



In a dog-eat-dog world, what can we do to ease tensions *within* families and communities?

Shelter SA is the peak body for housing in South Australia, raising awareness of the way neoliberalism and competition for scarce resources (like housing) impacts on individuals, families and communities. With a housing focus, one way of starting this conversation is to draw attention to the South Australian Government aim to increase the population to 2 million people by 2027.

With a steady flow of homeless people made up of a mixture of those who are chronically homeless and those experiencing homelessness for the first time, combined with a housing affordability crisis, citizens are very worried about where all of these people are going to live, whether or not they will have jobs, what they will eat and the impact they will have on the environment. The housing, employment, health and mental health needs of the current population are not currently being met by the private market or government provided services.

Neo-liberalism creates an environment where the needs of minority groups are pushed even further to the bottom of the political agenda. Minority groups are subordinate in terms of their social, political and economic power and from this inequitable position, are driven to compete with other people living with disadvantage for necessities to meet their basic needs such as shelter, food and clothing, with few, if any resources left for education, health, holidays or emergencies. This creates increased tensions *between* minority groups. For example there are negative stereotypes about refugees and the assistance they are entitled which are not helped by politicians speaking about 'boat people' or offshore processing. But there are also tensions and rivalry *within* groups that is especially insidious and detrimental to culture and relationships, undermining a sense of togetherness, family and community and replacing them with division and isolation.

As a minority population across Australia, Aboriginal people are overrepresented in homelessness and incarceration rates, have lower life expectancy, educational attainment and socio-economic standing than non-Aboriginal people. Having an appropriate, affordable and safe place to call home is only one of many needs, but is also important as a basis to achieve others.

Brian and Nicci Butler have been aware of tensions *between* Aboriginal people for many years. They have witnessed first-hand the way that some Aboriginal people are treating each other. They call it "lateral violence". Combined with dispossession, genocide and racism, it is a lethal cocktail for the future of Aboriginal culture. Focussing on bringing about change, Brian and Nicci's advocacy is based on the positive opposite of lateral violence, Lateral Love. The aim of Lateral Love Australia is to bring people together to share information and activities that engender respect, dignity and common ground for all Australians to work together. The following quote comes from Lateral Love Australia:

The legal definition of lateral violence as found via US Legal is: Lateral violence happens when people who are both victims of a situation of dominance, in fact turn on each other rather than confront the system that oppresses them both. Lateral violence occurs when oppressed groups/individuals internalize feelings such as anger and rage, and manifest their feelings through behaviors such as gossip, jealousy, putdowns and blaming.

And another one taken from Paul Memmott's Community Based Strategies for Combating Indigenous Violence 2001 'unresolved grief that is associated with multiple layers of trauma spanning many generations'. Some of these 'layers of trauma' include: colonial aggression; genocide; racism; alienation from tribal lands; breakdown of social structure; loss of spirituality and languages; removal of rights and responsibilities; labour exploitation; and large-scale removal of Aboriginal children from their families ('stolen generations'). These and other factors have contributed to the erosion of social structures and traditional values, and a range of social problems in current Aboriginal communities' (Memmott et al. 2001).

Most people have experienced the frequent manifestations of lateral violence. Here's a list so you know if it has happened to you, or if you are behaving this way:

- nonverbal innuendo (raising eyebrows, face-making)
- bullying
- verbal affront (overt/covert, snide remarks, lack of openness, abrupt responses, gossiping)
- shaming
- undermining activities (turning away, not being available, social exclusion)
- withholding information
- sabotage (deliberately setting up a negative situation)
- infighting (bickering, family feuds)
- scapegoating
- backstabbing (complaining to peers and not confronting the individual)
- failure to respect privacy
- broken confidences
- organisational conflict
- physical violence

Shelter SA supports the work of Lateral Love. The more people who learn about it, share information and educate others the more we can resist the effects of a dire shortage of housing and other resources and seriously consider whether we should be increasing our population.

Find out more about Lateral Love by looking them up www.lateralloveaustralia.com or <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Lateral-Love-Australia/356611377743638>.

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