

Sheds Conference 2011

Professor John Macdonald
One of the Patrons of AMSA

Sheds, Health, walking alongside Indigenous Men

- I want to honour the Indigenous people of this land we are on, both past and present
- For me, in addition to the elders I want to honour those Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander men and women whose health has suffered on account of contact with white people
- I acknowledge also the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who are here. If you want to learn about and from Indigenous men, they are here – go talk and listen to them
- I hope in a modest way the Shed Movement can be a small part of acknowledging these injustices and be part of Australia's Reconciliation

HEALTH

- ❖ What is health?
- ❖ What is a healthy Shed?
- ❖ What can we learn from Aboriginal men?

Health – not being sick?

- A lot more than this!
- We are learning all the time

Health is about interaction
with what is around us

- Science shows our grandparents had it right: health is about the impact of all the things around us. Health is interaction
- What?
- Yes, think about it – it is interacting with things and people that give us life and health – or stop us being healthy

Health= interaction, think of a child

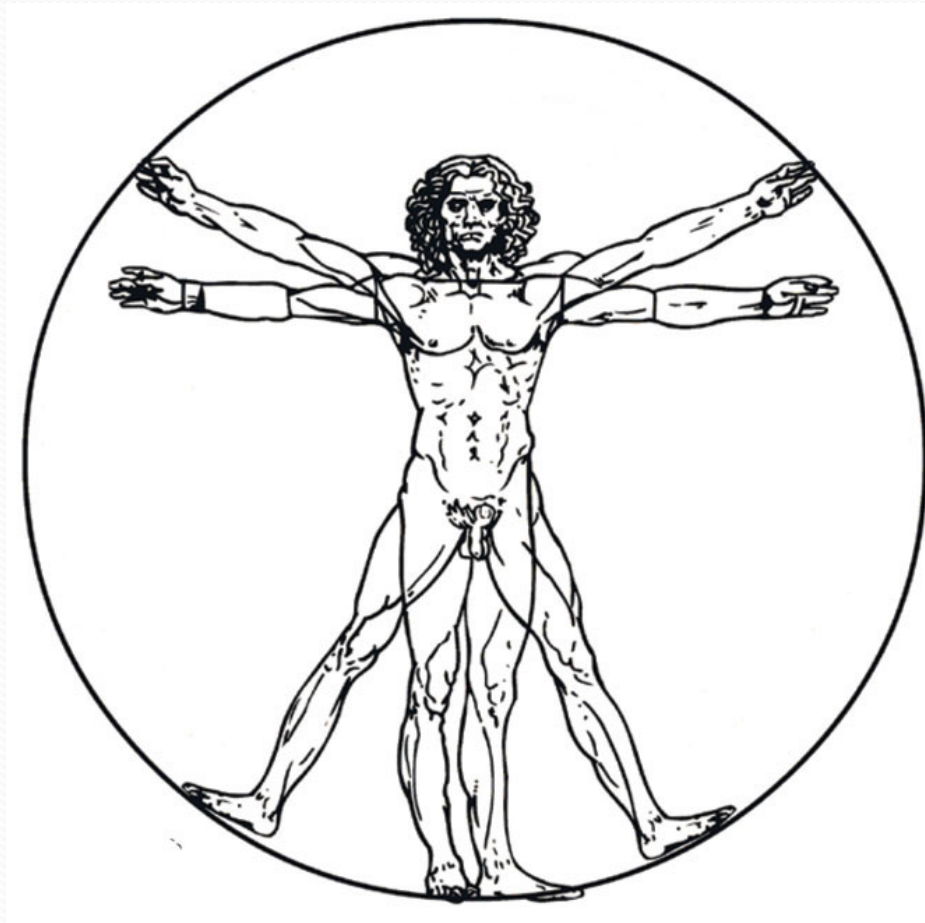
- What makes for the health of a child?
- Good parents, parents with enough money to feed, clothe, house, educate her/him
- Interaction with people who respect and love him or her
- A school where they are not bullied but the best of what they have is appreciated
- And ill health is often the lack of all these

Health = interaction, think of a pensioner

- What makes for his health is not feeling useless = being valued: family, friends, mates, grandchildren...?
- And, of course, access to food, clothes, housing...security..

- Young, old, and those of us in the middle (!), what makes for us being healthy is BEING VALUED

Interacting -



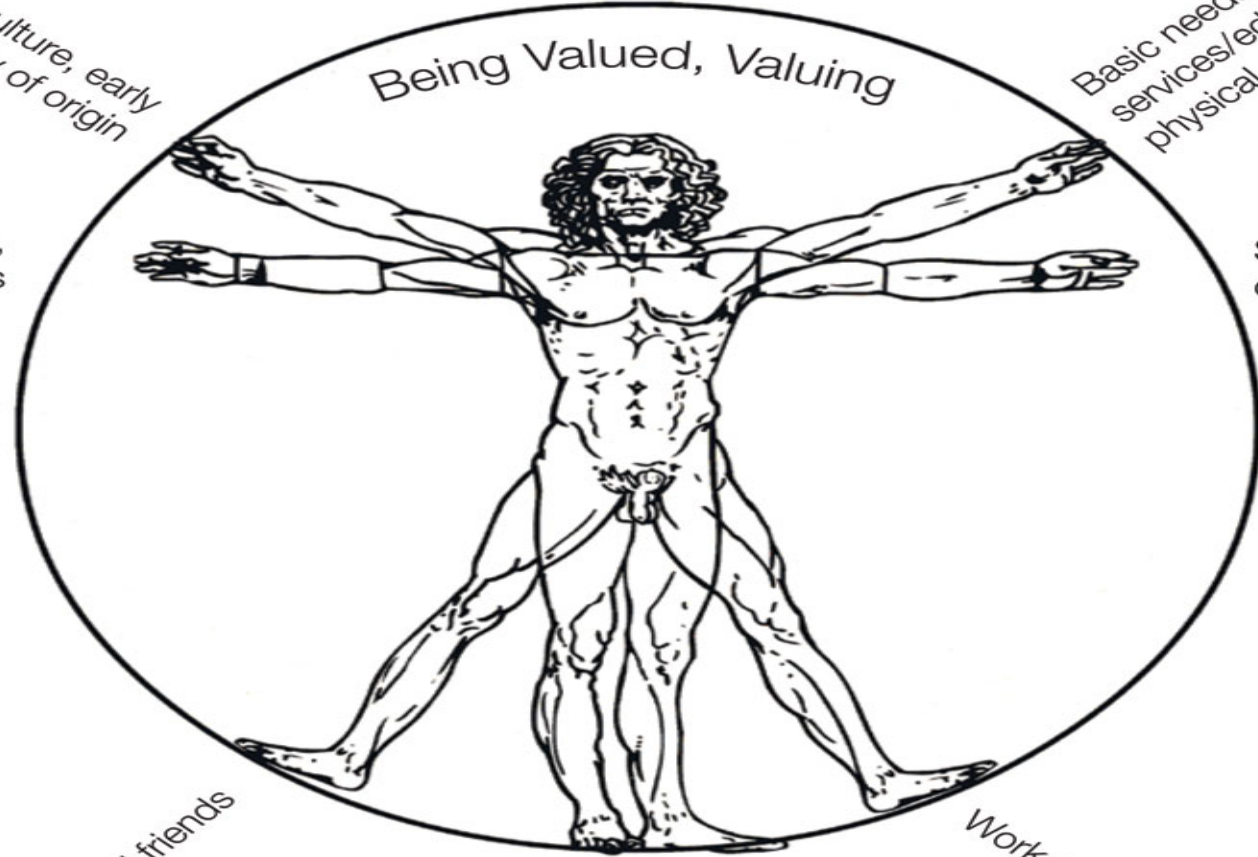
Collective history, culture, early
childhood, family of origin

Basic needs, Access to health
services/education, wholesome
physical environment

Being Valued, Valuing

Partner,
relationships

Social Gradient
compared to others



Children and friends

Work security and satisfaction

Religious, spiritual connections

Political stability

Interacting – our early years

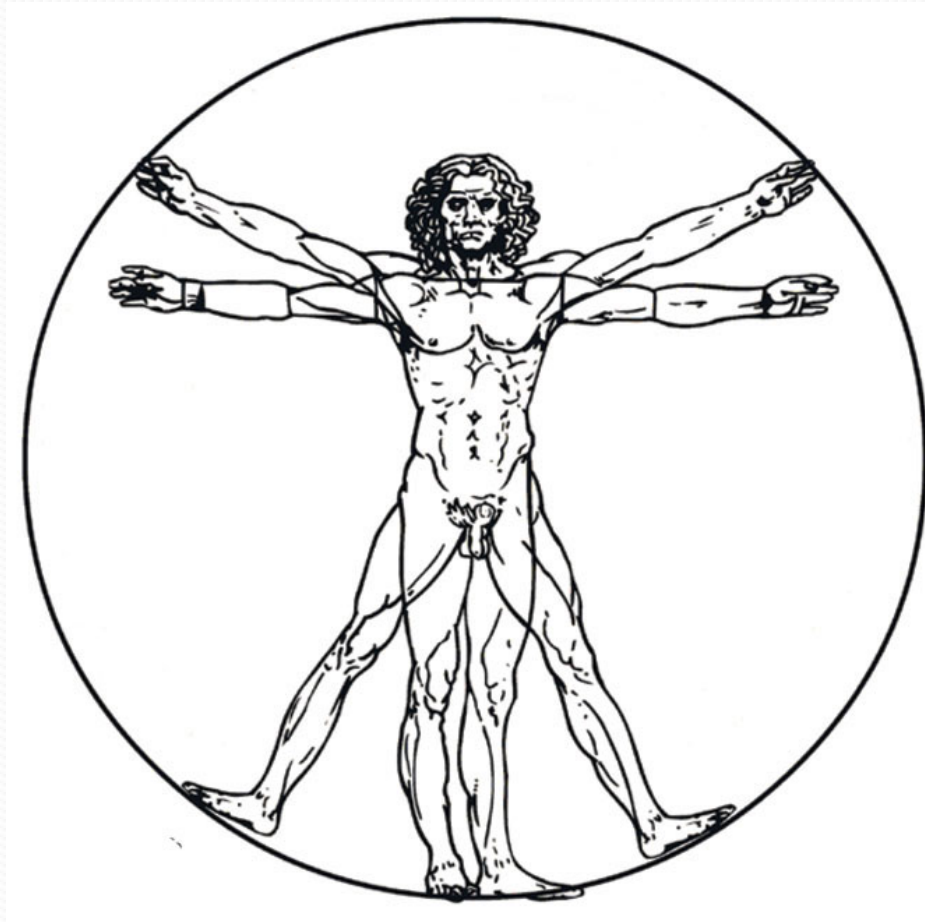


Wayne Quilliam/OxfamAUS

Loved or not loved

- The child who is loved for the first five years of his/her life stand a better chance of being healthy – of interacting well with their world, of bouncing back from hard times, than the child who is neglected
- And at the other end of the spectrum, the child who has interacted with a hostile, even abusive world from early on in life, risks to interact badly later on when life throws nasty things at you (Our study on suicide)

All the things we touch and which touch us
are our life lines, our health lines



The things which hold us to life are our health-lines, our life lines

- Our early years
 - Our families
 - Our work
 - Our faith
- Our access to basic needs – food, shelter, clothing ,
health and education
 - Take some of these away – risk ill health
- Take lots of them away and life can seem hopeless

Interaction with food:
Must be accessible and affordable



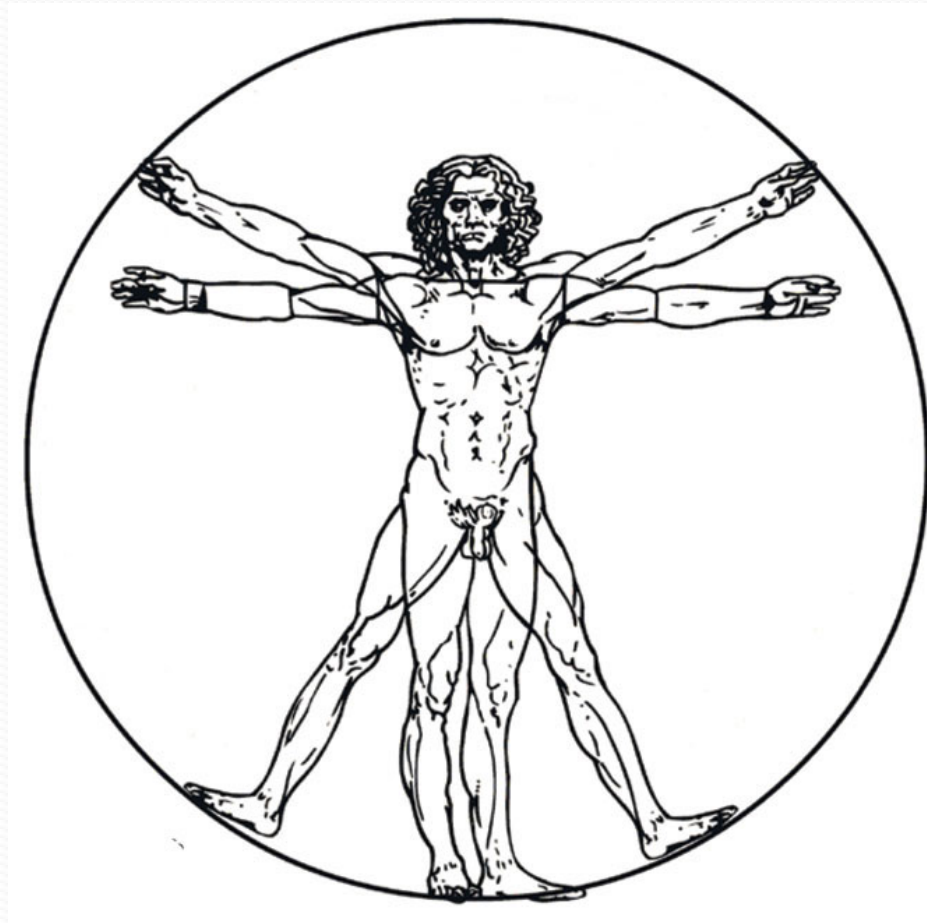
Not all men



More seriously,
some men know better than us that contact with food =
family health



Health and wellbeing involve interaction



Contact with other people: social support



Interaction is two-way: to be healthy you take and you give

- We know this from the Sheds –common sense: if you are there and closed to the others, you get less



A Healthy Shed is one with good interactions



Watch out!

- Health professionals know about illness, and not much about health



Watch out! – Depression is about!

- Health professionals talk a lot about depression
- And yes, it exists
- And yes, being part of a Shed can help us all not get depressed

- BUT – don't let this language and understanding take over the Shed
- The Sheds are Men's places – not first of all places for professionals to reach them (e.g. P&P in Mt Druitt Shed)

Sheds are NOT clinics!

- Clinics and hospitals are about disease and illness
- Good on them! We should use them when we are ill
- Sheds are about wellness, living, HEALTH
- I ask you all to not allow the Sheds to be taken over by health professionals who are unable to reach men.
- In the Mt Druitt Shed all professionals can come on Wednesdays and meet the men, but it is the men's space, not the professionals

Health = body + mind + social

- Don't be shy to say it – doctors good at the body stuff, that's their business
- Psychologist and psychiatrists good at the mind stuff
- But they forget that modern science tells us that health is BIO – PSYCHO – SOCIAL, body, mind and connections to the world, social
- Don't let yourselves be patronised: “That's a big word”, please take it on, if asked about Sheds and health say, yes, but Sheds are interested in total health:
- BIO PSYCHO SOCIAL HEALTH!

So – a Healthy Shed?

- Is one where men are interacting with each other
- (Doesn't necessarily mean deep and meaningful talking...shoulder to shoulder often good)
- But a Healthy Shed is also one which is open to interactions with the “outside” in some form or other, a “giving” place!

Now: Indigenous and White Men and Sheds



To promote Indigenous Sheds? Or to learn from Indigenous men's groups?

- The history of our interactions with Indigenous people is not a good one
- To say the least- not good for their health
- We should be careful: Sheds are a means to an end, not an end in themselves

Learning from Indigenous men

- Often we think “we can do something for them”
- Wrong way of thinking
- A Healthy Shed is saying:
- “What can we learn from Indigenous men”?

One example



Sheds, children and grandchildren

- One Aboriginal men's Group in the Illawarra region of NSW has the men and their sons and their grandchildren around them
- Not for everyone but great in that context
- And maybe something we can learn from?

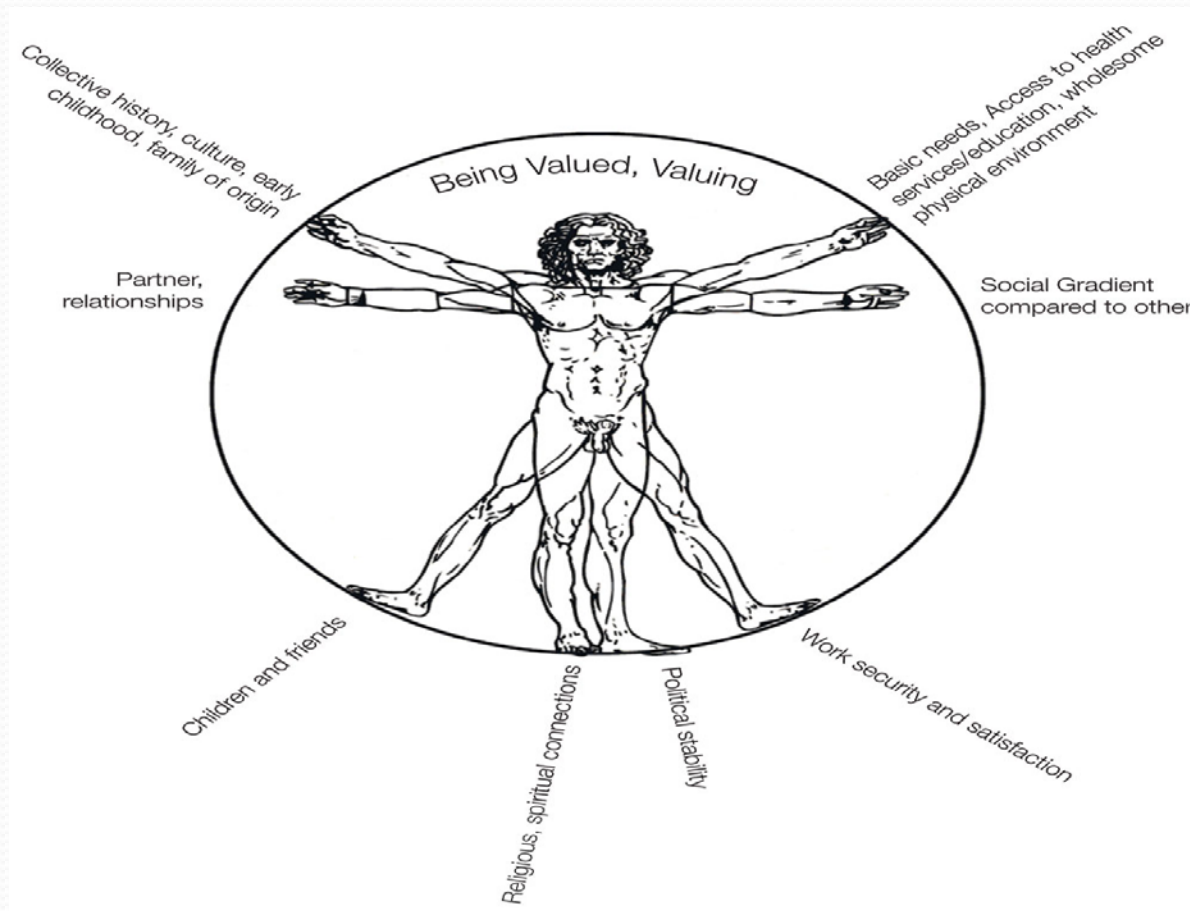
To be the same?

- Absolutely NOT
- Maybe not a good idea to have small children around if the Shed in question has potentially dangerous equipment around, but an openness to children and their carers on certain days might be just the thing, might link some capacity to need, or even just bring a different kind of human noise and smell..
- All human interaction (= health, remember?)

Finally...

- Sheds are seen to be the “easy part” of men’s health – we don’t make trouble, we are not expensive, we are seen to be good at keeping men out of clinical care....etc
- But health is interaction and sometimes in the future that may mean standing shoulder to shoulder with men, not just those who are “depressed” but with those who are struggling for a decent pension, decent housing,
- INTERACTING WITH THE BIG BAD WORLD

A reminder, when interaction weakens and gets taken away sometimes illness and sometimes worse



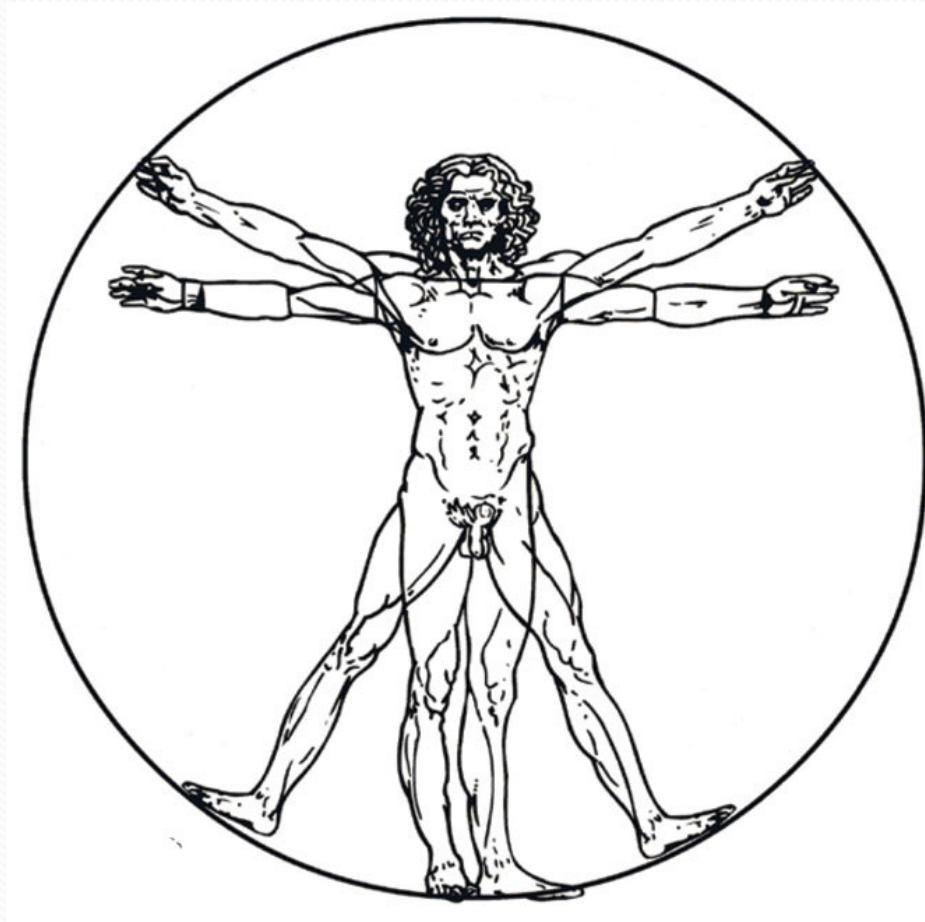
Resist!

- Resist the efforts (often well meaning) to turn Sheds into clinics, or into places for old depressed guys.
- That is not what we are about
- We are about health not illness treatment

My challenge

- The Sheds are getting lots of praise – GOOD
- But let's not rest on our laurels or sit on our...chairs?
- (Or not all the time!)
- If we know that some men (or women) we have contact with are doing it hard, a collective effort of support is sometimes better than an individual one: someone struggling with housing, with access to pension, social services... etc...REACH OUT
- Even risk not being the darling of the moment – if you see injustice.... Speak out - together

Reach Out! Enjoy!





Thank you