

The Nation's Conversation: Making Scotland the World's First ACE-Aware Nation



Sunday September 23, 2018



The Herald

A message from TIGERS and connected baby



WHAT WOULD IT take to ensure that an entire nation was ACE-aware? That's what this unique two day event sets out to ask.

How do we help every single citizen of Scotland, and even the UK and beyond, to understand

the importance of relationships, kindness and love? How do we use the scientific knowledge of Adverse Childhood Experiences to foster compassion and hope within our culture? How do we ensure that relationships are at the heart of all our public policies and spending decisions? These are the questions we will

be exploring as 2500 people come together over two days to have conversations of connection.

Public hunger for ACE-awareness exploded across Scotland in 2017, kick-started by a national tour of the documentary film Resilience. People who saw the film wanted to know what to do next. They wanted to disseminate the

knowledge more widely. This conference grew out of that hunger.

Our organisations – TIGERS and connected baby – are two voices amongst many working to spread the message of ACEs across Scotland and the UK. We draw confidence from the fact there are now so many voices insisting on change. We want these two days

to serve as an opportunity to bring together those voices. The desire for cultural change is springing up everywhere, and this event gives us a chance to strengthen our national determination to bring a new vision into being.

We are grateful to every single person choosing to be part of the conversation. ■

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ACE-Aware Scotland
Adverse Childhood Experiences

Making Scotland the World's First ACE-Aware Nation

Immersive Afternoon
25th September
at Hampden Park

Conference
26th September
at SEC Armadillo

The national movement that will raise a new generation



Dr Suzanne Zeedyk explains the science of Adverse Childhood Experiences and why so many Scots are embracing this grassroots movement that could enrich the way we care for children across Scotland . . .

THERE'S a movement sweeping Scotland. It has sprung up unexpectedly over the last year and is now engaging thousands of Scots. I think its origins are hope – hope that we can solve tenacious social challenges like domestic violence, high alcohol consumption, poor attainment at school, and high rates of Type 2 diabetes.

You wouldn't usually expect to find that mix within the same sentence. Nor would many people guess that the link drawing them together could possibly be childhood trauma. Yet that's what the science of Adverse Childhood Experiences is teaching us. The ACEs Study was published in 1998 and has taken two decades to reach public attention.

It has come to be regarded as a seminal discovery, in much the same way cholera was finally attributed to contaminated water in

the wells of London.

The study showed that the more emotional distress a person had suffered in childhood, the more likely they were to exhibit a range of health problems in adulthood, including heart disease, liver disease, depression, suicide attempts and drug use.

What counted as distress? The study highlighted ten traumas, including abuse, neglect, a parent in prison, a parent with mental illness and parental divorce. Subsequent studies have classified poverty, bereavement, neighbourhood violence, bullying and other stressors as ACEs.

The study, conducted with a sample of 17,000 middle class people, revealed that nearly half had experienced at least one of the named adversities. More than 10% had experienced four. That's three children in every Scottish classroom of 30 children.

The ACES Movement is waking

us up to a better understanding of our own human biology. Children's physiological systems are immature.

They are still developing the capacity to cope with strong emotions like fear, terror, anger, sadness and uncertainty. If they have to endure tough emotions without adult help, their biological self-regulatory systems develop in a fragile way.

They are more likely to need external help to handle tough emo-

“
OUR GETTING IT RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD APPROACH AIMS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

tions, like smoking, drinking, drugs, eating, punching. Dependence on such coping techniques leads to the kinds of health challenges and 'behaviour problems' our hospitals, prisons and schools are full of. We've been trying to tackle such problems for a long, long time. What's changed in the last year? Why are there suddenly new conversations taking place around family dinner tables and in police briefings?

I think the public interest can be attributed to a documentary film called Resilience: The biology of stress and the science of hope. The film had its Scottish premiere in the summer of 2017, hosted by two community organisations, Re-Attachment and connected baby. Since then, viewers have returned to their organisations and local authorities, insisting the film be more widely screened.

The film provides the kind of light-bulb moments that make the

science of ACEs accessible to the general public, leaving viewers with a sense of hope that solutions are possible. The film has sparked a grassroots movement of people who not only want to push the Scottish Government to keep taking the brave steps they have been taking in regard to ACEs, but who are ready to take action themselves.

That's why my organisation, connected baby, has partnered with the organisation TIGERS, to host a unique national conference on 25th and 26th September in Glasgow. The leading global ACEs campaigner, paediatrician

Dr Nadine Burke Harris, will join more than 1500 people to explore what we need to do to make Scotland the first ACE-Aware Nation in the world. Full details of how to attend are available on the website www.aceawarescotland.com. We welcome everyone who wants to be part of this conversation of hope. ■



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SCOTLAND: WHERE OUR CHILDREN SHOULD GROW UP LOVED, SAFE AND RESPECTED

John Swinney MSP, Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills offers an insight into why the Scottish Government is focussing on childhood adversity and encouraging more action to prevent and address adverse childhood experiences

IT IS clear to see that the experiences we have during our childhood shape who we are and how we interact with the world. When someone has an adverse or traumatic experience growing up, it impacts on their emotional, biological and physical development and, importantly, their capacity to learn and thrive.

Without the right support, the effects can last a lifetime, especially if those experiences are harmful.

The first adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) study took place more than 20 years ago, but the evidence base has been gaining increasing awareness in recent years, particularly so in Scotland.

It is clear that such adverse experiences aren't new, but the way we are recognising and tackling them in Scotland is changing. I am determined to drive progress on our vision that all children grow up loved, safe, and respected, so that everyone can realise their full potential.

We must work together to prevent adverse experiences happening in the first place,

and when they do happen, to reduce their negative impact and encourage healing.

As we reiterated in our Programme for Government published last Tuesday 4th September, we want to make sure children and adults can get the right support, at the right time, so we can support their resilience and also limit the chance for adversity to be passed down through generations.

To further our work on this, I am delighted that we have committed to incorporating the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child into domestic law in Scotland. This demonstrates



OUR GETTING IT RIGHT FOR EVERY CHILD APPROACH AIMS TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

our commitment to the rights of children and young people in Scotland.

As part of the broader range of work we're doing to help prevent ACEs, we are supporting parents, families and children by investing in perinatal and infant mental health, providing support to young mothers through the Family Nurse Partnership and taking action to tackle child poverty.

We're also investing in school nurses and counsellors, providing attainment funding to support health and wellbeing interventions in school, and supporting children to maintain contact and relationships with parents in prison where appropriate.

In addition to this, we're implementing national trauma training for Scotland's workforce, and working to increase awareness in communities, so as many people as possible can recognise and prevent ACEs, as well as support young people and adults who have suffered from the impact of these experiences.

Our getting it right for every child approach aims to improve outcomes, support the wellbeing of our children and young people, and address their needs early.

This is about families and services working together with the needs of the child or young person at the centre.

I'm delighted to be speaking at the ACE-Aware Nation Conference in two weeks' time, where I hope to listen, learn and take next steps.

I'm particularly pleased that we are supporting the attendance of Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament and Year of Young People Ambassadors. I look forward to hearing their views following the conference on how to make further progress and involve young people in this important agenda.

By working together, across all corners of society, we can create a united approach across Scotland to ensure we are doing all we can to prevent adverse childhood experiences and support children and adults affected. ■



Pauline Scott, Operations Director at TIGERS, looks at the effect understanding ACEs, stress and trauma can have on businesses

THROUGHOUT this discussion we have been exploring the impact that childhood adversity can have on individuals and what would ACE aware/trauma-informed practice look like across a variety of sectors, including education, criminal justice, health and third sector. But what about business? Does understanding ACEs, trauma and toxic stress have any relevance to businesses?

Why would a business invest both time and finance to understand ACEs and make cultural change, because of their knowledge? That is what TIGERS (Training Initiatives Generating Effective Results Scotland) have been doing.

ACEs is everyone's business. I believe this statement to be true. Why? Businesses need to be profitable to survive. To be profitable we require the right market conditions, the right product and a highly efficient, productive and motivated workforce. Most business leaders would agree that the most important factor in a successful business is the right people. We hear phrases such as, "our biggest asset is our people" and "you don't build a business, you build people".

If we truly mean these words and they are not just part of a marketing strategy, what does the authentic truth look like in a business that is truly people centred and why is ACEs awareness relevant?

We must start by understanding how "our people", are biologically

Why an understanding of human development can have a positive impact in your business . . .

programmed. We need to know that repetition to positive or negative experiences (ACEs) in life, especially during our most formative years, early childhood, will shape both our brains and our bodies.

It is those experiences that will impact our ability to stay regulated, build resilience and enable us to move to the cognitive part of our brain that allows us to problem solve, be creative in our thinking

and understand new concepts.

If people experience poor emotional wellbeing they are more likely to be stressed, disconnected and easily distracted, which can lead to low levels of productivity.

Many of these characteristics have developed in childhood and are created by the environments and relationships we experience. This means that our experiences can change our biology, impacting

on our ability to stay calm and focused in times of pressure, short deadlines or adapting strategy to meet unforeseen circumstances.

By providing our team with the knowledge and understanding of their own experiences we provide the insight into what can trigger our stress response system and why we all react in different ways. It allows us to take ownership of our own development needs and gives greater

understanding to our physiological responses to build resilience in the workplace. It allows leaders to understand that our staff are unique individuals and that when we support their emotional needs we can help them to achieve their best performance for themselves and the business.

This development of self-awareness, in conjunction with strategies for self-regulation, have been highly

effective within TIGERS. We have created and invested in a staff wellness programme that focuses on physical, nutritional and relational wellbeing.

Twice a week we undertake whole company wellness sessions that vary from walking and running to tennis and yoga. This supports the regulation of our bodies and brains and allows us to refocus on ourselves before we go home to spend time with our families.

We have piloted an eight-week Mindfulness course, that we plan to roll out across our whole business.



IF PEOPLE EXPERIENCE POOR EMOTIONAL WELLBEING THEY ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE STRESSED

Mindfulness allows us to train our minds to be more focused, to gain clarity, have the space to be creative and to feel connected.

All have benefits back to our business aims. We have monthly film afternoons where we view a short film, TED talk or documentary that is relevant to our professional and/or personal development and we hold discussions afterwards to hear the views of our team.

This type of session creates more platforms for our team to connect, share their views and have debate through differing opinions. Our wellness programme has been designed to promote connection, self-awareness and trusting relationships.

Our culture of trust creates a willingness, by our team, to challenge themselves, take risks and out with their comfort zone, with the knowledge they will be fully supported, regardless of the outcome.

At TIGERS, our knowledge of ACEs and understanding of human development has led to a focus on staff wellbeing. It is creating a significant impact on the relationships that our team have both, internally and externally. We are experiencing high levels of productivity, financial sustainability and business growth.

There are direct benefits to our business and staff by prioritising emotional wellbeing which also has the power to ripple through our families, communities and entire society. ■



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Waiting 10 years for the ACEs movement that's finally here

Detective Chief Superintendent John Carnochan, now retired, has long played a role in trying to boost awareness of ACEs in Scotland. Here's where he thinks we've now reached . . .

'AT THIS POINT it was clear to me that this was real but nobody wanted to talk about it." These are the words of Dr Vincent Felitti, talking about the findings of his major study into Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in 1997. I know what he meant and I know how he felt. There is an ACEs Movement now underway in Scotland. I welcome it, but it has taken a long time in coming. I want to remind us of its history.

Around 2005 Karyn McCluskey and I established the Violence Reduction Unit at the behest of the then Chief Constable Sir Willie Rae. We adopted a public health approach to reducing violence. That approach, at its heart, is about preventing problems. In researching the causes of violence we discovered Dr. Felitti's work and immediately made the link to primary prevention.

We were excited by our discovery and began to speak about ACEs in relation to reducing violence in Scotland. We spoke about it at conferences, meetings, in the media.

Every professional we encountered could identify with the con-

clusions of Felitti's study. ACEs were an important element of our 10-Year Violence Reduction Strategy, published in 2007.

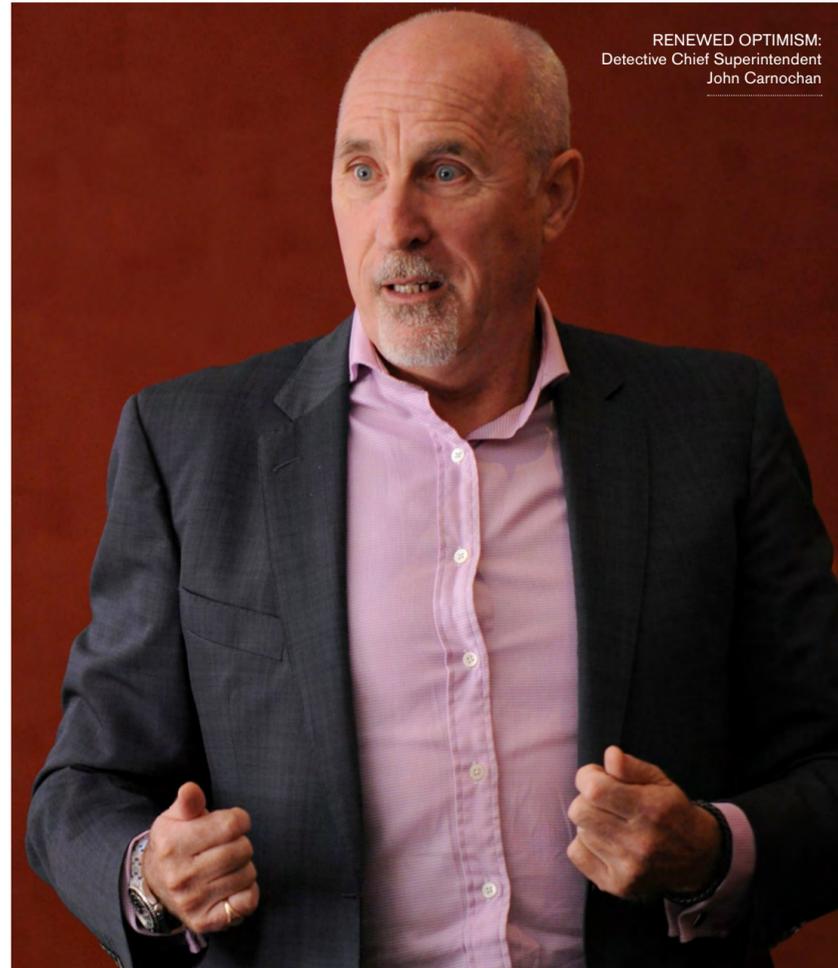
On July 18, 2007, Dr Felitti spoke at the Scottish Police College at a conference hosted by the Violence Reduction Unit and the World Health Organisation. The conference was supported by Scottish Government and attended by many senior civil servants and Ministers. In Scotland then, as now, there was regular talk from politicians and professionals alike about their earnest intent to improve public services by adopting evidencebased policies, ambitious strategies and collaborative practice.

Favoured speak of the time was "preventative spend", "sustainable change", "collaborative practice" and "whole systems approaches".

The stated ambition for our children was to make Scotland the 'Best Place in the World to Grow Up'.

I know it's complex and complicated and I know there is no single lever to pull that will make Scotland the Best Place to Grow Up.

But I thought, back in 2007, we were on our way. The evidence of ACEs, with the language of trauma



RENEWED OPTIMISM:
Detective Chief Superintendent
John Carnochan

and prevention, seemed to be the perfect catalyst. It was exciting. I thought we were laying the foundation for future generations to thrive.

But sadly we seem to have got stuck. I'm not certain why we are stuck, but we are stuck. Perhaps there are too many vested interests; perhaps we lack the courage; perhaps the task is too big, too ambitious. Perhaps we don't really have the vision that allows us to see the horizon of the next generation.

“ I'M HOPING CHANGE WE THOUGHT IMMINENT A DECADE AGO IS WITHIN TOUCHING DISTANCE

ation and the generations beyond that.

Maybe we, the adults, don't like our children enough to make the necessary sacrifice and effort. I really wish I knew the answer.

I was delighted when the ACEs Hub was established in 2016 by NHS Health Scotland, followed by the report "Polishing the Diamonds" from the Scottish Public Health Network. I know the people involved are wholly committed to their task.

However, it has now been a decade since Dr Felitti spoke at Tulliallan. It seems that revolutions take longer than I'd hoped.

In recent times the ACEs movement has been catapulted forward by a few dedicated practitioners working hard by speaking to ordinary mums and dads in cafés and schools and community centres all over Scotland.

They have made huge numbers of people aware of ACEs. They speak about the trauma caused by ACEs. They speak about the best way to buffer against the trauma. They don't speak about systems or ACE scoring or lack of resources and time. They speak about relationships and hope and aspiration.

I'm excited all over again. A public ACEs Movement is now underway. I'm hoping the change we thought imminent a decade ago is finally within touching distance.

This time the "whole systems" will be changed by the ordinary people who inhabit those systems – an inside out, bottom up Movement comprising individuals who really do want to make Scotland the Best Place to Grow Up.

Hear more from John at aceawareScotland.com/ [youtube-video-interview](#)

Making Scotland an ACE-Aware nation: Why the media has a responsibility to help our society in rethinking emotional distress

'I'VE been working in the media now for 25 years and it was only in my 24th year that I heard the term 'Adverse Childhood Experiences'. That fact makes me reflect on my working practices and that of the media industry as a whole.

Certain parts of the media, knowingly or not, exploit ACEs.

Many stories of violence, drug use, and broken relationships involve people who have suffered trauma at some point in their lives. But we never stop to really think about that trauma.

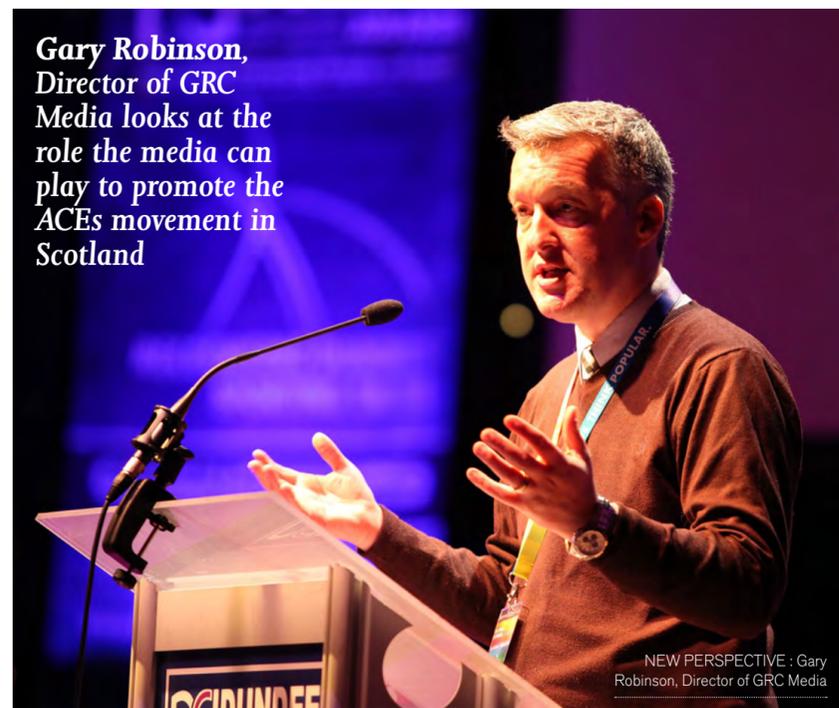
In the media, we tend not to ask, 'what has happened to this person?' We focus on the aftermath.

It makes inexpensive television, it sells newspapers, magazines and as a nation, we like to consume it.

I've interviewed dozens of guests on the 'Stories of Resilience' podcast series. They reveal the impact of trauma in lives, and the struggle that our systems and support services often have in paying real attention to trauma. In these interviews, I've discovered the link between trauma and ill-health later in life.

The honesty and openness of the interviewees have made me look at my childhood.

I was brought-up in the seven-



Gary Robinson, Director of GRC Media looks at the role the media can play to promote the ACEs movement in Scotland

NEW PERSPECTIVE : Gary Robinson, Director of GRC Media

ties when a 'good hiding' made you stronger and the phrase 'I'll give you something to cry about' was the norm.

I remember getting into a fight with a boy down the road and came off the worse, only for my father to send me out to 'finish the job'. I came off the worse again.

My parents divorced. That's now classed as an ACE. Today, my health isn't the best; high blood pressure, diabetes and I never give a straight answer when the Doctor asks about 'how many units a week?' Does that sound familiar?

I didn't think about my past or my future. I didn't know of ACEs. I do now. We know some areas of the media use distress and pain for financial gain. I believe we sometimes forget how the media can shape and influence modern culture.

However, imagine making small changes to our reporting approaches and having more caring, compassionate production values in our programmes, for example, creatively weaving ACEs into the backstories of popular soap characters.

My industry has a massive part to play in the ACEs movement, in shaping an ACE-Aware Nation.

Which of my colleagues will join me? See you at the Conference.

GERRY McLaughlin is Chief Executive of NHS Health Scotland, the national Health Board responsible for improving health and reducing inequalities.

NHS Health Scotland hosts a group called the Scottish ACEs Hub which works to raise awareness and improve policy and practice to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences and mitigate their negative impacts.

Here, Gerry explains why he feels so strongly that a public health approach to childhood distress is crucial to raising the next generation of Scottish children – and to helping adults heal. I started my career many years ago as a social worker.

As a student in Glasgow, I learned about childhood development and attachment, partly through the work of John Bowlby, the psychoanalyst who investigated the relationship between what happens to us in childhood and its impact in later life.

Comforting children's distress is central to tackling the impact of poverty

I can clearly remember first hearing about the damage to a child if they didn't form attachments to adults around them. As a first year student, it was a shocking discovery. That work later influenced the now landmark study on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), which found that specific traumatic events in childhood



HEALTHY OUTLOOK: Gerry McLaughlin is Chief Executive of NHS Health Scotland

have a profound and lasting effect on children and the adults they will become.

That shocking discovery, and the desire to do something about it, has led me to a career in public health, now as Chief Executive of NHS Health Scotland. As a special Health Board, our organisation works at a national level to promote and protect health and wellbeing and prevent ill health by reducing inequalities.

That means looking at the things that have the biggest impact on health: a decent income, good work, a decent home and the environment. But what do these things have to do with ACEs?

Well, we know that although Adverse Childhood Experiences have been found across the population, it's more common in poorer areas. Analysis of Scottish data found that ACEs were clustered in poorer areas, with 1 in 2 children in the wealthiest areas having no ACEs, compared to 1 in 10 in the poorest.

We need to find out why some groups, such as children in poorer areas, are at greater risk than others. That's why we're advocating for a public health approach to childhood adversity.

A public health approach means focusing on reducing poverty and inequalities, upholding children's

rights and creating the conditions for them to do well. We need to look at the lived experience of families and use the best available evidence to respond to the devastating challenge of growing up in poverty and its relationship to childhood adversity.

We know we can't take on this challenge alone. That's why our Scottish ACEs Hub is working across public services to raise awareness about ACEs and develop actions to address them. There's a groundswell of Scottish action being built around ACEs. Let's use this opportunity to make a real difference to both children and adults in Scotland.



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Jenn Knussen, Headteacher of Pitteuchar East Primary School, Fife, writes about her experiences of achievement from application of trauma-informed teaching

‘Little people matter’ – time to change our thinking on ‘challenging behaviour’ in the classroom ...

SIX YEARS AGO, an unexpected moment changed the way I approached my role as a Headteacher in a primary school. I experienced a sudden insight that fundamentally changed my thinking about the phrase ‘challenging behaviour’. It came from my growing understanding of trauma-informed teaching. And it was an insight that unsettled me.

Reflecting on nearly 25 years in teaching, I realised that every incident where a child presented as ‘challenging’ had been motivated by a single emotion within that child: distress.

What I was seeing wasn’t ‘challenging behaviour’. It was ‘distressed behaviour’. Once I had that understanding, my reactions to children’s behaviour changed. I now know this kind of shift to be common. Adults are better able to support a child when they recognise distress. Our initial response to a ‘challenge’ is to win it, and to prevent that challenge from recurring.

In contrast, our reaction to ‘distress’ is to offer comfort.

Once a child experiences comfort, and comes to expect it, relationships, trust and connections remain undamaged. This understanding of children’s behaviour is now fundamental to the way I lead my school.

More importantly, it is the way my whole staff team now approach-



es teaching. The phrase ‘challenging behaviour’ is no longer used in our school. We talk about ‘distressed behaviour’. I am hugely grateful to my colleagues for their compassion and openmindedness in the early days of that shift. This was five

years before the term ‘ACEs’ began to be widely adopted in this country. But our shared insight allowed our language, as a school team, to change to a language of connection and compassion.

As our understanding of the

driving nature of distress upon behaviour deepened, colleagues began to ask, “What has happened to this child?” Colleagues became curious, not about a child’s history, but about the positive impact that occurred when a child experienced calm comfort, a quiet place to regain their dignity, reassurance that any rupture in relationships could be repaired. Trust comes through repair. Our school team places a high value on the trust our children and families have in us.

As in every aspect of learning, children make ‘mistakes’ with their behaviour.

They need coached and supported, in the same way they would be if they made mistakes in literacy or numeracy. You don’t see many public displays in classrooms of how children are doing in core subjects, but it is a different story when it comes to class charts of behav-

our stickers. Our school team was relieved to abolish these. The best reward our children can receive is thanks and approval, nurturing their feeling of belonging.

We work hard to let the children know that they matter. Yes, it can be hard to remember who is getting a kitten or who has a wobbly tooth. But we know this is important to a child, so we make a fuss. Little things matter, just as little people matter.

As the nation becomes more aware of adverse childhood experiences and how to mitigate their impact, I recall the uncertainty at the start of my school’s journey.

Experience has cemented our resolve. The ACEs movement is strengthening the way we work, and word is spreading. I am hopeful.

Find out more about making Scotland an ACE Aware Nation at www.aceawareScotland.com

“ADULTS ARE BETTER ABLE TO SUPPORT A CHILD WHEN THEY RECOGNISE DISTRESS



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HOW HAVING A TRAUMA-INFORMED EMPLOYER HELPED ME SUCCEED

THE grassroots ACEs Movement, which has sprung up over the last year in Scotland, has engaged many adults. Now the voices of more young people are being heard. In today’s editorial, we hear from Fern Guckel, who talks about how ACEs information has helped in her life and why she thinks all employers should become trauma-informed.

I first learned the term Adverse Childhood Experiences this year, when I watched the documentary film Resilience, at a staff training night within the nursery where I work.

My first reaction was to cry, because I could personally relate to most of what the film focused on. After the documentary was finished, I felt so empowered, like someone had flipped a switch on inside me. Personally, I am a very shy person who never voices my opinion, but after I watched Dr Nadine Burke Harris in the documentary, I felt like I had to speak out and be heard. The documentary gave me a voice that could not be ignored.

Growing up in my family was extremely difficult. I have experienced multiple ACEs.



me I would never make anything of my life because I never showed any emotion towards anything I ever did.

After school I tried college because I had a feeling I wanted to work with children, but I never really had any passion for college. After three years I left and decided to do an apprenticeship in childcare. That turned out to be the right place for me. My managerial team knew about trauma. After many heartfelt conversations with them, I had finally found people who put their faith and trust in me and where I could feel comfortable. Three years later, after many tears and cuddles, I am now proud to be a fully qualified Early Years Practitioner. I have wanted to give up so many times over the past three years and just give in to my own negativity.

But I have the most amazing manager and director I could have ever imagined.

They put so much faith in me that I knew they wouldn’t let me give up. That was all because they understood about trauma and ACEs. I am now looking forward to the future with the most amazing support team I could wish for.

“THERE WAS LITTLE OPPORTUNITY TO FEEL SAFE AND CALM. IT WAS NOT MY SANCTUARY

We were exposed to frequent trauma and adversity. There was very little opportunity to feel safe and calm. It was not my sanctuary.

I grew up feeling like I was alone in the world and could trust no one. School tried to put me through years of counselling, but I just couldn’t trust anyone. I didn’t feel safe. I have never really been a high achiever in school or in anything I ever done. My teachers told

Education Campaigner **David Cameron** argues that there has never been a better time to drive forward the ACEs Movement. The ACE-Aware Conference in September, drawing together more than 2000 attendees, gives us a chance to create the courage that is crucial for change



Scotland ... It’s time to wake up and act on the science of adverse childhood experiences

A WAKE – aware – active! It’s too late to stop now! I hope readers will recognise this as a quote from Van Morrison. He said it as he was closing the legendary Caledonia Soul Orchestra Tour in 1973, showing his somewhat less than svelte dance moves, reeling towards the sides of the stage and informing anyone who would listen that it was indeed “too late to stop now”.

I am starting to feel like that about what has become known as the ACEs Movement in Scotland. For me, the concept of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is simple. Children are affected by adverse experiences for the long term, and the effects can be dramatic. Volumes of research make clear that damaging experiences in childhood affect us for life unless we are supported, loved and valued and encouraged to develop the capacity to heal ourselves. The damage can manifest in health where there are undeniable links between ACEs and a whole

range of life-limiting conditions. It can manifest in education where the correlation is with failure. It can manifest in relationships or careers or virtually any area of our lives.

These findings have been recognised within the scientific literature. What the public ACEs Movement has done is recognise that the findings weren’t known widely enough to drive change in the decisions we were making as a nation, around legislation, policies and practice. The goal of the ACEs Movement is to wake us up to the situations we are tolerating for children, through our own ignorance and indifference, and face up to the impact of ACEs.

That effort has been incredibly successful. Close to 2,000 people are likely to attend the ACE-AwareNation Conference on 25 – 26 September. The conference will be amazing.

The keynote speaker is the world-renowned paediatrician and campaigner, Dr Nadine Burke Harris, as well as a range of outstanding Scottish speakers (and me!).

The speakers will make the day

wonderful, but the huge gathering of committed individuals who are the audience will be the true marvel. The buzz will fill the SEC Armadillo as no band has ever done.

That said, the event will be a complete waste of time unless it moves to my third ‘A’ of ‘active’. This conference must lead us to action. Awareness without action is no more than self-indulgence. I hate the now-popular term ‘virtue signalling’, but it does describe what we do when we indulge in a fourth ‘A’ of agonising. That is all we are doing if we have awareness without action.

Luckily, it is easy to take action. We can pressure politicians who risk becoming more proud of their awareness than their activity. We can make relationships central to workplace policies. We can foster warmth in our own families.

Even if we do succeed in making Scotland an ACEAware Nation, I will still be hearing Mr Morrison in my head until our awareness translates into a massive, real improvement in the life chances of our children.



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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 and reflection on what she thinks an ACE-Aware Nation would look like ...



GOOD TO TALK: Mary Glasgow is Interim CEO at Children 1st, Scotland's National Children's Charity

What would an ACE-Aware nation 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 those 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 shown 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



I AM INSPIRED BY THE KINDNESS SCOTTISH PEOPLE SO OFTEN SHOWN FOR CHILDREN

nsat 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 willingly compassionate. It will be a nation where all children are cherished. The stories of the adults who did not experience enough kindness will be heard and understood.

Scotland – it's time to change shame and blame for compassion

James Docherty, one of the leading voices in Scotland when it comes to raising awareness of trauma young people are facing in our culture, gives his view of the ACEs movement currently taking place

IF I TRIED to describe how passionate I am about raising awareness and preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences, I could not do justice to the ACE-aware movement taking place across Scotland in an expression of feelings or words.

I consider myself an enthusiastic amateur when it comes to trauma and ACEs. I am always learning.

I am always discarding old ideas for new ideas. I am always exchanging what does not work for what does.

In my journey through life, I have had to throw several lifelong conceptions out the window in understanding many of the social problems we see in our culture.

I have my own personal experience of recovering from trauma. I know how difficult it is, how despairing it can be, how lonely it is, so I consider myself blessed to be able to help others.

Scotland has made massive strides in caring for its citizens in the last ten years. I think we are now starting to recognise that we

all belong to each other, because adverse childhood experiences are about a shared woundedness, regardless of class, religion, colour or creed. We need to look for the similarities and celebrate the differences when it comes to adverse childhood experiences.

We all react and respond differently to trauma and adversity in life.

But it's a glaring issue that needs attention. I have worked in prevention for a long time now, and what I can tell you is, in nearly all cases of individuals caught in the cycle of crime and anti-social behaviour that I have worked with, what has been most prevalent in their life was their exposure to adverse childhood experiences.

In the majority of cases, they grew up in poverty, experienced personal trauma, emotional loss in childhood and had experiences of abuse. Their world view and personality has been shaped in response to their early environment. You might say their brains never had a chance.



SPREADING THE WORD: James Docherty raises awareness of the adverse effects of childhood trauma

The ACE study is showing us that child rearing in our country is severely under threat. We have a public health issue on our hands. Common manifestations include kids being medicated, mental health



WE CAN'T SIMPLY BLAME KIDS FOR NOT BEHAVING ACCORDINGLY

issues, low educational attainment, ADHD, autoimmune disease, cancer, addiction, sexually transmitted diseases, frustrated parents who feel they have lost control of their kids, anti-social behaviour, kids self-medicating on street drugs and alcohol, youth violence.

All of this is because of the hidden cost of ACEs.

We can't simply blame kids for not behaving accordingly or blame parents for not parenting properly. What purpose does it serve only to shame and disgrace and cause further retreat, alienation and denial? We need to suspend judgment and

accusation from the whole conversation about ACEs and, instead, ask questions like "what's going on?", "why is it going on?", "what's our role in it?", and "how can it be prevented?" That's compassion and that's what's needed. I have never seen a long-term positive outcome come from shame and blame.

The ACE-Aware Nation Conference in September is, for me, a message of hope rather than despair. It tells us something can be done and that everybody can contribute.

When we understand it, we can change it. Adversity is a template for growth.

Hazel Sneddon, manager of Big Bird Nursery, explains why all early years staff in the country should be trained in the biology of relationships – and why her nursery focuses on children's emotional needs rather than managing behaviour

HOW A CHILD'S EXPERIENCE IN NURSERY HELPS PREVENT HEART ATTACKS IN ADULTHOOD



I AM PROUD to be the manager of Big Bird Nursery, a pre-school and out of school service operating in Larkhall, South Lanarkshire.

One of the things that makes me especially proud is that we have ensured all our staff are trained in attachment. We understand we have the responsibility to do our very best to eliminate the stress and anxiety children bring with them to our setting.

Children of all ages experience stress as they move from a home to an educational environment. As adults, we are charged with reducing that stress, paying attention to it and helping children let go of it. That's what our attachment training has taught us.

Our approach is informed by the research showing that children who experience stressful and unpredictable childhoods are more likely to experience poor mental health and develop long term health problems as they move into adulthood. It is that insight that has given rise to the term 'Adverse Childhood Experiences' (ACEs).

Our staff team now recognises that ACEs are common, and that they are linked to cancer, heart disease, mental illness and being a victim of violence. We appreciate that ACEs are commonly intergenerational, continuing within the same families. We now regard ourselves, as early years practitioners, as having a very important role in addressing ACEs. We believe it is time for all educational practice to follow the research and that all of us have to work together to break this vicious cycle in our society.

As early years practitioners, we need to recognise how important we are to these little people. To them, we are an extension of their

family, not paid staff.

Have you ever seen a baby look into the eyes of their carer, and observed how their sense of bonding and security seems to be acknowledged? That is a display of attachment. Attachment-led care acknowledges this basic human need. Those of us who work in early learning and education establishments need to foster that sense of security for every child of any age.

Let me give one example of what attachment-led practice looks like for us. Ever seen a person walk down a noisy street, with the baby facing outwards in a buggy? Our culture believes that we are doing something admirable – allowing our children to see the world. But babies easily end up feeling disconnected from their carer, because they can't hear or see them. At Big Bird, we teach our parents and carers that this disconnection is not contributing to a baby's strong sense of emotional security. We try to help our parents see the anxiety babies feel in wondering 'Where's Mum?'

So at Big Bird, we now ensure we have prams that face the person pushing them. This is one way we promote attachment-led practice with our staff, and it gives us a practical way to show our parents how secure attachment contributes to healthy brain development.

Preventing ACEs is possible. Early intervention is crucial. Supporting the attachment process is fundamental to the success and wellbeing of our children. At Big Bird Nursery, we are delighted to be part of the ACEs Movement emerging across Scotland. We will keep shouting.



We asked Scotland, 'What does an ACE-Aware Nation look like to you?' Here are your contributions to the 'Nation's Conversation'.

