



Media Release

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ITRC Calls for Major West-Coast Initiative to Prepare People for the Adverse Psychological and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Impacts of Climate Change

Coalition Releases Report Calling for Transformational Resilience Education and Skills Training to Become Universal by 2025 to Prepare People for Climate Traumas and Toxic Stresses

Devastating wildfires displaced hundreds on the west coast this year. Faced with the reality of injury or death of loved ones, losing their homes and livelihoods, and seeing their finances depleted, many experience significant psychological traumas that can negatively affect them, their family, and community for years. In response to these and the many other growing disasters and toxic stresses generated by climate change, the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC)* today issued a major report calling for psychological and psycho-social-spiritual--or transformational--resilience education and skills training to become universal across the west coast by 2025.

The report *Preparing People on the West Coast for Climate Change* is the outcome of an exploratory research project completed by the ITRC that assessed the nature and potential to expand transformational resilience building initiatives in California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Alaska. Transformational resilience is a framework for building psychological and psycho-social-spiritual resilience, not a specific method. It involves helping people learn simple age, demographically, and culturally appropriate: a) Presencing--or self-regulation--skills that enable them to calm their mind, body, and emotions when distressed; and b) Purposing--or adversity-based growth--skills that enable them to use adversities as transformational catalysts to learn, grow, and find new positive sources of meaning, direction, and hope in life. The combo of these skills help people think and act in healthy ways even in unhealthy conditions. They can also motivate people to use climate and other adversities as stimulus to increase their own sense of wellbeing by assisting others or helping to heal the planet. The ITRC report found numerous well-established human resilience building programs already underway along the west coast, and more in development. To prepare people for the accelerating adversities generated by climate change, the report concludes with a set of recommendations to ensure that, by 2025, transformational resilience education and skills training initiatives become universal regionwide.

"Much like everyone in society learns to read and write, personal and social--or transformational--resilience education and skills training must quickly become universal," said Bob Doppelt, Coordinator of the ITRC. "Without this, the mental health, physical health, safety, and wellbeing of people throughout the west coast will be seriously impaired. Millions of people will also withdraw into a self-protective survival mode that makes reducing the climate crisis to manageable levels even more difficult. Preparing people for the psychological and psycho-social-spiritual traumas and toxic stresses generated by climate change is now just as urgent a priority as emission reductions and external physical adaptation."

Quotes from ITRC California Steering Committee Members

"People with disabilities are deeply affected by climate change, whether through direct health consequences or stressed support networks, said Alex Ghenis, Policy and Research Specialist, World Institute on Disability, and Co-Chair of the ITRC California Steering Committee. "True social, logistical, economic, emotional resilience is vital for this community to navigate our new climate reality."

"I work as a lawyer and community organizer in the San Francisco Bay Area. I believe that if we do not change the stories in our heads, nothing on the outside will change," said Ayako Nagano, attorney with the Midori Law Group and Co-Chair of the ITRC California Steering Committee. "When I took the ITRC training, I went from feeling hopeless to hopeful, so that I could get back to doing this important work. I feel as if I have the basic tools to care for myself and others during these trying times. Everyone should have this type of education."

"As we better understand climate risks, and develop adaptation strategies throughout the state, many often ask "What do we urge the community to do?" said Kelly Malinowski, Project Manager, SF Bay Program, California State Coastal Conservancy and an ITRC California Steering Committee member. "Helping communities build personal and psycho-social-spiritual resilience is not only timely, but direly needed to prepare people for the impacts of climate change."

"Many rural and low-income communities are deeply burdened with a lack of baseline human needs like food security, access to opportunities, and emotional support services, said Nikki Caravelli, Project Manager of the Sierra Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Partnership. "We need funding and policies for programs and organizations that instill a culture of resilience, wellbeing, and empowerment in our most vulnerable communities, and we need it now."

"Over the last decade, our organization has responded to the human suffering emanating from climate change," said Elaine Miller Karas, Executive Director of the Trauma Resource Institute and a core member of the ITRC National and California steering committees. "We have found hope can be restored when individuals within communities are reminded of our inherent human strengths. Building widespread capacity for an integrated skills-based approach to support human resilience, as the ITRC proposes, offers a much needed beacon of light."

"The world that our young people will inherit is very different from the world many of us grew up in. Yet, the most socially-just ecologically conscious education is not doing enough to prepare youth for the world they will inherit, said Lil Milagro Henriquez, Executive Director & Founder, Mycelium Youth Network (MYN) and an ITRC California Steering Committee Member. "MYN seeks to close the gap between the increasing incidents of climate disasters and the ability of young people to respond to those challenges with resilience, hope, and real world practical skills. We need more resilience building programs to prepare youth to survive and thrive in a climate challenged world."

Quotes from ITRC Pacific Northwest Steering Committee Members

"Climate change is having, and will continue to have, substantial health and mental health effects among all communities in our region, particularly among those already affected by marginalization," said Dr. Sara Walker, Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Oregon Health Sciences University, and Co-Chair of the ITRC Pacific Northwest Steering Committee. "As the frequency and intensity of climate-related traumatic stressors increases, so too does the urgent need to develop and share skills to withstand that stress. The concept of Transformational Resilience offers a hopeful possibility: that we

can not only help ourselves and each other withstand climate-related stress, but use it as a tool to promote our own well-being, the well-being of our communities, and climate action in general."

"Community resilience building should be on everyone's radar!" said Teri Barila, Executive Director of the Community Resilience Initiative in Walla Walla, Washington, and Co-Chair of the ITRC Pacific Northwest Steering Committee. "Transformational Resilience helps us understand the framework of trauma, to then understand how to build the skills both individually and across the community to buffer the negative effects of any toxic event facing a community. We must work together now to build an understanding of the power of coming together as community, to build capacity, to empower each of us, to step forward toward a more resilient future."

"From a shrinking icepack resulting in community erosion and land and infrastructure loss, to melting permafrost, and other effects of climate change, people of rural Alaska experience the effects of climate change every day," said Dr. Linda Kruger, Research Social Scientist, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Juneau, Alaska, and an ITRC PNW Steering Committee Member. "Traditional ways of life that have played out since time immemorial are being lost with great emotional and psychological loss. Recommendations in this report will help people mobilize and work together to build capacity to move forward with mitigation and adaptation efforts."

"Regardless of the cause of toxic stress--be it childhood trauma or a community impacted by natural disaster as a result of environmental factors--we understand that building resilience--skills for self-calming, connecting with social supports and setting goals toward a better future outcome --is central to human well-being, said Kristi Slette, Executive Director, Whatcom Family and Community Network, Bellingham, Washington and an ITRC PNW Steering Committee Member. "Understanding why resilience, toxic stress and hope matter is important to every person--youngsters to elders."

"Adults helping young people develop resilience skills helps the adults do so as well," said Bob Lieberman, President of the Lieberman Group in Grants Pass Oregon and an ITRC PNW steering committee member. "As we spread the awareness of the impact of overwhelming stress and trauma and the importance of resilience skills as curative, palliative and antidote, communities mobilize to develop their capacity for resilience. This has impact across all aspects of community life, including anticipating, responding to and preventing the incremental and traumatic stresses of climate change."

"The frequency and intensity of human caused climate change disasters will increase in the coming years--and they can serve as an opportunity for humans to grow," said Claire Ranit, Project Director, Resilience Network of the Gorge, Hood River, Oregon. "Building individual and community capacity for transformational resilience is one of the ways we can both begin to mitigate our impacts on the climate and prepare for the challenges of impending climate events."

** The International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC) is a network of over 350 mental health, trauma treatment, social service, climate and environmental, disaster management, social justice, education, and faith leaders working to build widespread levels of psychological and psycho-social-spiritual resilience for the adversities generated by climate change. A 22-person National Steering Committee oversees the ITRC's activities (their names and affiliations can be found on the ITRC website: <http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/intl-tr-coalition>). ITRC California and Pacific Northwest steering committee members supervised the development of this report (the list of members can be found on first page of the report).