

‘CPO’ CAN REDUCE INCIDENCES OF CIVIL UNREST & DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Australian psychologist **Dr Ben Palmer**, internationally regarded as one of the world’s foremost emotional intelligence (EI) experts has stepped up his campaign for the installation of a Chief Psychological Officer in Australia as a second wave of the Covid-19 virus looms, job losses escalate, and rates of domestic violence and civil unrest increase.

“Fake news is creating a lot of doubt in the minds of the public right now. The fundamental problem being, that it is very hard for individuals to discern what is factual from what is subjective, opinion-based news” said Dr Palmer.

Pointing to the long held argument from president Trump that all news contrary to his opinions is “fake news” Dr Palmer believes that Trump has been able in part, to erode a great deal of the trust the general public once had in news and current affairs reporting, and this situation is exacerbated by highly emotional social campaigns such as the Black Lives Matter movement and others.

“We are living in extremely volatile times. We are bearing witness to many simultaneous social uprisings that can have a very divisive effect on the psyche of the community at large, particularly when they are commented on or twisted by fringe actors with extreme views. Campaigns for justice are fundamentally driven by people’s moral compasses and if there’s one thing we all differ on it’s our moral reasonings and impulses. We are seeing this first hand with the George Floyd-inspired Black Lives Matter campaign which has been hijacked to a degree, by rioters and looters using the death of this individual to justify their criminal behaviours.”

“Most people have respect for other human beings, so the campaign is rooted in a fundamental social tenet that *all lives* should be respected and protected. But the hijacking of the message by certain extremist groups, the biased and often inflammatory reporting by many media outlets and the general confusion caused by, on the one hand, the condemnation of police violence against black people and others, and then on the other, the vandalism of historical landmarks and monuments and the recently unveiled campaign to soften the perception of pedophiles, is causing considerable confusion and anxiety amongst Australians” he added.

Dr Palmer believes that a Chief Psychological Officer would help to quell anxiety and create clarity as a trusted and objective voice.

“Jacinda Ardern is a shining example of a leader who is able to generate relationship trust because she connects with people on an emotional level. She is highly and genuinely empathetic. She is authentic and real, formal and informal, and willing to be vulnerable and show pain and hurt as and when she feels it. This makes her, in part, a very successful leader because she doesn’t simply offer sympathy, she actually lives empathetically and that makes her trustworthy in the eyes of her people.”

Dr Palmer believes a Chief Psychological Officer would function in a very similar way to the New Zealand leader and would likewise help calm the growing anxiety experienced by Australians. For too long he says, Australia has been largely driven by a “hero mindset” particularly in sport and business, as a consequence, Palmer believes empathy has been sacrificed in favour of stoicism and a ‘results-first’ culture.

“It is a critical time with all that’s going on presently, and knowing that natural disasters are now common place in Australia and will continue to occur, that a Chief Psychological Officer is installed to direct policy around the pandemic, bush fires, floods and terror attacks of any kind, to manage the emotional and mental wellbeing of our people.”

Since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an alarming escalation in reported incidences of domestic violence, both spousal and that perpetrated against children, something that

could be better addressed, Dr Palmer reasons, with the installation of a Chief Psychological Officer. Palmer's comments are, in large measure, supported by Domestic Violence NSW Interim chief executive Delia Donovan who recently said research shows major events such as pandemics, natural disasters and recessions often result in increased family violence and enforced isolation. Natural disasters with health and economic impact presents further problems, not least of which is 'under-reporting' of incidences and an increase in the severity and complexity of cases.

"Social distancing measures, including self-isolating have been imperative to stop the spread of the virus, but they come with their own inherent psychological problems. The Australian government has been quick to take measures to address our physical wellbeing, but has paid little regard to our emotional and mental health" Dr Palmer states.

With businesses collapsing and significant staff layoffs such as those introduced this week by Qantas and the ABC becoming the 'norm', financial pressures on individuals and families are exponentially compounding those already present threats to our physical and mental wellbeing.

"Trust is fundamental, to the safe navigation through any crisis, by a government. Without it, there is only anarchy and we're seeing all too much of that in the US and to a lesser extent, parts of Europe presently. If Australia is to mitigate the risk of domestic violence, civil unrest and suicide rates, all of which spike dramatically in times of crisis, then we need clear and concise communication underpinned by consistent empathetic messaging that help foster trust, which in turn, helps to create a more empathetic environment."

"There's a lot of knee-jerk reactions at the moment from governments and companies that further unsettles people and causes anxiety and often anger. Take the removal of certain television programs and movies from the public arena, the calls for historical figures to be expunged and the changing of very old product brand names. All of this if necessary, should have happened a long time ago and it needs to happen carefully, in a way where the public is properly informed so they better appreciate the significance of it. Done in an information vacuum can make these well intended actions divisive and in some cases cause greater civil unrest."

Dr Palmer argues that the agenda-driven white noise generated by many media outlets needs someone to filter, distil and clarify the more emotionally combustible subject matter, before Australia follows the US, as we so often do, down this rabbit hole of civil violence.

To speak with Dr Ben Palmer please contact him directly on: 0413 138 323 or ben.palmer@genosinternational.com