

Stories of resilience, healing and transformation

Aboriginal Resilience Lecture Series focuses on oral history and storytelling to shape worldviews



COURTESY CULTURE AND MENTAL HEALTH

RESEARCH UNIT JEWISH GENERAL Historical Trauma and Aboriginal Resilience, broadening understanding of "Growing up Well" across Cultures and Contexts, part of the Aboriginal Resilience Lecture Series.

RICHARD TARDIF
THE EASTERN DOOR

The Culture and Mental Health Research Unit (CMHRU) at the Jewish General Hospital will begin its 2009 Aboriginal Resilience Lecture Series next Friday, holding its first of three scheduled series.

"Resilience in general is a process of facing challenges and

getting through difficulties," said Dr. Stéphane Dandeneau, Scientific Coordinator at CMHRU and part of the Roots of Resilience Project that consists of six sub-projects, each investigating a different aspect of Aboriginal resilience.

"Aboriginal resilience refers to the many distinct worldviews Aboriginal groups have about going through that process. The whole idea behind it is to redefine resilience from the Aboriginal perspective," said Dandeneau.

"No one has really looked at Aboriginal resilience," he adds. "The mainstream literature talks about it in very individualistic terms and many Aboriginal people feel it doesn't capture how we feel and think."

Dandeneau, a Métis from Winnipeg, along with other members of the CMHR, including Kahnawa'kehrón Morgan Kahenttonni Phillips, thought it was a good idea to bring in speakers that have done work in Aboriginal resilience and start discussions on this issue.

"This is a way of saying we have a lot of knowledge and a lot of stuff we are good at," he said. "From looking at the process of resilience, we can really share the

knowledge and capture many stories that we can share."

Dandeneau says one way of looking at it is to look at the suppression the Canadian government, and governments all over the world, have put on Aboriginal people.

"You think that we would all be dead by now," he said. "What has kept people close to their culture, close to their language, close to their culture, strength?"

Phillips was introduced to the Roots of Resilience Project through the National Network for Aboriginal Mental Health Research located at the Jewish General Hospital's CMHRU. She was completing her undergraduate degree at Concordia University in the Department of Social & Cultural Anthropology at the time, two years ago.

"I had been involved with a number of community-based participatory research projects, but I was particularly attracted to this project because it focused on the positive aspects of Indigenous people rather than negative aspects of our people that past research has thrived on," she said.

"Recent literature on the evolving concept of Aboriginal resilience tells us that oral history

and storytelling have played significant roles in the shaping of our worldviews," she said.

"Indigenous peoples are beginning to re-write the history books from our own perspectives."

Phillips has been collecting narratives or stories of resilience within Kahnawake that have helped to shape its history.

Some of those stories (collected from youth, adults and elders) include The Creation Story, the Story of how the Haudenosaunee Confederacy was formed, the Kaienere'ko:wa (The Great Law of Peace) and the introduction of Christianity.

Other stories include the creation of the elected Band Council system, the imposition of the Indian Act, and more recently, stories of the eradication of the riverfront, the diminishment of the land base, the Oka Crisis of 1990 and membership issues.

"The knowledge that we are sharing with mainstream society, I believe, can create better understandings of our diverse histories and to promote healing in our communities through stories of success such as language and cultural revitalization efforts," she said.

Phillips is proud to announce that the second lecture in the series will be held in Kahnawake on March 20, 2009 (place and time to be determined) and will include Seneca elder and scholar Mike Myers.

"I believe we've (Haudenosaunee) been resilient for a number of reasons," said Myers, "most important of which has been our ability to keep an extraordinary amount of our culture and its teachings relatively intact."

Another key ingredient, says Myers, has been the degree to which Haudenosaunee have been able to maintain the languages.

"This allows us to think in non-European ways about any issue giving us the flexibility to see, conceive and imagine many more possibilities than English and French allow."

"The Kanien'kehá:ka at Kahnawake have shown resilience and an ability to adapt to challenges which form so much of our history," said Phillips.

For more information on the lecture to be held in Kahnawake contact Phillips at 450-638-4377.

The first lecture will take
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place Friday, February 13, from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. at the Institute for Community and Family Psychiatry Amphitheatre at the Jewish General Hospital at 4333 Cote Ste Catherine Road.

The scheduled lecturer will be Les B. Whitbeck, Ph.D. from the John G. Bruhn Professor of Sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Whitbeck is studying American Indian children aged 10-12 years, following the children and their caretakers through their high school years.

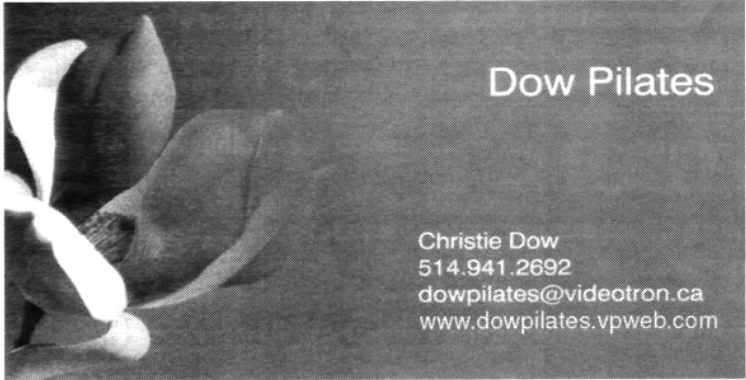
Michael Ungar, Ph.D., a University Research Professor

and Professor of Social Work at Dalhousie University, Halifax, will host the third lecture on April 24.

Ungar's research is focused on understanding resilience among children, youth and fami-

lies across cultures and contexts. For more information visit www.mcgill.ca/resilience/lectures/.

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