INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE FRIDAY SEMINAR

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ABSTRACT: There is a glaring hole in the "close the gap" discourse in Australia. Government, media and public agencies tend to lament the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life expectancies, health, education and economic conditions. One the one hand they recognise that the western mainstream programs they have implemented do not close the gap, but on the other hand also recognise that culturally appropriate programs do close the gap yet with no economic analysis comparing both intervention models to justify cost effectiveness of outcomes, and the piecemeal funding with no movement to close the gap continues.

At the same time there is a systematic, institutionalised and radical denial of Aboriginal Spirituality and Traditional Knowledge (ecological, medical, ...) to inform programs that recognise what is essentially their religion, cultural practices and beliefs. It is this Aboriginal Spirituality and knowledge that the community are yearning for, and beginning to revive the knowledge to enable Indigenous communities to disconnect from the intergenerational trauma of colonisation, and reconnect with their faith, their country, their families. This presents opportunities for providing youth with computer literacy skills to contribute towards recording knowledge of their Aboriginal faith through learning and training resources compliant with government curriculums. These skills contributes towards employment in contemporary modern society.

Restorative justice is a part of this healing process, and is still in its infancy in Australia. There is an opportunity to learn from South Africa where its restorative justice processes are more advanced in supporting traditional knowledge, traditional medicine and governance. Significantly it is in Australia where the South African government...
came to Queensland in the 1920's and 1930's to study the Qld Aboriginal Protection Act on how to control the black population, which they then used in South Africa as apartheid. The opportunity is in motion for intercultural support between both cultures for restorative justice to come full circle and add to the healing process for Aboriginal Australians.

Legal implications arise from this process of reviving Aboriginal spirituality, where traditional lore and knowledge impacts sovereignty and treaty claims to land and prior art (use) of bush foods and medicines and a calling from various groups to have their sovereignty reclaimed formally. Concerns from Indigenous communities about misappropriation and patenting of Indigenous knowledge, medicines and methods provide opportunities for prosecution and protection of their knowledge ensuring benefits are shared in the community rather than exploited by pharmaceutical companies and the herbal industries. It also presents opportunities for cottage industry micro-enterprise developments for particularly remote Indigenous communities to stay on their land as custodians and enable sustainable agricultural development.

Despite thousands of years of community evidence, the use of Indigenous holistic traditional healing is only beginning to be recognised by governments and funded either as its own health system, or in collaboration with western health systems. New communicable diseases and the lack of formal networking bodies of Indigenous traditional healers present opportunities for knowledge transfer and improve their level of professional knowledge. Recent move towards integrating both Western and Indigenous medicines through collaborations in both health systems will provide opportunities for greater insights and innovation, by comparing the cost and clinical effectiveness of interventions for communities that use Indigenous-only, Western-only, and both systems concurrently.

BIO: Dr Chris Kavelin is a strong and passionate advocate for ensuring the voices of Indigenous communities are heard in an era of globalization where they have little political voice and power. Chris’ PhD focused on the protection of Indigenous Medical Knowledge, having discovered the misappropriation of such knowledge by large pharmaceutical companies; and how universities play an inadvertent role in this misappropriation. Since then, Chris has undertaken extensive field work over the past ten years in North America, Samoa, New Zealand and Australia. The networks he has developed and the level of trust in relationships with communities he has gained speaks to the integrity he has held, despite challenges to ensure the voices of Indigenous communities are on the agenda for those who can make a difference. He is currently developing research collaborations with university partners in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Uganda and North America in conjunction with grass roots Indigenous community organisation’s in these areas that he specializes in: Intellectual Property Law; Indigenous knowledge systems, particularly the spiritual aspects
of health and medicine; Research protocols for cross-cultural health and medicine; Restorative Justice; Interdisciplinary praxis focused on community service; Cross-cultural knowledge and palliative care; Globalisation of Indigenous knowledge; Repatriation of Indigenous medical knowledge.