

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

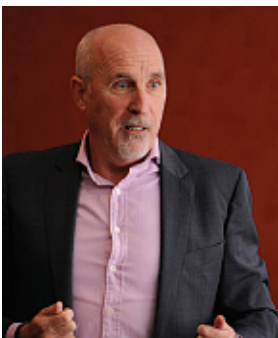
On July 18th 2007, Dr Felitti spoke at the Scottish Police College at a conference hosted by the Violence Reduction Unit and the World Health Organisation. The conference was supported by Scottish Government and attended by many senior civil servants and Ministers.

In Scotland then, as now, there was regular talk from politicians and professionals alike about

their earnest intent to improve public services by adopting evidence-based 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 and prevention, seemed to be the perfect catalyst. It was exciting. I thought we were laying the foundation for future generations to thrive.



John Carnochan

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 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 cafes 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 www.aceawarescotland.com/ [youtube-video-interviews](#)

