

## KEEP YOUR SPIRIT STRONG

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## Building a strong tree for strong spirit

“Imagine the seed of a tree being planted. No matter what the type of tree, all trees begin this way, as a seed, under the ground. They grow roots that keep the tree grounded and allow it to grow strong. Now imagine the roots as our support networks – our family, our friends, and our people. Then imagine us as the trunk of the tree, growing up because of our strong roots. Now we look at the branches and they represent all of our choices and all of our experiences.” This is how Wiradjuri man, Uncle Tom Powell, founder of Red Dust Healing, encourages people to visualise themselves and their lives so that they can find the way to heal.

**Red Dust Healing** is a cultural healing program that empowers Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to deal with rejection, hurt and anger in their life. Rejection can be neglect, abuse, grief, suicide, abandonment, domestic violence, or loss.

Participants are asked to look at what is absorbed through the root system of the tree as nutrients. These nutrients can be both good and bad. The program highlights that bad nutrients can stem from roots, especially rejection. That rejection can have a significant impact on their trunk (themselves) and their branches (their choices).

The program encourages participants to build up tools and strategies to make positive behavioural changes. “One of the most important impacts of the program is when participants realise and understand that a lot of their choices and their rejection is not their fault. It is an extremely powerful moment.

It is also the first step to fixing the relationship they have with themselves. And with those around them as well,” said Uncle Tom.

A program participant has said that, “the main benefit (for Aboriginal people) is that their spirit heals, it actually does heal. It actually comes together again, if you can visualise that. All things are possible from that place. And you can move forward. So, your spirit heals and it’s about integration. It doesn’t matter what anyone does to us, we are whole, we are spirit. Hold your head up high. Know that you’re worth it, that you’re as valuable as anyone else and be proud of the colour of your skin. Be proud of it and your people are with you. And Red Dust Healing brings you back to that place.”



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health**