

KEEP YOUR SPIRIT STRONG



Building a strong tree for strong spirit

RED DUST HEALING

“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, growing roots, keeping the tree grounded and allowing 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 confront rejection, hurt and anger in their lives.

The program examines the intergenerational effects of colonisation on the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of the participants. Rejection encompasses neglect, abuse, grief, suicide, abandonment, domestic violence, and loss, and the program is centred on reinforcing to the participants that rejection is not their fault.

Red Dust Healing uses numerous models and tools to guide participants through the program, with the Tree model being one of the most prominent. Participants are instructed to look at what is absorbed through the root system of the tree as nutrients and that these nutrients can be both good and bad. The program highlights that bad nutrients can stem from roots, particularly rejection, and that rejection can have a significant impact on their trunk (themselves) and their branches (their choices).



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RED DUST HEALING *(continued)*

Uncle Tom also reinforces that rejection is not the fault of the participant and through understanding tools and strategies to deal with these bad nutrients, participants are empowered to make positive behavioural changes. “One of the most profound 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 and is the first step to not only fixing the relationship they have with themselves, but with those around them as well,” said Uncle Tom.

The importance of having strong relations with community and mob is well known as a key factor in maintaining ideal social and emotional wellbeing and is something that Red Dust is inherently aware. “More than anything, Red Dust is about restoring families and letting people know that they are worthy and loved. Through this, people regain their sense of dignity and integrity and their spirit starts to heal,” said Uncle Tom.

With the impact of COVID-19 being far and wide, Uncle Tom acknowledges that people and communities are feeling fragile and disconnected. To combat this, Uncle Tom encourages people to only worry about the things you can control, to remain true to yourself, and to learn tools that reinforce how you can best feed your roots with good nutrients.

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.”

Red Dust Healing has achieved meaningful change to the mental health of its participants and throughout the program’s history, Uncle Tom has always stayed true to Red Dust’s motto: “When the dust is settled on our lives, all we get to keep and take with us is our dignity, our integrity and the love and respect we shared with people.”

