

# Loneliness, Social Isolation & Community Change

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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

# We Know

With satisfying relationships people are

- Healthier
- Happier
- Have better cognitive functioning
- Less depression
- And live longer

# Yet; not all people experience these things

- People with Disabilities
- People experiencing Mental Health
- Elders, especially with chronic issues
- Minorities
- Other Vulnerabilities



# We Also Know

- Those who are 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.

# 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.

# 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



# Cigna Study - 2018

- 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 w/Disabilities

- 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 “Change Theory”

# Change Theory

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

# Micro Change

Micro change is when we look to clinically, or therapeutically change 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 re-enter the Community.

# Micro Interventions

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Social Fitness Exercises
- Cultural Profile
- Mindfulness
- Engaging a “Care Force”

# Macro Change

Macro change is about the environment around the individual. 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 Lifeworld.



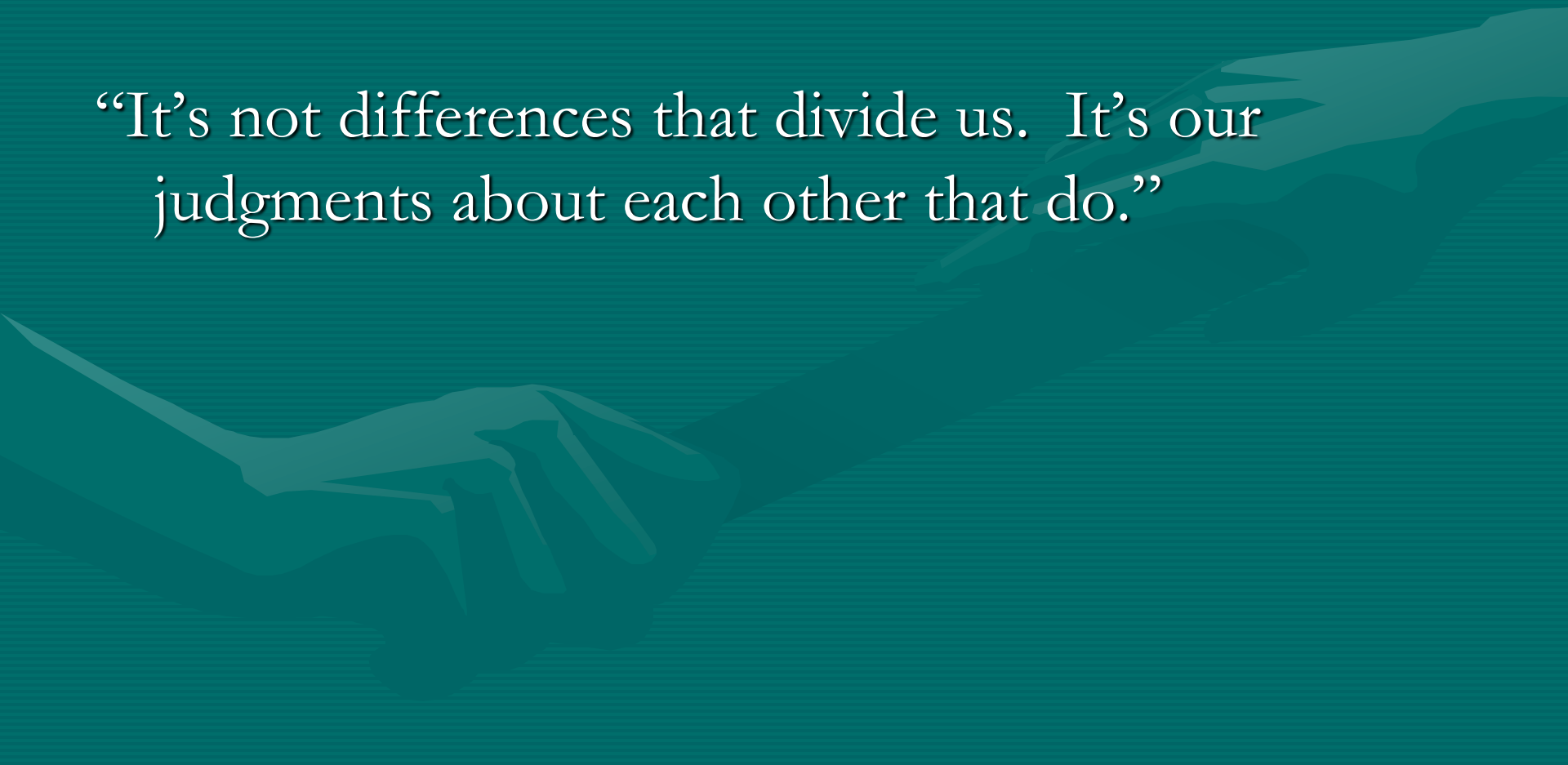
# Macro Interventions

- Community Mapping
- Gatekeeper Strategies
- Softening Cultural Infrastructure
- Coffee Klatch
- Community Benches
- Lessening Polarization

“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

- 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

“One of the biggest flaws in our approach to life is the Western belief that competition creates strong and healthy systems. But competition among individuals is not the dominant way life works. It is always cooperation that increases over time in a living system. Life becomes stronger through systems of collaboration and partnering, not through competition.”

Margaret Wheatley

“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 passions
- Look for places (communities, lifeworlds) where these common passions are celebrated
- Find out what is important in how this community behaves (Rituals, Patterns)
- Look for (or become) the Gatekeeper to other community members

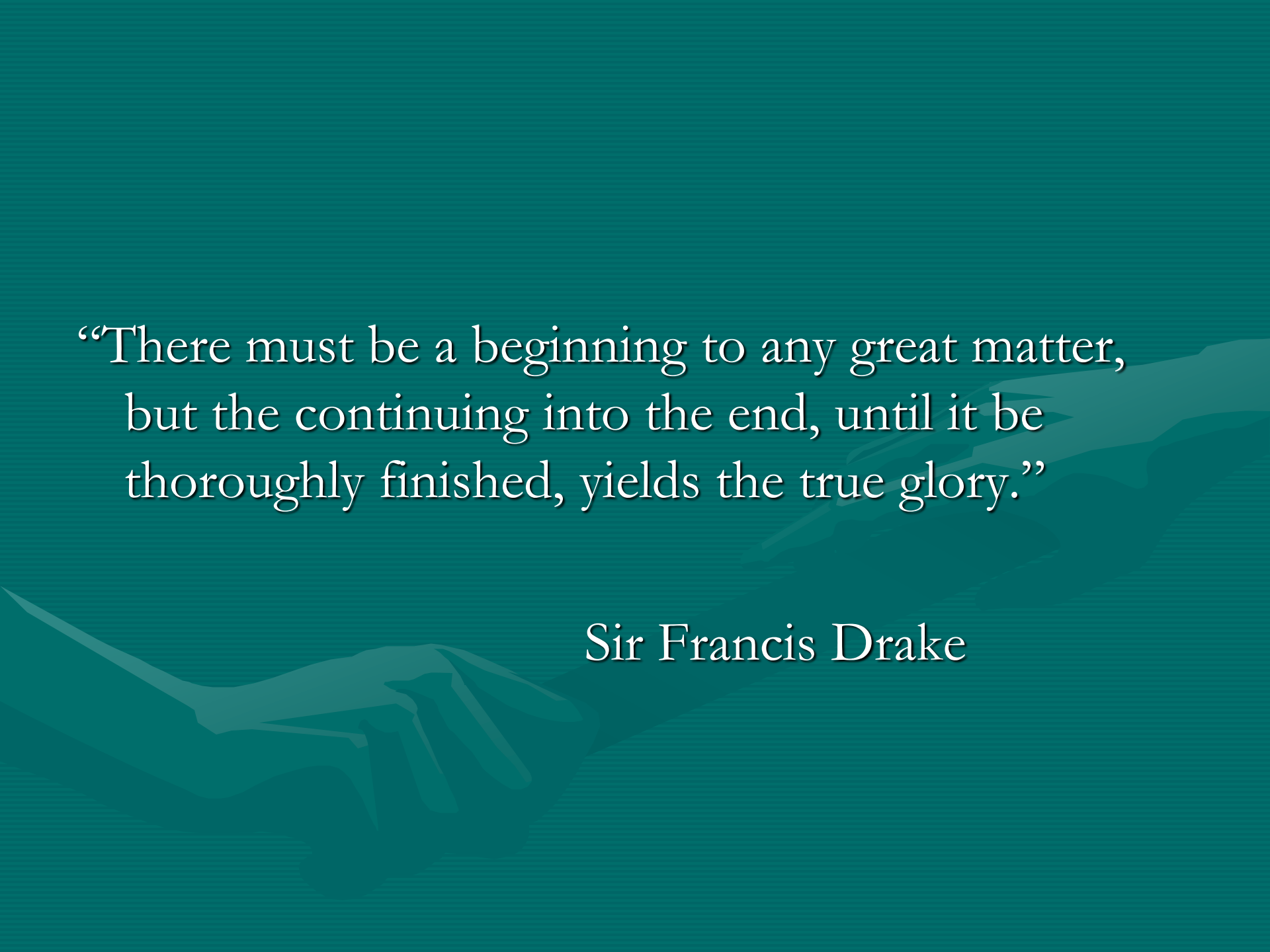
# Gatekeepers

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.

The background is a solid teal color. Faint, stylized silhouettes of hands are visible, appearing to reach towards each other. One hand is positioned in the upper right, and another is in the lower left, with their fingers slightly curled as if grasping or supporting something. The silhouettes are a lighter shade of teal than the background.

“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.

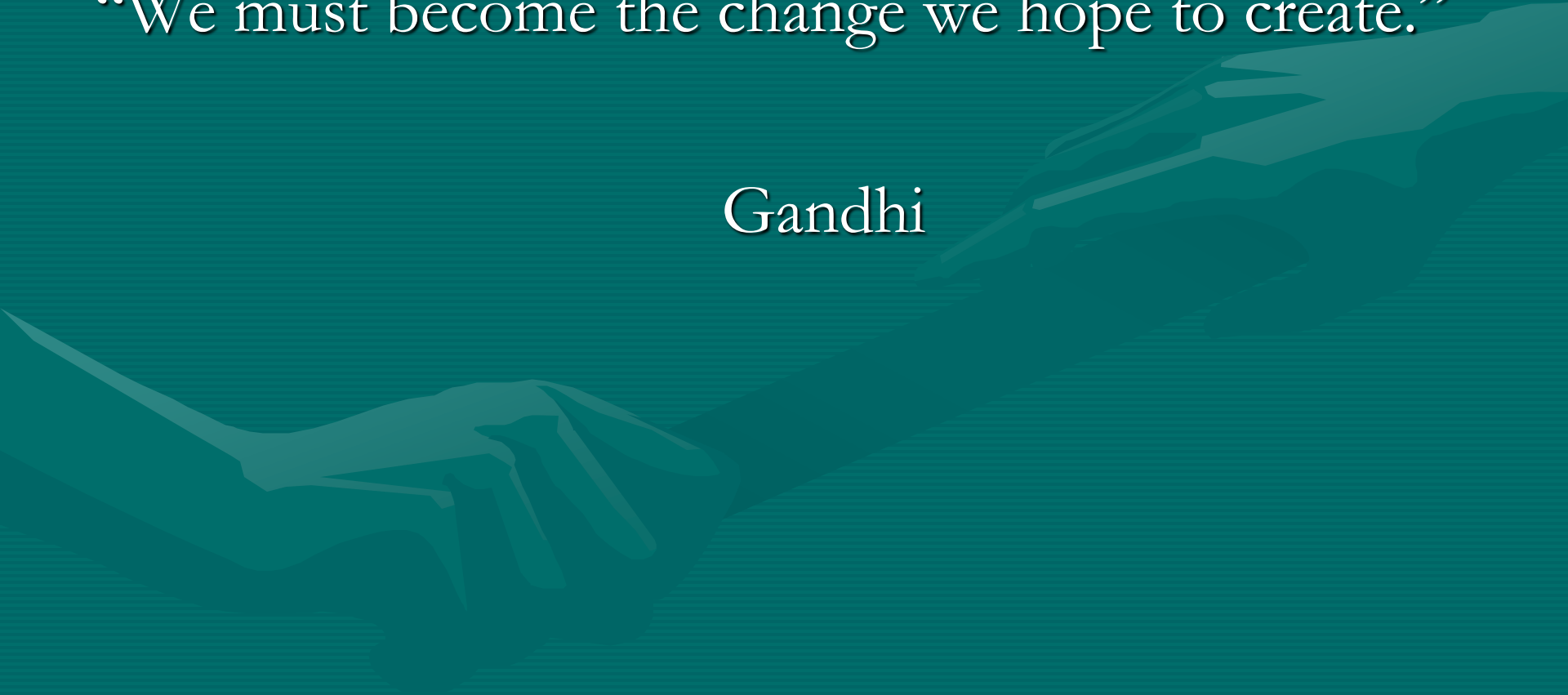
“He noticed that it was our brother the Quetzal bird running to the river, picking up small drops of water in his beak, then returning to the fire to throw that tiny bit of water on the flame. Owl approached Quetzal bird and yelled at him:  
“What are you doing brother? Are you crazy? You are not going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