

# Preventing Loneliness, Social Isolation: The Concept of Social Capital

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# All People Want

- To stay active in the community, be social
- To be productive, contribute and participate
- To be treated with dignity and respect
- To stay in their home
- To be able to get around the community
- To be or stay active as possible
- To build, maintain and retain relationships



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# We Know

Those who are lonely or socially isolated feel:

- Disconnected
- Excluded
- Alienated
- Have more sick days
- Have lower self-confidence
- And actually die sooner



# Those at Risk of Social Isolation

- The Elderly
- The Poor
- People with Disabilities and their Families
- Single Parents
- People with Mental Health conditions
- Ethnic Minorities
- Those who feel Different

# Definitions

- Social Isolation is a state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging, or engagement with others, and lack a minimal number of contacts
- Loneliness can occur in the presence or absence of social isolation. It is a lack of social intimacy and a deficiency in social relationships. It is often described as a subjective feeling of isolation, not belonging, or lacking companionship.

- Social Isolation is objective. It can be identified, mapped, and quantified
- Loneliness is subjective. It is felt and only articulated by the person



LONELINESS

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“To be lonely is to feel unwanted and unloved,  
and therefore unlovable. Loneliness is a taste of  
death.”

Jean Vanier



# Impact - Survival

308,849 individuals, followed at least 7.5 years, indicate those with social relationships have 50% greater likelihood of survival. This is comparable with quitting smoking and exceeds other risk factors for mortality such as obesity or physical inactivity

Social Relationships and Mortality Risks. Holt-Lunstad, Smith, Layton. 2010.

# Impact - Cost

The impact of people living in social isolation add almost **\$7 billion a year to the cost of Medicare,** mostly because of longer hospital stays – a result, researchers suggest, of not having community supports at home

AARP Public Policy Institute, Stanford, and Harvard. 2020.



“Simply living alone or in an isolated place may be just as harmful to your health as feeling lonely”

Julianne Holt-Lunstad



# Biology

Loneliness may have evolved as a kind of early warning system, prompting us to get back to the tribe. System reactions include:


- Inflammation
- Respiration
- Circulation
- Nerves

These help short term survival, but not over time.

# Depression

- Loneliness is risk factor for depression, which increases mortality and cardiovascular diseases
- Depression diminishes serotonin and increase myocardial infarction and stroke
- These increase heart rate variability, releasing adrenaline, leading to risk of cardiac arrhythmia
- Whatever the mechanism, the effect of depression on mortality is significant in size

Isolated folks have disrupted sleep patterns, altered immune system, higher stress hormones, increased heart disease by 29% and stroke by 32%. In all, it accounts for a 30% higher risk of dying in 7 years.

A faint, stylized illustration of two hands shaking is visible in the lower-left background of the slide. The hands are rendered in a light teal color, matching the overall theme of the presentation.

# Loneliness in Canada

- 1 in 10 people over 15 years of age report always or often feeling lonely
- 15% of women report always or often lonely
- 24% who live alone say always or often lonely
- Close to half (49%) report fair or poor mental health
- Canadian Social Survey – Sep 2021

The New York Times recently reported that since 1980's the percentage of American adults who say they are lonely has doubled from 20% to 40%



# Cigna Study using the UCLA Loneliness Scale

- Cigna Insurance review of 20,000 Americans
- 20 items – 4 point Likert Scale – 20 to 80
- Never – Rarely – Sometime – Often
- 1. How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
- 2. How often do you feel left out?
- 3. How often do you feel isolated from others?
- Score of 43 or higher indicates loneliness



# Cigna Study - Findings

- Nearly half of Americans report sometimes or always feeling alone (46%) or left out (47%)
- Two in five Americans sometimes or always feel that their relationships are not meaningful (43%) or isolated (43%)
- One in five report they rarely or never feel close to people (20%) or feel there are people they can talk to (18%)
- Only half of Americans (53%) have meaningful in-person social interactions, such as extended conversations, or connecting daily
- Generation Z (18 to 22) is the loneliest generation
- Social media use alone is not a predictor of loneliness

“I used to think that the worst thing in life was to end up alone. It’s not. The worst thing in life is to end up with people who make you feel alone”

Robin Williams



# Engagement Issues for Individuals/Families at Risk

- Economic Impact
- Logistical Challenges
- Increased Medical Appointments
- Social Stigmas
- Fears of Others
- Embarrassment

# How Do We Address This Challenge

- We need to re-examine the root of the problem
- Often we think isolation is internal to the person
- There must be micro and macro strategies
- We need to understand “Social Capital”
- We need to understand “Change Theory”

# Change Theory

- **Micro Change** – change the individual to connect into the community.
- **Macro Change** – change the community to understand, accept, and welcome the individual

# Micro Change

Micro change is when we look to clinically, or therapeutically change/enhance the person or his/her circumstances. This change is where we work specifically with the person to have them learn something, acquire something, or utilize something that will make them more viable and able to successfully connect to the Community.

# Micro Interventions

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Social Prescriptions
- Social Fitness Exercises
- Cultural Profile
- Mindfulness
- Ice-breaking practice
- Engaging a “Care Force” to find isolated people



# Macro Change

Macro change is about the environment around the individual and enhancing the social architecture. This type of change revolves around the perceptions, attitudes and assumptions about the isolating issue. Macro change attempts to shift these attitudes in either formal ways (through laws) or informally through relationships that, in essence, broadens the perspective of the community.

# Macro Interventions

- Community Mapping
- Free bus tickets to get people out
- Utilizing Libraries/Community Centers
- Promoting Neighbor Connections
- Softening Cultural Infrastructure
- Coffee Connection
- Community Benches
- Holding “World Café” conversations



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# Efforts in the UK

- Establish a Minister of Loneliness (2018)
- Initiate 3 major National actions:
  - 1. Reduce stigma associated with loneliness
  - 2. Make reducing loneliness a national agenda
  - 3. Improve the evidence and data
- Actions to date – social prescribing, car services, developing social hubs, office for national statistics, reimagining space.

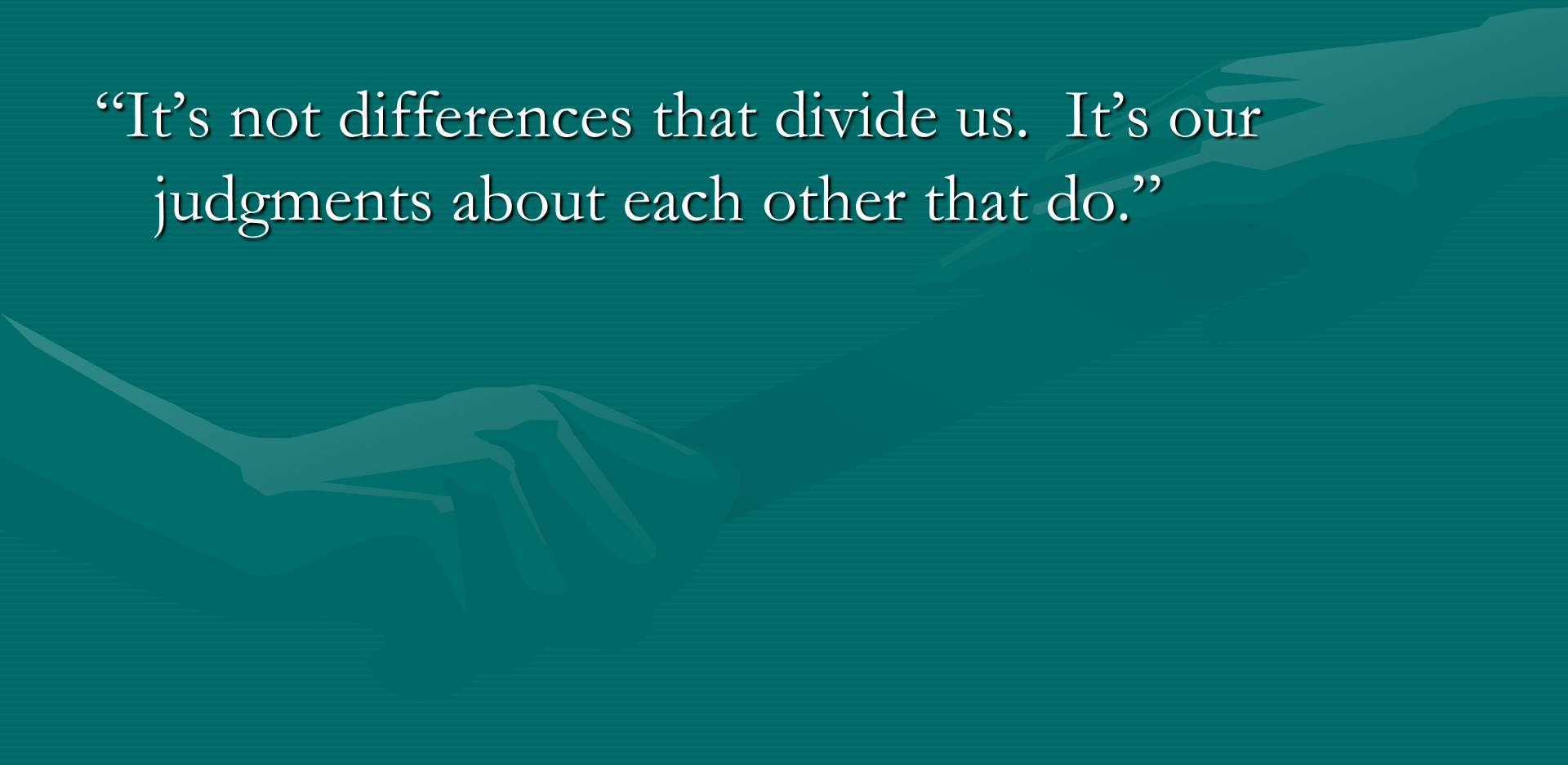
# Other Efforts

- Australia Coalition to End Loneliness
- US Coalition to End Social Isolation/Loneliness
- Private Concierge Programs
- Angus Reid Institute Studies in Canada
- BBC Loneliness Experiment, 55,000 folks
- WHO – Age Friendly Community Initiative
- Carleton University Study by Robert Coplan
- Volunteer Ottawa

“Human conversation is the most ancient and easiest way to cultivate the conditions for change – personal change, community and organizational change, planetary change. If we can sit together and talk about what’s important to us, we begin to come alive.”

Margaret Wheatley

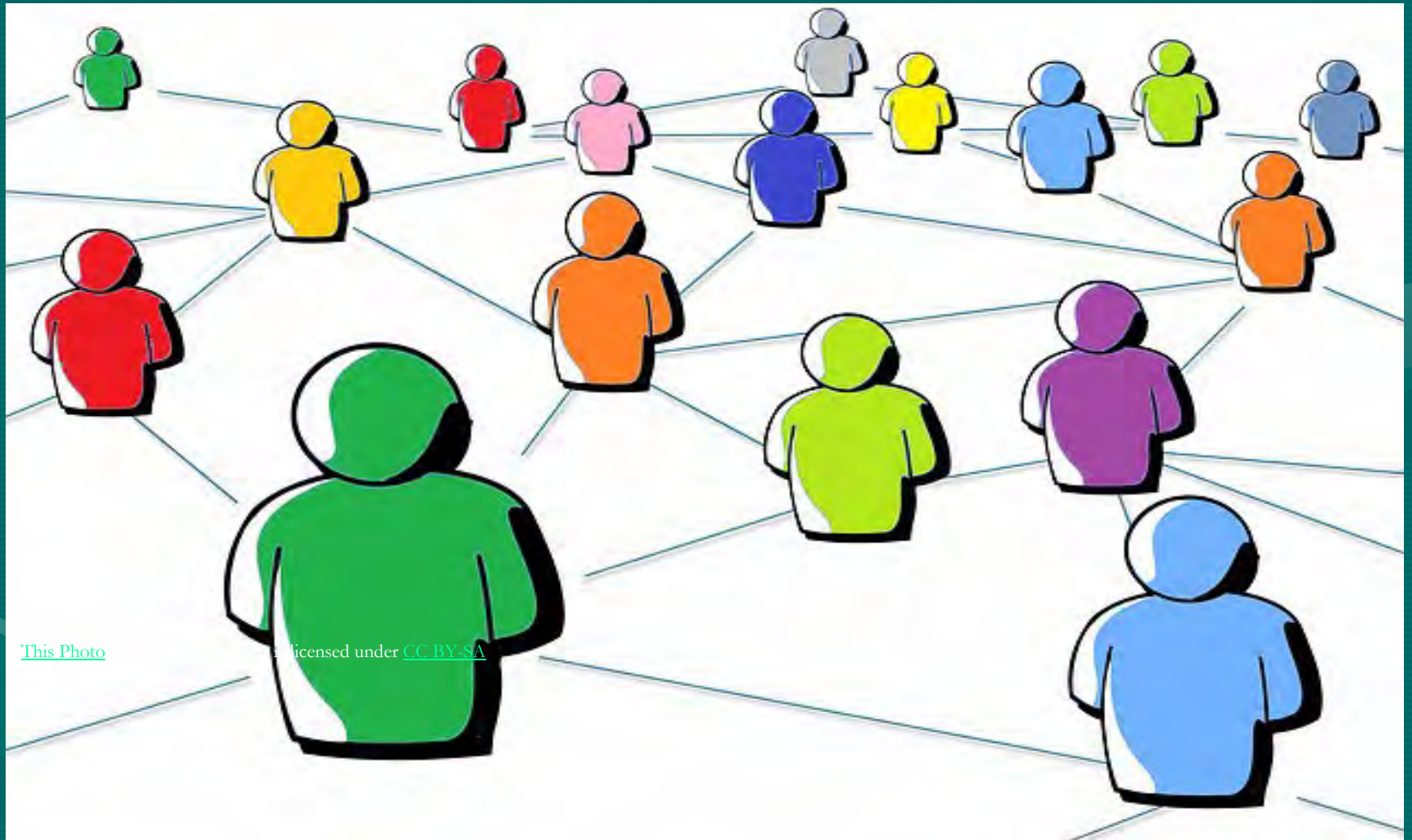
“It’s not differences that divide us. It’s our judgments about each other that do.”





# Social Capital: the antidote

- The value we get from our relationships
- Promotes ethical behavior in the Community
- Influences and builds all the major pro-social behaviors of tolerance, respect, kindness, honesty, cooperation
- Enhances healthfulness and happiness
- Keeps people safe, sane and secure
- Actually promotes longevity



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“If you belong to no community and decide to join one, you cut your risk of dying in half over the next year.”

Robert Putnam

# Building Community

- Look to (or help others) find their common connecting points
- Look for places (community mapping) where these common passions are celebrated
- Examine the “social infrastructure” to determine how this community behaves (Rituals, Patterns)
- Look for (or become) the Gatekeeper for new community members

# Gatekeepers

In community, the gatekeeper is key to informal change or behavior adjustments. Gatekeepers are influential members of a community that promote or deter certain behaviors and actions. When a gatekeeper endorses, or rejects a certain behavior or action most other people follow the trend. Think of your own behaviors and who was influential. This is strong “social influence theory” at work.

# Types of Gatekeepers

- Positive, proactive players who see opportunities or possibilities
- Negative, reactionary players who see obstacles or problems
- Right-brain thinkers who see macroscopic issues and bigger picture realities – Stories.
- Left-brain thinkers who focus on details and clear, objective issues – Statistics.



# COVID Pandemic

Loneliness and Isolation have been challenges for a long time, but since the COVID Pandemic (March 2020) these issues have been exacerbated.

A recent Kaiser Foundation study found that in mid-March 2020, 32% of those polled felt that their mental health has been affected by worry and stress. By mid-July 2020, that number had risen to 53%. This is an amazing increase in worry/stress!

# Connection during COVID

## Survey Results

ANCOR survey (April 2020) of over 80 agencies from all over the US and Canada found these ideas

- Zoom, Facetime, Skype, meetings/activities
- Apps like “House Party,” “Talk Line,” “Kast”
- Virtual tours, YouTube options
- Outdoor walks, sitting on porch, greeting others
- Community service, volunteering
- Online classes, Facebook challenges



# More Ideas

- Yard games,
- Drive-by parades
- Drive in Church services
- Cooperative games, “Words With Friends”
- Watching TV, talking about it on the phone
- Join a Meet-up group that uses Zoom
- Working on a joint project, or puzzle

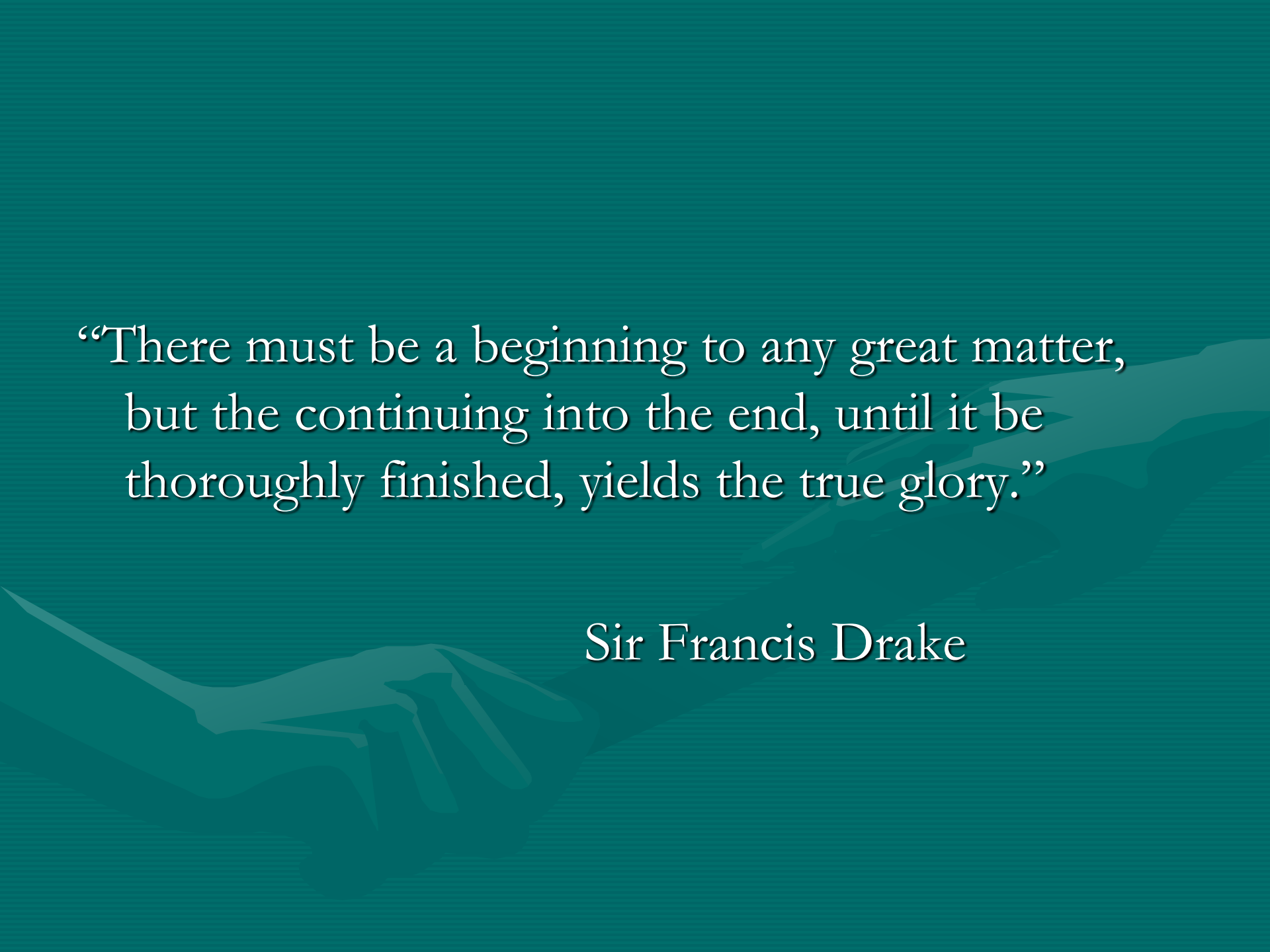
An updated version of "How To Build Community"  
to inspire connection throughout the pandemic.  
*Available as a poster, postcard & free digital download.*  
**PLEASE SHARE WIDELY.**

# HOW TO BUILD COMMUNITY

## DURING A PANDEMIC

### WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

TAKE A DEEP BREATH AND GIVE THANKS FOR THE NEW DAY  
REMEMBER WE ARE PART OF A LARGE, DIVERSE, GLOBAL COMMUNITY  
FIND SAFE WAYS TO CHECK ON NEIGHBORS - SING WITH THEM  
PRACTICE PHYSICAL DISTANCING  
WASH YOUR HANDS - LIMIT TOUCHING YOUR FACE  
GO OUTSIDE AND GET MOVING - USE GLOVES TO PICK UP TRASH  
WEAR A MASK TO PROTECT OTHERS - GREET FOLKS AS YOU PASS  
READ ALOUD TO EACH OTHER AND CHILDREN  
TAKE A BREAK FROM THE NEWS  
USE TECHNOLOGY TO NOURISH SOCIAL CONNECTIONS  
REACH OUT TO OLD FRIENDS - MAKE AMENDS  
ORGANIZE FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS, UNIONS AND GRASSROOTS POWER  
IMAGINE A SHARED FUTURE FOR PEOPLE, PLANTS AND ANIMALS  
REMEMBER TO GRIEVE - MAKE ROOM FOR A NEW NORMAL  
PROTECT/ASSIST VULNERABLE PEOPLE - OFFER HELP IF YOU CAN  
SHARE TOILET PAPER - ASK FOR SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT  
CHERISH AND MAINTAIN REDUCED POLLUTION  
SUPPORT LOCAL FARMS AND FOOD PANTRIES  
EAT HEALTHY FOOD - BUY FROM LOCAL BUSINESSES  
TAP INTO YOUR CREATIVITY - TRY SOMETHING NEW  
SEND LETTERS, POSTCARDS AND PACKAGES  
MAKE AND SHARE MUSIC - DANCE LIKE THE WORLD IS WATCHING  
THANK AND SUPPORT ESSENTIAL WORKERS - HEALTHCARE,  
SANITATION, POSTAL, FOOD AND MANY OTHERS  
KNOW THAT NO ONE IS SILENT,  
THOUGH MANY ARE NOT HEARD  
WORK TO CHANGE THIS

The background is a solid teal color. Faint, semi-transparent silhouettes of hands are visible, appearing to be in a gesture of offering or support. One hand is positioned lower on the left, and another is higher on the right, both reaching towards the center.

“There must be a beginning to any great matter,  
but the continuing into the end, until it be  
thoroughly finished, yields the true glory.”

Sir Francis Drake

# An Aztec Story

“A long time ago there was a great fire in the forests that covered our Earth. People and animals started to run, trying to escape from the fire. Our brother owl, Tecolotl, was running away also when he noticed a small bird hurrying back and forth between the nearest river and the fire. He headed towards this small bird.

“He noticed that it was our brother the Quetzal bird running to the river, picking up small drops of water in his beak, then returning to the fire to throw that tiny bit of water on the flame. Owl approached Quetzal bird and yelled at him:  
“What are you doing brother? Are you crazy? You are not going to achieve anything by doing this. You must run for your life!”

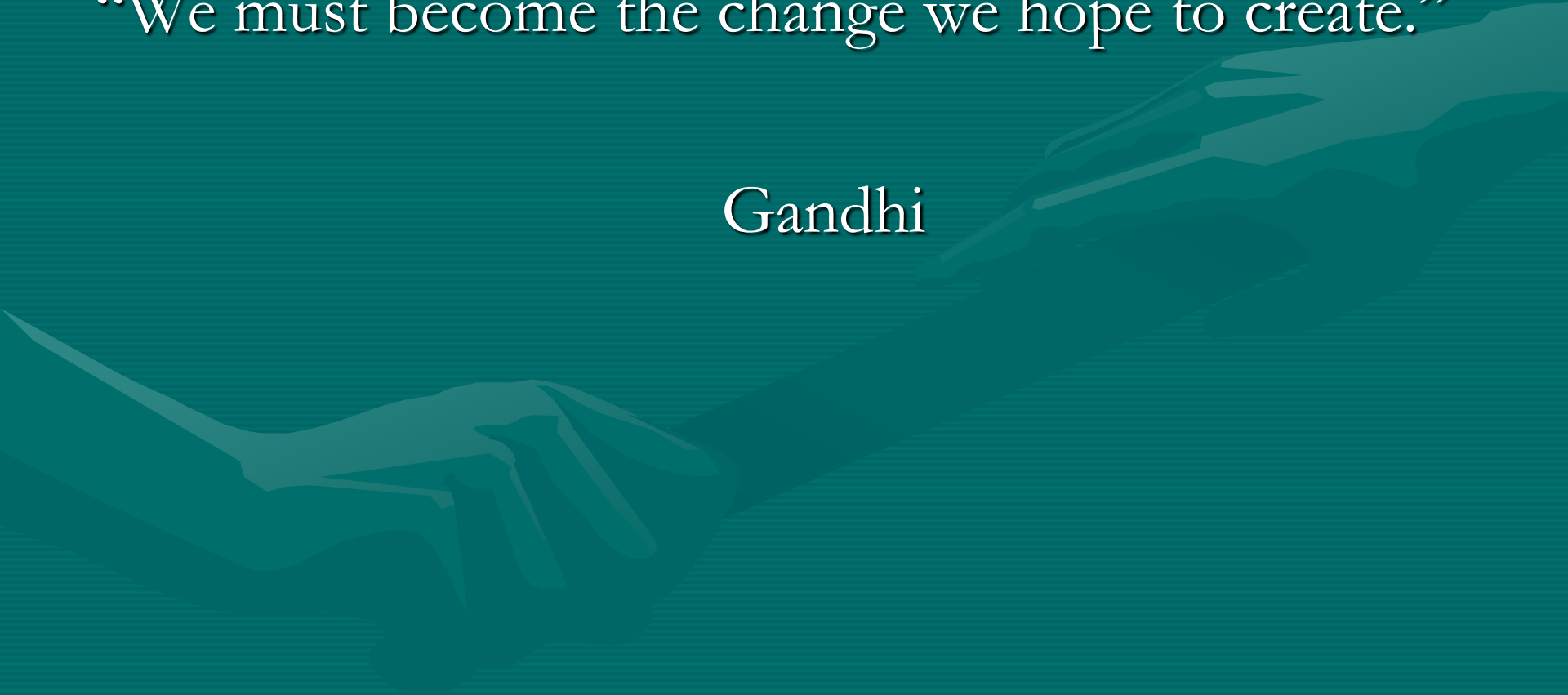


“Quetzal bird stopped for a moment and looked at the owl, and then answered: “I am doing the best I can with what I have to save a place I love.”

It is remembered by our Grandparents that a long time ago the forests that covered our Earth were saved from a great fire by a small Quetzal bird, and owl, and many other animals and people who got together to put out the flame.”

“We must become the change we hope to create.”

Gandhi



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