

We are the Ones.

Every day, for the next 15 years, 10,000 baby boomers will reach the age of 65. The added impact of this population on an already overtaxed infrastructure is staggering. But how true is the stereotype of older folks becoming redundant in their retirement years, playing golf and going on cheap cruises, getting sicker and ultimately dying in nursing homes? What if we did a total reframe on this pessimistic scenario and realized the potential for an ever growing demographic of people to not take *from* but to give back *to* society and our beautiful planet?

This past April, 47 impassioned people met at the Mercy Retreat Center in Burlingame, California, to launch the Conscious Elders Network. This gathering came out of the vision of a few who recognized that, in these most precarious of times when humanity is way out of good relationship with the earth, it is the role of the Elders to catalyze a movement to set things right. Traditionally, in the Indigenous cultures, Elders were seen as the wisdom keepers for their community. They were the placeholders who, because of their long lives, held the stories that provided continuity: bringing the generations together and informing all future decisions. So there we were - gathered together in our modern day Longhouse.

We came primarily from the West and East coasts, medium age 65, equally divided between men and women. Among us were teachers, wilderness guides, coaches, ministers and people from both the financial and technological sectors. What we all had in common was a sensibility of active service born out of the sixties and nurtured by our long-range views. The issues that we face in 2014 aren't new: social and economic injustice, sexual inequality, environmental destruction, climate change,

gross overconsumption, dysfunctional governance and broken educational and religious systems. But there is an acute immediacy now and, as our group met in circle, I could see in our faces the eyes of a young and hopeful tribe who once fervently believed that we could make a difference. And here we are again – on the other side of our lives.

Today many of us have more time and are still healthy and energetic. Collectively, we have a huge body of knowledge and diversity of skill sets. Most significantly, as *conscious* Elders, we are doing the inner work necessary in order to awaken to our true essence; practicing non violent communication, embracing our inextricable relationship to the planet and acknowledging our personal responsibility for her well being. This is a key point. Many times over the course of the workshop we reminded each other of the Einstein quote, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking that we used when we created them.” It’s really important for us to suspend the finger pointing, to take responsibility for the problems and commit to being a part of their solution.

We went thru many powerful processes over our long weekend together. We meditated, danced, sang, laughed and prayed. We communicated hopes and dreams, articulated our grief for the world, envisioned positive change, brainstormed practical projects, explored who to network with and how to craft and spread our message. And we shared many inspiring stories. A most compelling account came from one of our participants who, after the Sandy Hook massacre, organized people in Sunnyvale, California. They were actually able to pass a measure putting sensible gun laws on the books in their town.

One of the groups that I joined was exploring how to connect Elders with children outdoors. We all recognize that a strong relationship with the natural world is imperative if humans are going to be motivated to protect it. We also agree that, in order for that to happen, many Elders must first reconnect with nature themselves. We even talked about the unsustainable relationship that Americans have with dying; how people are being kept medically alive when there is no hope of recovery instead of being encouraged to have more dignified end of life choices.

At the close of the workshop, we left with our hearts inspired and our heads full of ideas. Since Burlingame we have evolved strong, on-going teams (vision/mission/values, new paradigm story, wisdom council, environmental stewardship, intergenerational activism, operations and strategy) and others are still emerging. Both the Northeast and West Coast groups are planning fall events and our membership has almost doubled since April.

Every one of us recognizes that this is a huge project and it's already begun, on a smaller scale, all over the country. Transition Town groups and Elder Councils are currently meeting in many places. Our aim is to create a network that can link all these people together: aligning with those who are addressing similar social and environmental problems. While reclaiming the traditional role of Elders we want to work inter-generationally, supporting the younger folks who are facing the daunting tasks ahead. Our vision is one of peace inspired by the Earth Charter and our mission is to help create a new story for the future generations of all species. Please join us at www.consciouselders.org

