

The Tree of life is an activity that uses Narrative therapy ideas and was developed by Ncazelo Ncube (REPSI) and David Denborough (Dulwich Centre Institute of Community Practice www.dulwichcentre.com.au). It was first used with vulnerable children in Southern Africa living with HIV/AIDS, but has since been used with communities all over the world. This activity uses the tree as a metaphor for different aspects of life. These generally include history (origins, ancestors), daily activities at present, skills and abilities, hopes and dreams for the future, people who are important to you, and gifts that you have been given.

Tree of Life Sculpture

This sculptural Tree of Life was a collaborative project which represents Aboriginal communities and people, rather than our individual lives. It was created by participants attending the art-based workshop *If Trees Could Talk: Sharing Our Stories through the Creative Arts* at a conference on *Building Resilience in Times of Crisis* held in Winnipeg May 14-15, 2009. Participants involved in the sculpture were from three Aboriginal communities in Manitoba and Ontario (Lake St. Martin First Nation, Cross Lake Band and Pikangikum First Nation).

The roots represent who we are and where we come from, so we have included our names and communities on the base of the sculpture.

The skills and abilities of Aboriginal people are recorded on the trunk of the tree and include trapping, fishing, hunting, cooking, baking, raising children, listening, art, dancing, storytelling, strong culture, family values, sense of direction, and sense of humour.

We chose to represent our hopes and dreams as well as things that are important to us as leaves and other special objects on the tree. Our hopes and dreams include prosperity, good health, respect, safety, traditional teachings, expanding communities, finding ways to deal with challenges, networking, bringing workshops into our communities, finding better coping mechanisms, success, staying clean and healthy, peace and unity. The people who are important to us include family, grandparents, elders, pastors, friends and neighbours.

There are a few other things we have included which have special meaning. There is a bird looking after her young in a nest which represents the importance of family. There is a spider hanging in the tree, which represents our respect for all living things. There are people holding hands and coming together, which represents unity.

In preparing for the workshop, participants were invited to bring any special items that they wanted to include in the tree of life sculpture. One man included a necklace made of soapstone which he said represents all nations. One woman included a beaded key chain with a note that read *"Always be positive, for a better tomorrow, health, respect, prosperity"*. Another woman gave her medicine bag, which represents healing. She included this story *"This bag represents healing. My step-daughter gave it to her dad and I was sitting in the room when she left. My husband said, you know you're always sick. So I'm going to give this bag to you. I have carried it for many many years. So today I thought it's time to give it up. So I'm giving this to the tree of life."*

The Tree of Life sculpture is currently on display at the Edge Gallery at 611 Main Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba. For gallery hours, please contact Serena Postel at 204-947-2992 or serena@edgevillage.com. For more information on this workshop or other art-based workshops, please contact Julie Epp, Art Theray Facilitator, at 416-660-8414 or julieepp@hotmail.com



