

ARE YOU LETTING EXPERTS RULE YOUR LIFE?

Have you heard this definition of an “expert” before? - an ‘ex” is a “has been” and a “spert” is “a drip under pressure”. Experts were allowed to take charge of our communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, but let fear, fatigue and frustration take hold.

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the shaky foundations on which much of what we take for granted was built - on intricately interwoven nature of globalised supply chains, manufacturing infrastructures, and the ‘just in time’ deliveries to supermarkets.

Erich Fromm, known for developing the concept that freedom was a fundamental part of human nature , believed “ We have, in the same way, relegated our own responsibility in what happens to our country to the specialists - who are supposed to take care of it, and the individual citizen does not feel that he can judge, and even that he should judge, and take any responsibility.”_

Throughout the pandemic elected politicians and governments increasingly deferred to their ‘experts’, believing that following ‘expert’ advice provided protection against controversial calls.

In a way, Royal Commissions became the ultimate experts – especially those with a focus on the quality of Health Programs, Early Childhood and Aged and Community Care – advised on and determined the services they thought we required, and often left untapped abilities of individuals, families and communities.

It was extremely unfortunate that these “specialist advisors” often overlooked or deliberately refused to mention the importance of grandparents in the fight against COVID although they often provided the support that was so sorely needed.

The Australian Bureau of Statistic noted that “grandparents have become the social glue in modern family life” that “approximately one-fifth of Australian children aged 12 and under receive grandparent care”, and that “grandparents are contributing in excess of \$3.94 billion to the Australian economy in unpaid childcare.”

The important and necessary contributions of grandparents to their families and other community members was certainly ignored by these extremely well-paid, and often anonymous “expert, specialist advisors.”

Konrad Lorenz, an Austrian Nobel Prize winner, zoologist, ethologist, and ornithologist, considered that “Every man gets a narrower and narrower field of knowledge in which he must be an expert in order to compete with other people. The specialist knows more and more about less and less and finally knows everything about nothing.”

To survive the Covid 19 pandemic we have certainly had to make changes - both big and small - in our everyday lives. A major change that individuals, families and communities have not yet made is to take more control life in our homes and communities, and encourage and empower others to do the same.

John Dewey, an educational reformer who designed the classification system used in libraries throughout the world, observed many years ago that " No government by experts in which the masses do not have the chance to inform the experts as to their needs can be anything but an oligarchy managed in the interest of the few. And the enlightenment must proceed in ways which force the specialists to take account of the needs. The world has suffered more from leaders and authorities than from the masses. The essential need ... is the improvement of the methods and conditions of debate, discussion and persuasion - that is the problem of the public."

There is little possibility of us returning to a pre-COVID world, but rather than lament this loss please consider that we now have some genuine personal and social opportunities. Do we wish for a society that is fair, truthful and merciful; prosperous and generous; democratic and transparent?

Do we want to live in. communities that are anxious and argumentative; uncivil and individualistic; competitive and selfish? What is the world we want to build? Will every life matter? What are our new priorities?

Wendell Berry, a novelist, essayist, environmental activist, cultural critic, and farmer wrote "We are going to have to gather up the fragments of knowledge and responsibilities that have been turned over to governments, organisations and specialists and put those fragments back together in our own minds, and in our families and households and neighbourhoods."

Families, who have had to work, live and learn at the kitchen table for months, have had to rediscover the best and the worst of themselves. The family - in all its nuances and challenges, griefs and joys – remains the fundamental pillar and source of order in human society. We neglect the family at our peril.

Rachel Carson, an ecologist who questioned the scope and direction of modern science, promoted the idea that "This is an era of specialists, each of whom sees his own problem and is unaware of, or intolerant of, the larger frame into which it fits?

Our new challenge is not how to keep families at home, but how to encourage them to interact fruitfully in our new communities. We need to restore social contact and connection at the very basic of levels, especially for the elderly and vulnerable. We do not need the services of "experts".