Parenting special needs children is challenging at the best of times. As nurses, we are called on to deliver clinical intervention, educate but often more importantly, to advocate.

Trust from the client is not only related to an expectation of clinical expertise moreover, it depends on empathy. Without trust how can a professional demonstrate empathy? The two go hand in hand. But these two factors also cross cultures, it’s a two way street. A client trusts a nurse but if the nurse does not demonstrate he/she trusts the client then the clinical intervention undertaken will in some way create an unnecessary barrier. A client from another culture has to trust otherwise there will be little or no respect for the work the nurse initiates. Aboriginal people hold respect for one another very highly. Without it, trust will be expressed superficially and the nurse will only receive from the client lip-service, a cultural communication technique where the client tells the nurse what they think the nurse wants to know, or hear.

The nurse is an invited guest into the family’s world and the client remains the most important focus. Education should not be confined within the environment of the hospital. Cultural disposition necessitates that environments need to foster a sense of trust and ownership before any therapeutic connection can occur. Nursing through the lens of culture and cultural sensitivity is an essential skill.

The following poem was written after an interaction with an empowering Aboriginal lady called Mary. Mary had found herself thousands of kilometres from her home (a remote area where she resided within a community setting where she spoke her own traditional language). She had been airlifted to access treatment for her young son. The treatment required radical surgery and Mary had been residing in supported accommodation attached to the hospital for some months while her son entered the rehabilitative phase of his treatment. Members of Mary’s family/community had arrived in the city to provide support and to learn how to help in the care of the young child. Mary battled with hospital protocols, her own sense of loss and grief and yet rose above obstacles and actively sought support to develop her skills in caring for her child. All she wanted was for the education to take place in a culturally appropriate environment. Mary used the recognised difference to build solidarity. On further interactions with Mary, it became apparent she missed seeing the “black faces”, she missed her language but most importantly she missed the safety of her familiar environment.

Poem written by Mary and Katrina Lane-Krebs. Article additions by Katrina Lane-Krebs and Cheri Yavu-Kama-Harathunian.

**Down by the river**

* I wanna go down by the river.  
* That girl there she says: “No”  
* She say he can’t go too.  
* Why? Why he can’t come down by the river?  
* Why not sister?  
* He should come down by the river!  
* Sister, you come too?  
* You different, not black skin like me, you different  
* You wanna come down by the river?  
* You bring the boy then  
* He comes with you.  
* That girl she don’t know our ways.  
* We don’t know this boy’s ways, but we gotta learn it!  
* You meet us down by the river.  
* You show my mob what’s to do.  
* We’ll get along you know.  
* You come too sister, you, me, aunties, Down by the river.*

Cheri: “Junjarin-nga dhar’guna yau’eembai’ya nguolam/bula dhar’kun yar war gow”. These are Kabi Kabi words. They are from a 40,000 year old blessing and mean: “May the spiritual forces of Mother Earth guide and protect your inner self and truth”. I offer this blessing to you.

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