Building a Culture of Transformational Resilience in Organizations and Communities for Climate Traumas and Toxic Stresses

(May 14, 2020)

Bob Doppelt
Coordinator, International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC)

Email: tr@trig-cli.org
Website: http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/intl-tr-coalition/
Far More Than the Pandemic
The Climate Emergency Will Disrupt Every Aspect of Society and Create Profound Mental Health and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Problems

Yet We Have Neglected The Human Dimensions of the Civilization-Changing Event!

The Adverse Psychological & Psycho-Social-Spiritual Reactions to Climate-Enhanced Traumas & Toxic Stresses
The Climate-Ecosystem-Biodiversity Emergency is Unlike Any Modern Society Has Faced!

Even With Aggressive Emissions Reductions & Ecological Restorations:

- It will **worsen for decades** and mix **acute disasters** with **cascading disruptions** to the **ecological, social, and economic systems** people rely on for **basic needs**.

- It will **aggravate racism & other systemic oppressions**, disrupt **social support networks**, and undermine the **social determinants of psychological wellness**.

- Left unaddressed, the resulting adverse **mental health** and **psycho-social-spiritual problems** will be **as bad** as the physical impacts **and** could **derail** emissions cuts.
One Consequence

More Frequent and Extreme Disasters

- Each year more than 47 million Americans experience extreme storms, heatwaves, coldwaves, droughts, floods, or other disasters.

- That number will at least double by 2050 if emissions keep rising.

(Scientific American)

Wind, Rain, and Snow Storms

Heat Waves

Sea Level Rise and Storm Surges

Wildfires

River Flooding

Drought

And many other surprise disasters...
Equally Important:
Everyone Will Face More Persistent and Intense—or Toxic—Stresses
From Directly Experiencing, Seeing, or Worrying About...

• Economic disruptions, job, and income losses
• Water, food, and other resource shortages
• New illnesses and diseases
• Loss of place, community, culture and natural environment
• Disruption of close family and friend social support networks
• Involuntary migration
• Disaster-triggered crime or violence
• Intensified racism, sexism, and other systemic oppressions
• Our future and our children’s future
• Many other surprising persistent toxic stresses
The Combo Is Already and Will Increasingly Generating Both...

**Individual Traumas**

**Collective Traumas**

Either can cause people to harm themselves, others, and the natural environment
The Individual and Social Consequences of Trauma and Toxic Stress

**Stress Reaction From Cortisol & Adrenaline**
- Physical Reaction:
  Blood pressure, pulse rate, difficult breathing, cold sweats, muscle tension, head and stomach aches, sleep disorders
- Mental Reaction:
  Mind racing, excessive worry, tension, fear, anxiety, shattered assumptions.

**Trauma and Toxic Stress**

**Harmful Coping Mechanisms**
- Hyperactivity and overworking
- Legal & illegal substance abuse
- Food, alcohol, tobacco abuse
- Avoidance or danger seeking
- Dissociation, denial, reenactment
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance wellbeing

**Personal Breakdown**
- Physical health problems
- Psycho-emotion problems
- Spiritual problems
- Cognitive problems
- Behavioral problems
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance wellbeing

**Trauma-Organized Communities and Societies**
- Despair, loneliness, meaninglessness
- High crime and violence
- Racism & other systemic oppressions
- Social and political extremism
- De-individualization
- Diminished physical health
- Ineffective or corrupt government
- Disregard for environmental impacts
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance wellbeing

**Trauma-Organized Groups and Organizations**
- Short-term, quick-fix thinking
- Pervasive distrust and conflict
- Groupthink & Groupshift
- De-individualization
- Denial, reenactment
- Oblivious to ecological impacts
- Less ability to cope, problem solve, and enhance wellbeing

If not discharged

If it persists

If it persists

If many people experience it

If many individuals and groups experience it

If many people experience it
Ignoring This is Truly Unfortunate Because the Climate Crisis Also Offers The Opportunity for Profound Transformation!

It is a primal truth that, as painful as it can be, adversity is often our greatest impetus for learning, growth, and transformation.

Lets Use the Climate Emergency as a Transformational Catalyst to Learn, Grow, and Increase Personal, Social, and Ecological Wellbeing!
Pre-Disaster

Warning (years/days/hours)

Impact

“Heroic Phase”
Occurs during and right after impact: often thought of as “resilience”

“Community Cohesion”
Honeymoon phase can last a few days to a few months: Transformation Resilience vital here

“Disillusionment”
Can last months to years and generate severe mental, social, and spiritual distresses: Trans. Resilience is vital here

“Recovery”
Coming to terms and working through grief can take years: Trans. Resilience vital here

“Bounce Back”
Only possible if sufficient time exists for recovery without new disasters or toxic stresses

Some People Remain Dysregulated

Another Disaster or Anniversary Reactions Can Cause Regression

‘Transformational Resilience’ in Phases Commonly Seen in Disasters

But others use the adversities as a transformational catalysts to find New Meaning, Purpose, and Hope

• **No country** has come close to alleviating mental health or psycho-social-spiritual problems using clinical treatment or direct service programs alone...

• Because they:
  
  o Reach only a **small number** of people
  o Do not **build group** or community strengths
  o Do not change **unsafe, unhealthy**, and **unjust cultural norms**
  o Do not change the **social narratives** that create and reinforce those norms

• Rather than helping people **after** they experience mental health or psycho-social-spiritual problems, we must prioritize **PREVENTING** them by making Transformational Resilience **UNIVERSAL**!
Mental Wellness & Resilience are Not Just an Individual’s Responsibility: They Result from the Interplay of Personal and Social Factors

- Biological factors such as genetic traits can play a role.

- However, equally or more important are:
  - An individual's family history (and prevalence of ACEs)
  - The quality of their social support systems
  - The cultural norms that define acceptable and expected behaviors
  - The social narratives (messages) they hear that reinforce those norms
  - The social and economic systems that exist where they live
  - The magnitude and type of socio-economic pressures they experience

- At the same time the way people perceive and respond to adversities shapes the norms and practices of their neighborhoods and communities.
Addressing the Personal *and* Social Factors Requires Organizations & Communities To

Build a Culture of Transformational Resilience!
Building a Culture of Transformational Resilience is Everyone’s Job!

» Civic leaders
» Neighborhood leaders
» Faith-based organizations
» Mental health and other direct service providers
» K-12 and other levels of education
» Health care organizations
» Senior programs
» Social justice and equity groups
» Climate and environmental groups
» Community planning organizations
» Disaster planning and management
» Police and security officers
» Justice system
» All types of public agencies
» Private sector
» Elected officials
» Many other community and neighborhood leaders
The Three Pillars of Organizations and Communities with a Culture of Transformational Resilience

- Trauma-Informed and Resilience-Skilled Members
- Healthy Social Environment
- Enabling Culture
Pillar I

Trauma-Informed and Resilience-Skilled Members

• Build awareness of how the trauma and toxic stress can affect their thinking, emotions & behaviors (i.e. help everyone become “trauma-informed”).

• Give every adult and youth the opportunity to learn and continually improve “Presencing” & “Purposing” information, skills, and tools.

• Help all private, non-profit, civic, and public leaders understand how their organizations and communities can become “trauma-organized” and learn how to transition them to safe, healthy, and just resilience-enhancing social systems.
The 3 Pillars of Orgs & Communities with a Culture of Transformational Resilience

Trauma-Informed and Resilience Skilled Members

• Widespread knowledge of how the psychobiology of trauma & toxic stress affect individuals & groups

• Every adult and youth has opportunity to learn & continually improve Presencing & Purposing skills.

• All org. & community leaders know how to become safe, healthy and just resilience-enhancing entities

Healthy Social Environment
Pillar II

Healthy Social Environment

• Robust working coalitions and ongoing communications among uncommon set of grass roots, civic, non-profit, private, and public organizations and leaders.

• Ongoing opportunities for residents to meet neighbors, work together, and build, maintain, and link social support networks.

• Regular opportunities for all residents to engage in activities that benefit the common good through neighborhood and community projects.

• Restorative Justice used as much or more than criminal justice.

• Healing Circles and other venues are available for people to share their distress and/or grieve after loss.
The Three Pillars of Orgs. and Communities with a Culture of Transformational Resilience

Trauma-Informed and Resilience-Skilled Members

- Widespread knowledge of how trauma and toxic stress can affect individuals and groups thinking, emotions, and behaviors.
- Every adult and youth has opportunity to learn & continually improve Presencing & Purposing information, skills, and tools.
- All organization and community leaders know how to shift their groups to safe, healthy, and just resilience-enhancing entities.

Healthy Social Environment

- Robust working coalitions and ongoing communications among uncommon set of grass-roots, civic, non-profit, public, and private leaders in the community.
- Ongoing opportunities for residents to meet neighbors, work together, and build, maintain, and connect social support networks.
- Regular opportunities for all people to engage in activities that benefit the common good through neighborhood and community projects.
- Restorative Justice used as much or more than criminal justice.
- Healing Circles and other venues are available for people to share their distress and/or grieve after loss.
Pillar III

Enabling Culture

• Community leaders jointly promote and role model social narratives emphasizing safe, healthy, just, and ecologically sustainable responses to adversity.

• Willingness among local leaders to examine and alter long-standing assumptions and beliefs about equity, development, the environment, and other issues.

• Leaders prioritize awareness and the elimination of ecological and climate impacts and restoration of ecological systems and species.

• Place-based approaches used to identify and address the root causes of problems rather than reacting to symptoms with marginal or quick fixes.

• Continued willingness to use adversities as catalysts to learn, grow, and find new sources of meaning and direction rather than doubling down on old approaches.
The 3 Pillars of Orgs and Communities with a Culture of Transformational Resilience

**Trauma-Informed and Resilience-Skilled Members**
- Widespread knowledge of how trauma and toxic stress can affect individuals and groups.
- Every adult and youth has opportunity to learn and continually improve Presencing & Purposing skills.
- All organizational and community leaders know how to shift their groups to safe, healthy, and just resilience-enhancing entities.

**Healthy Social Environment**
- Robust working coalitions and ongoing communications among uncommon set of grass-roots, civic, non-profit, public, and private leaders in the community.
- Ongoing opportunities for residents to meet neighbors, work together, and build, maintain, and connect social support networks.
- Regular opportunities for all people to engage in activities that benefit the common good through neighborhood and community projects.
- Restorative Justice used as much or more than criminal justice.
- Healing Circles and other venues are available for people to share their distress and/or grieve after loss.

**Enabling Culture**
- Community leaders jointly promote and role model social narratives emphasizing safe, healthy, equitable, just, and ecologically sustainable responses to adversity.
- Willingness among local leaders to examine and alter long standing assumptions and beliefs about many issues.
- Community prioritizes awareness of and the elimination of ecological and climate impacts.
- Locally-designed approaches used to identify and address the root causes of problems.
- Continued willingness to use adversities as catalysts to learn, grow, and find new sources of meaning and direction rather than doubling down on old approaches.

**Question?**
Which pillars and elements are strongest and weakest in your organization or community?
Implementation

The ‘Wheel of Change’ for Building a Local Culture of Transformational Resilience for the Climate Emergency
Organize A Diverse Group of Uncommon Partners

- Organize a local ‘**Resilience Coordinating Council**’ (RCC) composed of a diverse set of **uncommon partners** to **co-design** innovative **age** and **culturally appropriate** actions to build population-level Transformational Resilience.

- **Most effective approach** will often be for an **existing ACEs, trauma-informed care, social resilience**, or other network of **civic and non-profit** organizations to take the lead _IF_ it is willing to **expand its focus and participants**.

- To avoid reverting to conventional treatment approaches, mental health and direct service program professionals should serve as **equal participants, advisors, or coaches**, **not** the primary lead.
The RCC should assess the community's capacity for mental wellness and resilience in the face of the climate emergency by:

- Assessing the likely **near and long-term, direct and indirect, acute and chronic** traumatic stressors the climate emergency will produce for the local population

- Identifying **group and community strengths** that help foster and sustain mental wellness and resilience

- Identifying factors that **diminish** the influence of those resources.

**Tools**: Asset-based Community Development, Community Health Assessments, SWOT Analysis, the WHO's National Community Survey, Assessing Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs and Resources: Toolkit for Humanitarian Settings, & others.
Create Vision, Goals, and Strategy for Building Population-Level Capacity For Transformational Resilience

- The assessment should be used to form an **ideal vision**, coordinated **strategy**, and detailed **workplan** to build and sustain **population-level** Transformational Resilience **before, during, and after** climate disasters.

- Can use ‘**ends-planning**’ to achieve this.
Educate *All* Adults and Youth in Transformational Resilience Information and Skills

Make Transformational Resilience information, skills, and tools available to *ALL* adults and youths in the community/region by:

- Supporting and expanding existing *Adult* resilience education programs
- Supporting and expanding existing *Youth* resilience education programs
- Public education campaigns
- Educational forums
- Community cafes
- Conferences
- Workshops
- Other
Strengthen, Maintain, and Connect Social Support Networks

To provide broad-based emotional support, practical assistance, information and access to key resource:

- Establishing & strengthen family and friend “Bonding” social support networks

- Connecting them across geographic, cultural, and socio-economic lines to create “Bridging” social support networks.

- Bonding and Bridging networks should be connected with organizations that provide essential resources & services to create “Linking” social support networks.

Sample Tools

- Neighborhood groups can organize regular gatherings that allow local residents to meet.

- Community organizations, faith-based groups, work places, and other venues can hold events that bring diverse groups of people together from different parts of the community.
Empower Residents to Take Responsibility for Transformational Resilience

By helping residents learn how to:

• Identify and counter **unhealthy cultural norms**

• **Share** Transformational Resilience information **with others**

• **Identify** and **assist** struggling individuals

• Host local ‘**Resilience Hubs**’ or ‘**Pods**’ to link neighbors with each other and to essential information and resources

• Craft **local solutions** to emerging problems.
Continually Evaluate, Learn, and Improve

- Regularly **measure** and **evaluate** progress

- Use the data to continually **learn** what works and **improve** the strategy

- While **advocating** for **funding** and **other resources** needed to enhance and sustain the initiative.
Embed Principles and Practices in Local Organizational and Government Policies

- Embed the principles and methods in the goals and protocols of local organizations by having them **sign MOUs**

- Codifying them in county, city, state (and federal) **public policies**: e.g. enact **Health and Resilience in All Policies (HRIAP)** (modified by HiAP adopted by many public agencies).
How can you get the “Wheel of Change” rolling in your organization or community?

The ‘Wheel of Change’ for Building a Local Culture of Transformational Resilience for the Climate Emergency

- Embed TR in local organizational and public policies
- Organize diverse group of uncommon partners
- Assess climate traumas & stresses, local strengths, and obstacles
- Create vision, goals and strategy for population-level Transformational Resilience
- Continually evaluate, learn, and improve
- Empower residents to take responsibility for Transformational Resilience
- Strengthen and connect social support networks
- Educate all adults and youth in mental wellness & Transformational Resilience skills
Examples: Each Emphasizes Different Elements

Fargo North Dakota

Tarpon Springs, Florida

Baton Rouge Louisiana

San Francisco Neighborhood Empowerment Network

Mycelium Youth Network

Oakland, California

Minnesota Thrives

Mental Well-Being and Resilience Learning Community

For more examples see ITRC Inventory of West Coast Resilience Programs:
http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/
Building Universal Capacity for TR Will Help With

**Human-Caused Disasters** like:

- Community or school violence
- Drug and alcohol abuse
- Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)
- Racism and other systemic oppressions
- Much more

**Non-Climate Natural Disasters** like:

- Earthquakes
- Tsunamis

Will also greatly *reduce demands* on and the *public costs* of clinical treatment and direct service programs
Again--Imagine the Benefits of a Global Preventative Transformational Resilience Movement That Helps:

- **Everyone** become *trauma-informed* and *build strengths* so they can *think & act in healthy ways* even in unhealthy conditions.

- **All leaders** learn to *promote social narratives*, *shift cultural norms* and *practices* & make their groups *safe, healthy, just, and equitable* resilience-enhancing entities.

- **Everyone** learn how to use adversities as *transformational catalysts* to find new meaning, *direction* and *hope* in ways that motivate them to increase *social and ecological wellbeing* as a way of increasing their *own sense of wellbeing*. 
Let’s Launch a Global Movement to

Build a Culture of Transformational Resilience in All Organizations and Communities!
About the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC)

A global network of mental health, social service, education, climate, faith and other leaders working to raise awareness of the urgent need, methods, and benefits of proactively building universal capacity for Transformational Resilience for climate impacts.

• Led by national steering committee and regional steering committees in the PNW and CA.
• Webpage on ACEs Connection Network site and private Basecamp site for ITRC members
• Major conferences held in different parts of the U.S. (2016, 2017, 2018)
• Private and public workshops held in the EU and throughout the U.S.
• Free sequence of webinars each spring and fall.
• In 2018 inventoried and assessed resilience building programs across the west coast.
• In 2019 had SB 1037 introduced in Oregon leg. to make resilience education universal
• In 2019 issued Call to Action on the Climate Mental Health and Psycho-Social-Spiritual Emergency – we ask all individuals and organizations to please endorse it!

This information and more found at: http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/
About the Presenter

Bob Doppelt founded and coordinates the International Transformational Resilience Coalition (ITRC). He is the director of The Resource Innovation Group. For almost a decade he directed the Climate Leadership Initiative (CLI) and taught systems thinking and global warming policy at the University of Oregon. Prior to that he ran a research institute and taught at Portland State University. His academic training is in both counseling psychology and environmental science. He is also a mindfulness teacher (Spirit Rock Meditation Center), and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Instructor (U. Mass. Medical School Center for Mindfulness). In 2015 he was named one of the world’s “50 Most Talented Social Innovators” by the World CRS Congress.

Bob is the author of a number of best-selling books on the process of systems-based individual, organizational, and community change.

His book *Transformational Resilience* (Greenleaf Publishing 2016) describes the need as well as “Presencing” and “Purposing” principles and skills for building personal and psycho-social-spiritual resilience for the impacts of climate change. His other books include *Leading Change Toward Sustainability* (2003), *The Power of Sustainable Thinking* (2008), *From Me to We* (2012), and *Entering the Watershed* (1993).
Some of the Research that Guides The Approaches Offered in This and Other ITRC Webinars


- **Building Community Resilience through Mental Health Infrastructure and Training in Post-Katrina New Orleans**: Springgate B.F., et.al. (2013) PMC Publications.


- **Building Resilient Communities: Making Every Contact Count for Public Mental Health**, (2013) Mind for Better Mental Health and Mental Health Foundation, UK.


- **Healthy, Resilient, and Sustainable Communities After Disasters: Strategies, Opportunities, and Planning for Recovery**, (2015) Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences


More research is available in the ITRC Library: [http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/intl-tr-coalition/](http://www.theresourceinnovationgroup.org/intl-tr-coalition/)