide spiritual revolution happening and that perhaps augers well for what I am implying here. I'll bring this question of spirituality up again a little later.

6. Getting the Basics Right

So in stress management 101, the notion of relaxation, exercise, sleep and diet were the corner stones of managing stress better. You might notice that I haven't spent any time on exercise, but I do want to say that exercise has at least the potential to reduce a particular substance, 17 hydroxicorticosteroid (cortisol), which is the biological marker for anxiety, and yes, simply put, exercise reduces anxiety. But if that wasn't compelling motivation enough, high levels of cortisol have an inverse effect on our immune system and leave us vulnerable to disease. So again, exercise can reduce disease, it doesn't get much simpler than that!

Diet too becomes a critical feature. It's interesting when I asked people in another course I conduct to write up a diet for the week. They inevitably choose a diet that is weight reducing. In other words, they come up with something along the lines of Pritikan or Atkins, or Weight Watchers, which is all well and good, but that is not what I really asked. Diet is simply what we eat and should contain the five food groups. It is not about making you fat or thin, it's about making you healthy.

I may have done myself a disservice by only providing such a brief outline of stress management 101, etc, but what that course did do was allow me to design what I thought was a much more holistic course, which was the Care of the Self series. Those courses from 1995 are still current today. It is from those two series I wrote two books, "Managing the Impact of Trauma", and "A Wish Before Dying".

So what have I learned from the Care of the Self-Program? I think there was any number of core elements, but there are four things that I want to share with you today.

7. Conflict is really the issue!

The first was an understanding of what causes anxiety and how we learn to become anxious. Ultimately I think conflict is the key in all of this. Bill Glasser, who you may well be familiar with, wrote "Schools without Failure", "Control Theory", and many others. Bill was a cognitive behaviourist who believed that conflict sat at the seat of all anxiety. Simply put, no conflict, no anxiety. Conflict again in its most basic form is the difference between what you want and what you get. You must have had times like that. Think about how one of your employees may react if they are not payed. They are indignant, they are angry, and they are anxious. Perhaps because they feel a sense of loss of control, and if nothing else, a lack of respect, but also they may be frightened. Can you think of a time of distress that you didn't involve conflict?

8. The Matrix of Stress

Many years ago I conducted a study that examined the question of why so many bus drivers suffered from stress, and subsequently why the workers compensation claims were on the increase. I won't go into why bus driving might be stressful, although that may be self-evident. But the actual duties of a bus driver were not the cause of the stress at that time. What makes this particular study interesting was that another psychologist, working for the government, (I was working for the union), came up with an identical appreciation of the problem. I am not sure whether she (Kerry Borthwick) ever went on to use this as part of her psychological

intervention with clients, but the matrix of stress has become a corner stone of Care of the Self-programs. It's a simple paradigm, for instance if you think about many times you have been stressed, there are in fact common features. You feel a sense of being overwhelmed, (excessive demand), you feel isolated (without support), you feel out of control (not in control), and fourthly you are unsure of where this enterprise will lead to, (uncertainty).

DEMAND	**SUPPORT**
CONTROL	**CERTAINTY**

In the Care of the Self classes, I asked people to consider on a scale of one to ten with "ten" being really bad and one being not at all, the last time they were stressed. Then account for each one of those in each of the four quadrants and see how high they score. The next part of the exercise is to think about now, or perhaps think about a time you were happy and content and then re-score them, the difference is quite significant. So part of this caring for the self is dealing with conflict and first appreciating conflict in terms of its magnitude and your reaction to it. For instance, recently I had a client whose baby was still born, and he said that the anxiety was so overwhelming he was able to recalibrate what was and what is not important. I said to him, so I suppose you won't be getting angry when you are stuck in a long queue in the supermarket. He said, those types of things are now in some appropriate proportion. You see, he has a new bench mark for what is stressful.

One of the good things about the matrix of stress is that while it tells you why you are anxious, it also gives you the remedy. A template, if you like, for reducing your anxiety. All of us have more control then we think. Certain things are certain in this life (aside from death and taxes), that there is support for people in all sorts of places, and by practicing some assertive skills you can reduce the expectation and thus demand on you.

Finally, on the matter of support, it always greaves me to see the suicide of a young person, but you may be familiar with the fact that at the funeral of a young person, the church is usually packed with maybe 600 people. They never fully realised how much they were loved and how much they were supported. You see, the Care of the Self programs not only acknowledged this, but asked each person who participated to reach out. It is not a course that promoted self indulgence, self absorption, but rather encouraged people to reach out and gain support from the various communities that they are members of and incidentally in the same way give back in return.

As a friend once commented, it's not just a case of loving your neighbour as yourself, but also letting your neighbour love you!

9. Learned Optimism

The second thing that came out of Care of the Self was an understanding of optimism. This is an essential ingredient in the building of resilience and resilient communities. This notion of optimism, which was written about by Martin Seligman, (Learned Optimism) and was the antithesis of what he wrote about in the 70's and 80's, that was in his theory of "Learned Helplessness". The two are juxtaposed. In a state of helplessness, there is no resilience, there is simply compliance and giving up, but in optimism there is a challenge, there is anticipation, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Helplessness is coloured by cynicism, negativity, hatred, and damaged communities. Optimism is coloured by maybe scepticism, but a healthy scepticism, and it focuses on what is possible. The Chinese have a sign for change. One part of that sign alone says "danger", the other part says or means "hidden opportunities". So the optimist looks at change in terms of those hidden opportunities, while the pessimist and the person who has learned to be helpless looks at, and only, the dangers.

The third thing in Care of the Self that becomes a corner stone of resilience is developing strong coping resources. In a book by Erica Frydenberg, "Beyond Coping", we find a bridge between the care of the self-coping and the optimism of Seligman, and Frydenberg describes this as "hope". Whether or not hope should be part of our coping resources is rather self-evident. Simply put people who hope cope. People who don't cope become helpless and hopeless.

10. Coping Resources

Whatever the role of hope there are five core elements in respect to coping resources. These are firstly self-esteem, secondly social networks and support, thirdly emotional well being, fourth spiritual-being, and fifth physical well being. These five, according to research psychologists Hamner and Marting, who researched this more than two decades ago, are the critical elements, along with personality, that dictate whether a person will cope well or not.

I would like to spend a little time on each of these, because without coping, like relaxation and those other aspects in "stress management", it is very hard to see how a person could develop a sense of resilience. It was M Scott Peck in his book, "A road less travelled", who observed that once you understand, really understand, that life is difficult, you can transcend it, and instead of trying to make your life easier, accept that the road is hard and sometimes painful. The connection I want to draw is that first you should try and not spend your coping resources simply trying to make your life stress free, but face the inescapable fact that life is indeed difficult. Having left this burden behind, then you are free to use your coping resources in a creative manner so as to cope better with this difficult life. In fact, I would suggest that there is a pervasive approach by people in society to try and avoid accepting or confronting this at all costs. Thus, ubiquitous use of drugs, alcohol and other diversions such as pornography, are undoubtedly a desperate attempt to soften, or satisfy invalid or non-authenticated, even imagined needs.

I suppose the other important lesson that came out of the Care of Self series for many people was that in order to take care of others, you must first take care of yourself. You may have heard many times in this regard, the analogy of self-care and the safety instructions given by cabin crew prior to take-off. If on an aeroplane, an oxygen mask falls from the locker above and you're sitting next to a child, make sure your own mask is fully adjusted before attending the needs of the child. This is such a critical and pivotal issue, especially in the way in which we develop adequate coping resources. In fact, I would suggest that the resilient person ultimately is the person who cares for themself first. Not in an absorbed way, but sufficiently self focussed so as to then be able to energise and assist others. In fact, there is a paradox working here, is there not? If you put others first and wear yourself out and overburden yourself so you can no longer cope, then do you not see that you will in fact become dependent and needful of others? This circumstance is the very reverse of what you intended. You intended to be someone else's rock, but in fact by not taking care of yourself you become invalid, infirm, either physically, mentally or both, then in simple turn just add to the stress and strain of the person you intended to care for!

I would now like to briefly discuss each of these elements that make up our coping resources. The first, self-esteem, is not the same as self-absorption. Self-absorption is where you put the welfare of yourself above all others. The wonderful writer and philosopher, C.S Lewis, suggests that authentic love is simple, it's when the welfare of the other person is more important than your own. There is a dichotomy between the negative notion of being self absorbed and self centred, and the positive where you take care of yourself in order to take care of others.

I need not tell you that marriages, whether they be traditional marriages or so called "new age" marriages, have a terrible attrition rate, some would say one in two, but at the very best, one in three. Ultimately marriages fail because of a failure by each person to communicate and be mindful of the needs of the other. I would have spent more time in the last twenty years trying to assist women see the world from a man's perspective, and men trying to see the world from a woman's perspective, than anything else in relationship counselling. There are distinct differences between the two and whether my feminist friends like it or not, John Grey's book, "Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus" in good humour, highlights those significant differences. It would be wonderful to spend some time here, because most of us in this room are probably in a relationship. Sufficient to say, happy and loving relationships are inevitably tied to sound communication and understanding of our differences (I think my workshop "Living and loving together – building relationships that will last", will be on my web page shortly).

As we move on, there is one core element of coping that I want to address today, ie, spirituality. It's frustrating when I address this issue and people respond, "I am not religious". I need to say that even atheists have a spirituality, a sense of that inner self or 'ego' that Freud spoke about. Your personality, if you happen to be an atheist is your soul, the very element that is unique to you. Carl Jung saw it so important even if he did use the word "religion", when he said, *"Among all the patients in the second half of life …there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a spiritual outlook on life. It is safe to say that every one of them fell ill because they had lost that which the living religions of every age have given to their followers, and none of them has been really healed who did not regain a spiritual outlook"* (Carl Jung 1933).

11. Resilience

So that is what I want to say about coping resources, and I feel that I haven't done it full justice, but I recommend that you may touch base with my web site www.heas.com.au. There you will find some further information on coping resources and other aspects raised in many of the courses that I have presented.

So at last, having spent three quarters of an hour getting to this point, I have emphasised the very foundations needed for us to develop resilience. This is an interesting topic that has been chosen, "Building Resilience – Building Resilient Communities", because I will in fact not be talking in depth at all about communities. It is my thesis that in being resilient ourself rubs off. You see that was the idea I introduced at the beginning of this seminar, ie, that notion of co-dependency working both ways. I pointed out that if you live with someone who is distressed or anxious, alcoholic or depressed, then there may be ramifications for the entire family unit. Likewise, if we build resilient people, then we have a chance to build authenticate resilient families and communities. I suppose the community that you have in your mind right now is your school.

Defining resilience:
- The Oxford Dictionary says that "resilient" means 1). Resuming its original shape after compression; 2). Readily recovering from shock, illness, etc." I like to refer to it as simply "bouncebackability".

12. The Core Elements

There are a number of qualities inherent in resilience that are not very well conveyed by the definition above or in fact any definition. So you have to look deeper than simple definitional terms, and I've come up with a series of core elements that stand out. The first of these (and these aren't particularly in order), I would describe as "childlike curiosity". One of the many things that's made technology advance so quickly is its appeal to younger people. Some of you here still may have the idea that if you want your VCR or DVD tuned, then ask a person under the age of 18. My new years resolution for 2000 was in fact to understand my mobile phone, be able to program my VCR, DVD, television combinations, and understand my way around a computer better than I did in 1999. I might say I achieved that, one of the few resolutions I have ever managed to keep. I think the thing prodding me in the back of my mind was a phrase that I heard many years ago when the Internet first came out. I went to a workshop on the Internet, and the presenter said "Children learn quicker because they are prepared to push buttons". It stuck in my mind that as adults we are frightened of making a mistake, frightened of getting hurt, frightened of being embarrassed, all of which inhibits our ability to really enjoy and integrate new skills. Experiment with things, ask questions, and see the funny side of things. You know the distance between rage and laughter is just a decision made at the hippocampus, a signal will either go into your left frontal lobe or your right frontal lobe for interpretation, and depending on which side it goes, will mean you will laugh or become angry about something.

The second quality is akin to the first, "learn from experience". Resilient people understand that within suffering and times of sorrow, there is nonetheless a learning experience available. A friend of mine, John Cavanagh, gave a program recently called "Unexpected Gifts". It may come as a surprise to you that he works as a specialist in the oncology unit at the Mater Hospital in Newcastle. His paper highlighted the fact that even in these desperate moments when we feel sad and in so much pain, especially as we see our loved ones suffer, there are gifts. The reconciliation of a family member with another who haven't spoken in years. The realisation that in suffering there can be gained a new sense of dignity. It was Victor Frankl who said, "Lord that I be worthy of my suffering", and in Frankl's case he was talking about many people in Aushwitz, who despite the horrific circumstances were able to show their humaneness and dignity.

So learning from experience is not just about the positive things in our lives, but also the negative. The resilient person bounces back from the negative and is willing to adapt what they have learnt to the future. Some such as Karen Reiuich "The Resilience Factor" says that how we deal with adversity is simply the most important predictor of resilience.

This brings us to the third element, which is to "adapt quickly". People who do not have resilience resist change. Do you see the connection between the first three, curiosity - learning - adaptation? Many people are fearful of change. They never see the opportunities, they only ever see the dangers. So adapting quickly allows for the removal of procrastination. I forget who said it, but someone once said that " procrastination is the thief of time". Now that's easy for me because I love change. I love fluidity. Other people prefer things to be the way they always have been. Abraham Maslow described this when he talked about the "hierarchy of needs", in respect to human motivation. The second rung of those needs being "security and order". This was the second of five, the fifth, realising self-actualisation. So the need for order and predictability and routine can keep us a long way from being fully fulfilled.

Attached to this, resilient people have a talent for serendipity. Resilient people learn lessons in the "school of life". Serendipity is the antidote to feeling victimised. They can convert a situation that is emotionally toxic for others into something emotionally nutritious to them. They thrive in situations distressing to others, because they learn good lessons from bad experiences. They convert misfortune into good luck, and gain strength from adversity. A good indicator of exceptional resilience is a person talking about a rough time that said "I will never willingly go through anything like that again, but it was the best thing that ever happened to me". They ask "How can I turn this around?", "Why is it good that this happened?", "What's the gift?".

Fifthly, the resilient person has solid self-esteem and self-confidence. I mentioned self esteem earlier, it's part of our coping resources. Self-esteem enables you to receive praise and compliments, and it also acts as a buffer against hurtful statements, while at the same time being receptive to constructive criticism. Self-esteem is about self talk, positive statements about ones self. Imagine, if you will, if I was to tell you how terrific I was. That I am a good speaker, I am a good writer, I am a great psychologist, I am a fantastic father, what would be the cringe factor in this? Yet in our society we readily accept people who say "Gee, I'm stupid", "God I'm an idiot" and other such self effacing terms. In our world, there needs to be at least a middle ground where I feel comfortable saying that I'm okay. Self-confidence allows you to take risks without waiting for approval or reassurance from others. To expect to handle new situations well because of past success, and this is again tied in of course with the third core element above of adapting quickly.

The sixth core element is having good friendships and loving relationships. Research has demonstrated that people in toxic working conditions are more stress resilient and are less likely to get sick when they have a loving family and good friendships. I have mentioned in therapy many times "You cannot fight a battle on two fronts". If you have a toxic work environment, then you need a loving home environment. Loners here are more vulnerable to distressing conditions at work. Talking to friends and family does help and diminishes the impact and difficulties, while increasing feelings of self worth and self-confidence.

The seventh core element is the ability to express feelings honestly. Resilient people express anger, like, dislike, appreciation, love and grief, and the entire range of human emotions openly and honestly. But resilient people are able to also suppress their feelings when they believe it would be best to do so. Think for instance of anger, is it always appropriate to express one's anger? Argument, is it always wise to argue? I've always used the theory that you only argue when you have a chance that the other person will accept your point of view.

The eighth feeling is very much tied into the Care of the Self-Theory, and that is a sense of optimism. Deep optimism guided by internal values and standards. Resilient folk have a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty. An optimistic person can work without a job description, is a good role model by virtue of their professionalism. Ultimately, however, they have a synergistic effect that brings stability to crisis and chaos. They ask "How can I interact with this community so things turn out well for us?" Probably today among all of you, this is the single core element that you need to take back to your communities. That sense of optimism that things will work out well.

The ninth core element is the ability to empathise. That is, the ability to put yourself into another person's shoes. Too often we go into situations with a winning attitude, and a pervasive philosophy of that if I win, you must lose. It's a cliche to talk about win-win attitudes, but an empathetic person attempts always to see the situation from the other's point of view and behaves accordingly.

The tenth core element relates to something that goes back to the beginning of this program, when I introduced you to a form of knowledge that you know, but a form of knowledge that is not always practiced because of our bias towards the scientific method, I refer to intuition. The resilient person uses intuition and creative hunches. They accept subliminal perception and interaction as valid useful sources of information. What's my body telling me? Did that daydream mean anything? Why don't I believe what I'm being told? What if I did this? These are some of the questions the intuitive person answers.

Goleman picked up this theme of intuition in his book "Emotional Intelligence", this along with empathy and optimism, I consider the three essential elements that are the most essential in building resilience.

13. Conclusion

So we come to the end of this paper and I imagine if you are reading it that you may agree that I hardly did it justice in the short time I had with you in presenting it. What in all of this will you take away with you? I expect that the changes and adaptation that we will all be required to face in the next 50 years will be gigantic. In fact the likelihood that we will make our lives easier and less stressful is not a view supported by our experience of the last century. The future will be filled with paradoxes in the same way of the last century, where we were told that computers would make our lives easier or mobile phones improve communication. If you think that they have only improved our society, then I could do with some help on that.

Earlier in the paper you may have in fact picked up some negativity, especially when I was discussing the rates of depression. Likewise now you may feel there is a bite to my comments on where we are now and where we are heading. However, if you see it this way, it is unintended and a negative spin that would be at the cost of missing my real sense of optimism and hope. I think its as I said earlier, that in accepting that life is difficult, we can transcend or rise above it. In so doing, we can save a good deal of our stress and certainly stop wasting energy that could be used in more creative ways. In fact I believe it is the continuing challenges in our lives that makes them so rich and interesting.

However, irrespective of all that is written in this and so many similar papers, I believe that in order to be resilient each of us must ultimately have meaning in our lives. Viktor Frankl, again suggests that happiness only comes from meaning, we do not achieve meaning through happiness.

Ultimately our quest here on this planet, as we hurtle through the universe, holding on for dear life, is to see that our lives do have meaning. Quite often this can be obscured especially when we compare ourselves to others. Or worse still because we are not in the centre of the picture, we may think have no real import at all. I often quote two names to my clients. Joachim and Anne, here were two people who lived near Jerusalem, more than 2000 years ago, who may have pondered the same question. Living under Roman rule and struggling day by day to get by, they may have thought that their lives had little meaning. Yet their lives were to change the course of history They were the parents of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus, a Nazarene who was to have more impact on global affairs than any other person in history. You see Joachim and Anne were part of that tapestry, not the main subject of it.

Likewise resilient people see their lives as having meaning. People in vocations such as teaching have been entrusted with the future generations and I can think of a no more sacred trust and thus meaning in than that.

Yet to achieve this resilience the basics, as discussed in this paper, also have to be not just understood, but inculcated into a repertoire of behaviour which is habitual and thus long lasting. All of which sounds very well, but how is this achieved? I have attached a questionnaire, which may provide for you not just an assessment of your resilience, but when scored gives you perhaps a template to build better resilience skills.

Finally, I suggested earlier that this paper's title might be in someway misleading, as it suggests that its ultimate purpose was to show how communities could be made resilient. The facts are, of course, that communities don't exist without people. Thus resilient people build resilient communities. Yet there is another suggestion that flavours this paper and that is that resilient leaders positively impact on their community, in short resilience can be contagious. Thus, as you go back to your schools at the conclusion of this conference I would hope you take back a clear message, in better caring for yourself, you better care for others.

July 2004

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Appendices 1

Tips for Building Resilience

Make Connections

Good relationships with close family members, friends or others who are important to you. Accepting help and support from those who care about you and will listen to you strengthens resilience. Some people find that being active in civic groups, faith-based organisations or other local groups provides social support and can help with reclaiming hope. Assisting others in their time of need also can benefit the helper.

Avoid seeing Crises as Insurmountable Problems

You can't change the fact that highly stressful events happen, but you can change how you interpret and respond to these events. Try looking beyond the present to how future circumstances may be a little better. Note any subtle ways in which you might already feel somewhat better as you deal with difficult situations.

Accept that Change Is a Part of living

Certain goals may no longer be attainable as a result of adverse situations. Accepting circumstances that cannot be changed can help you focus on circumstances that you can alter.

Move Toward Your Goals

Develop some realistic goals. Do something regularly — even if it seems like a small accomplishment — which enables you to move toward your goals. Instead of focusing on tasks that seem unachievable, ask yourself, "What's one thing I know I can accomplish today that helps me move in the direction I want to go?"

Take Decisive Actions

Act on adverse situations as much as you can. Take decisive actions, rather than detaching completely from problems and stresses and wishing they would just go away.

Look for Opportunities for Growth

People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of their struggle with loss. Many people who have experienced tragedies and hardship have reported better relationships, a greater sense of personal strength, even while feeling vulnerable, also an increased sense of self-worth, a more developed spirituality and a heightened appreciation for life.

Nurture a Positive View of Yourself

Developing confidence in your ability to solve problems and trusting your instincts helps build resilience.

Keep Things in Perspective

Even when facing very painful events, try to consider the stressful situation in a broader context and keep a long-term perspective. Avoid blowing the event out of proportion.

Maintain a Hopeful Outlook

An optimistic outlook enables you to expect that good things will happen in your life. Try visualising what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

Take Care of Yourself

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing. Exercise regularly. Taking care of yourself helps to keep your mind and body primed to deal with situations that require resilience.

Get Better and Better Every Decade

Become increasingly life competent, resilient, durable, playful, and free. Spend less time surviving but try and survive major adversities better. Enjoy life more and more.

Appendices 2

Self Assessment

Appended to this paper you will find a questionnaire that I think provides a useful audit for resilience. It is a self-scoring questionnaire and has an interpretation on the same page.

RESILIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

	Almost never	Rarely	Sometimes	Quite often	Most of the time
1. Very resilient. Adapt quickly. Good at bouncing back from difficulties	①	②	③	④	⑤
2. Optimistic, see difficulties as temporary, expect to overcome them and have things turn out well.	①	②	③	④	⑤
3. In a crisis, I calm myself and focus on taking useful actions.	①	②	③	④	⑤
4. Good at solving problems logically.	①	②	③	④	⑤
5. Can think up creative solutions to challenges. Trust intuition.	①	②	③	④	⑤
6. Playful, find the humour, laugh at self, chuckle.	①	②	③	④	⑤
7. Curious, ask questions, want to know how things work, experiment.	①	②	③	④	⑤
8. Constantly learn from experience and from the experiences of others.	①	②	③	④	⑤
9. Very flexible. Feel comfortable with inner complexity (trusting and cautious, unselfish and selfish, optimistic and pessimistic, etc).	①	②	③	④	⑤
10. Anticipate problems to avoid them and expect the unexpected.	①	②	③	④	⑤
11. Able to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty about situations.	①	②	③	④	⑤
12. Feel self-confident, enjoy healthy self-esteem, and have an attitude of professionalism about work.	①	②	③	④	⑤
13. Good listener. Good empathy skills. "Read" people well. Can adapt to various personality styles. Non-judgmental (even with difficult people).	①	②	③	④	⑤
14. Able to recover emotionally from losses and setbacks. Can express feelings to others, let go of anger, overcome discouragement, and ask for help.	①	②	③	④	⑤

15. Very durable, keep on going during tough times. Independent spirit. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

16. Have been made stronger and better by difficult experiences. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

17. Covert misfortune into good fortune. Discover the unexpected benefit. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Now add up your score.
15-39 points: Seek help!   **40-49 points:** You're struggling
50-59 points: Just adequate   **60-69 points:** Better than most
70-85 points: Very resilient!