

SCOTLAND – IT'S TIME TO WAKE-UP AND ACT ON THE SCIENCE OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES



In this week's article The Real David Cameron, Education Campaigner, 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 strengthen the courage that is crucial for change.

Awake – 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 to make us face up to the real impact of ACEs.

That effort has been incredibly successful. Close



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to 2,000 people are likely to attend the ACE-Aware Nation 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 ACE-Aware 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.

