

SCOTLAND - IT'S TIME TO CHANGE SHAME AND BLAME FOR COMPASSION



James Docherty has become one of the leading voices in Scotland when it comes to raising awareness of the adversity and trauma young people are facing in our culture.

Here, James gives his view of the ACEs movement taking place across Scotland.

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 (ACEs) 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



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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.

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 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.

