

WHAT WOULD AN ACE-AWARE NATION LOOK LIKE?



Mary Glasgow is the Interim CEO at Children 1st, Scotland's National Children's Charity. Under her leadership, Children 1st has worked hard to embed an understanding of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) within every aspect of their organisation. Mary is one of the speakers at the ACE Aware Nation Conference on 26th September.

Here, Mary gives a personal reflection on what she thinks an ACE-Aware Nation would look like.

In my role leading Children 1st, Scotland's National Children's Charity, I regularly find myself having conversations with lots of people about the many ways childhood events affect us for the rest of our lives. Those

conversations are often about how we can protect children from abuse and neglect, how to support children coping with the stresses that living in poverty places on their families, and how we help children and families to recover and repair after such trauma.

I am both excited and nervous to be sharing some of those conversations with the 2000 people attending the ACE-Aware Nation Conference in Glasgow on the 26th September. I will talk about how the insights from those conversations have shaped our work at Children 1st.

When I speak about the work of our organisation, I am inspired by the kindness people in Scotland so often show for children who are living in desperately difficult circumstances. I have also been disheartened by the lack

of compassion shown toward those same children, once they become adults who did not have the help they needed to recover from childhood trauma. We are often judgemental of the unhelpful strategies they developed to cope with the trauma they suffered. How can we nurture more compassion in our country?

I suppose I am asking what an ACE-Aware Nation looks like. One recent and unexpected conversation has helped me find answers to this question.

I was on a bus travelling into Glasgow city centre to speak at an event for youth workers and policy makers. I was lost in thought about what to say to them that could have maximum impact on behalf of the young people who need their voices heard loud and clear at such events.



A woman sat opposite me. She was one of those women of Glasgow who look older than their years, the kind of woman that you know might smile and engage in a chat about the weather. Just as likely, she would drop a funny one liner so sharp you could cut yourself on it.

This woman smiled at me as she sat down, and she commented it was a beautiful

day. We made small talk about what a wonderful summer it had been, until we crossed the bridge over the Clyde into Oswald Street and on up to Hope Street. As the bus pulled in at a stop she gestured toward two men huddled in doorways opposite. They were young men, sleeping on the streets of a city with the brand "People make Glasgow" emblazoned across its buildings.

She muttered something about them being "an embarrassment to the city." I caught her eye and, without thinking, I asked "But don't ever you wonder what happened to them?" She looked right at me, and it took all of five seconds for her sharp blue eyes to fill with tears. "Aye, right enough," she said. "My nephew was homeless." She paused, thoughtful, and

said "I have to be honest. I've never thought about that before." As we got off the bus, she smiled at me again and said, "I'm off to buy one of those guys a coffee."

I think that's what an ACE-Aware Nation will look like. It will be full of people who are curious and willingly compassionate. It will be a nation where children - all children - are cherished. The stories of the adults who did not experience enough kindness will be heard and understood.

