

ACEs: Start Where You Are and Do What You Can

Conference 16 February 2018

Background

The body of evidence linking a range of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) to health-harming behaviours and poorer health outcomes is becoming increasingly better understood.

Exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences in childhood has been found to have a strong and graded association with a range of health behaviours and outcomes, including: early onset of alcohol use; alcohol addiction; illicit drug use; depression; low life satisfaction; unintended teenage pregnancy; HIV risk behaviours, as well as a range of non-communicable diseases and premature death.

Although these experiences are surprisingly common in the general population, certain vulnerable groups, such as people involved in offending, are known to have experienced higher levels of adversity than others

Due to the cross-cutting nature of ACEs and the impact on life outcomes, Community Justice Ayrshire decided to host a Pan-Ayrshire multi-disciplinary conference with the following aims:

- **To raise awareness of ACEs and trauma;**
- **To identify areas of good practice already happening across Ayrshire and beyond;**
- **To act as a catalyst for a Pan-Ayrshire approach to working with people who have been affected by trauma, and to prevent future trauma occurring.**



ACEs: Start Where You are and Do What You Can

A multi-disciplinary group met over the course of several months to plan the event, which was to be called '**Start Where You are and Do What You Can**' in a plea to delegates that everyone has the power within them to make a difference, whether at home or in their professional life.

The conference was part-funded by Community Justice Scotland, and was hosted by Councillor Anthea Dickson, Chair of Community Justice Ayrshire. Nearly 300 expressions of interest were received from across Ayrshire in relation to the event, with 150 places available on the day.

Input at the event was provided by experts on ACEs and trauma including:

Karyn McCluskey (CEO Community Justice Scotland)

Dr Suzanne Zeedyk (Research Scientist and founder of Connected Babies)

Dr Michael Smith (Lead Associate Medical Director, Mental Health & Addiction Services Greater Glasgow & Clyde)

Jennie Young (Teaching Fellow, Stirling University)

Dr Warren Larkin (Clinical Psychologist and Department of Health Lead on ACEs)



After the input from each of the above speakers, James Docherty from the Violence Reduction Unit brought the theory to life by providing his own personal insight into what living with adversity and trauma means, and how he has been able to move on and recover from this.

A development session was held in the afternoon, which posed the following question: **What do we need to change to make us more ACEs aware / trauma informed in our practice?**

The event finished with a screening of the 'Resilience' DVD.

Initial Feedback

Feedback on the day and on social media after the event was overwhelmingly positive – with delegates appearing to be ‘fired up’ to take this work forward.

Next Steps:

- **An electronic evaluation was sent out to all delegates, and the results collated.**
- **A report on the event will be written and provided to partners.**
- **The film of the event along with the presentations from the speakers will be made available via the Community Justice Ayrshire website. This will be ‘packaged’ in standalone segments in relation to each speaker, to include the response from James Docherty. This will allow partners to utilise individual inputs for training purposes.**
- **A debrief meeting of the multi-disciplinary group will be scheduled to consider the feedback and plan the next steps.**

From the outset we have been clear that it was hoped that this event would be the **catalyst** for future collaborative work across Ayrshire in relation to ACEs and trauma – both from the perspective of preventing future harm, but also in relation to helping those who have been subjected to trauma to recover from this, recognising that this is an important preventative measure in breaking the intergenerational cycle of ACEs. Our overarching aim is to make Ayrshire *a centre of excellence for trauma informed ways of working.*

From conversations with partners there is wide support for the development of a ‘vehicle’ to take this work forward in Ayrshire, and as such it is proposed that a **collaborative forum** is set up to allow us to look at this issue from a strategic level. This would allow us to plan an approach which learns from the good work already happening in Ayrshire and beyond, and allow us to share resources to deliver awareness raising sessions or specific training. This forum would also link in with the national ACEs Hub, of which there are several members in Ayrshire. We would welcome your endorsement of such an approach.

Post Event Feedback

An electronic evaluation was distributed to attendees following the event, and 77 responses were returned.

Q1 – Speakers feedback

Dr Suzanne Zeedyk

*“Her passion came across;
challenged the audience to
change our thinking; engaging;
exceptional quality; gave me
goosebumps with her words;
link to biology was interesting;
amazing; messages were made
clear and simply put for all
understanding; informative;
inspiring; determination;
powerful; get it right in the
early years”*



James Docherty

“Delivered in an articulate manner; value of lived experience; offered inspiration to others; demonstrated the significant change in his own situation and therefore improved outcomes for his own family; bringing theory to life; first-hand experience; could have listened to him all day; emotional and encouraging; restored faith in our attempts to break the cycle which can appear inevitable at times; passionate; no-nonsense approach”

Dr Michael Smith

“Excellent; provided a lot of theory and academia; passionate; ACE memes very useful; moved discussion to understanding how ACEs impact on individuals and thinking about how to more effectively engage with them; always available supportive adult; adverse community experiences; practical; thought provoking.”



Jennie Young

“Articulating the needs of proper trauma informed learning from personal experience of designing and delivering; chimed with our work in community safety; relevant information; exceptional quality; most realistic.”

Dr Warren Larkin

“Excellent; good balance of scientific evidence, operational experience and personal perspective; impacts of ACEs and the need to ask about them; inspiring presentation; passionate and clearly focused.”



Question 2. What was your level of awareness regarding Adverse Childhood Experiences prior to the conference? 74 delegates responded, 2 skipped the question.

- Limited Awareness – 39% (29 responses)
- Good Awareness – 50% (37 responses)
- Excellent Awareness – 11% (8 responses)

Question 3. After attending the conference, how would you now rate your awareness of ACEs? 74 delegates responded, 2 skipped the question.

- Limited Awareness – 0%
- Good Awareness – 47.3% (35 responses)
- Excellent Awareness – 52.7% (39 responses)

Question 4. What did you hope to achieve from the conference?

- Hoped to gain a better understanding and knowledge of how adversity impacts on us as we grow older. More in depth understanding of how brain development is affected by ACEs.
- Complexities of people's lifestyles and the background in what needs to be considered when offering support and intervention in an empathic manner.
- Awareness raising to such a degree that enables capability to share with colleagues and in turn push that awareness further into our communities.
- Multi-agency collaboration on how we engage with partners to ensure we are all trauma informed in all interventions with children and young people.
- Strategies to help better support young people struggling with ACEs.
- Inspiration and confirmation that we are doing the right things in education and our time and commitment will make an impact.
- Networking – a call for action!
- Opportunities to discuss and share practice of impact of trauma aware work where ACEs are used to inform supports and planning in education.

Question 5. Do you feel that this has been delivered? Please explain your reasons.

- Each speaker was able to demonstrate this with facts and science with I found fascinating but it also helped me understand why people act in a certain way and that this behavior can be linked to adverse childhood experiences.
- Plenty of information I can use with my team and make a start at local level.
- Powerful to be amongst others who want to change things so that the ACEs are routinely recognized as significant in the way we work with people.
- Good level of awareness made within various agencies which will lead to further work on same – heartening to hear Police Scotland have made the commitment.
- Left with a much deeper knowledge and understanding.
- Yes – 'Start Where You Are and Do What You Can.' for me this means informing partners who deliver services to understand ACEs and utilise to inform practice. Public need to be informed of the knowledge that exists around the impact of ACEs to help them understand why we might look at offending behaviours differently.
- Conference was a wonderful catalyst to stimulate interest. Platform to call for action and next steps is now over to us.

- It was essential that theory was packaged with real life experiences – this was evident throughout the day.

Question 6. What were the key messages you could take away from the conference?

- Inclusion, holistic approaches, respecting the past and understanding how we can support the present.
- Behaviour is communication.
- ‘There is not enough love in our system.’
- Ayrshire can lead the way in ACEs awareness.
- Keep going even when you feel outnumbered by others who adhere to the medical model – even making a small difference is contributing to something wider.
- The significant impact having 4 or more ACE’s has on an individual, emotionally, physically and socially. Also that by raising awareness with greater understanding this impact can be reduced.
- There is no magic wand and the importance of doing what you can.
- Compassion and humanity needs to replace processes, systems and procedures.
- Change the way you speak to people from “What is wrong with you” to “What happened to you.”
- ACE’s are preventable and the impact on individuals can be reduced. ACE’s should not be used to write somebody off as having no chance in life. Give everyone hope.
- We all need to do our own little bit.
- Hurt People Hurt People.
- Every Contact Makes a Mark.
- Start where you are – we are all at different stages. Some are ready for routine enquiry, some have just heard about ACEs.
- Reinforced the message of relationships and resilience being absolutely key to all practice.

Question 7. How do you believe you can utilise this in your current organisation?

- I am looking at staff training internally and also hoping to hold an event for the third sector so we can have conversations around this and begin to understand the impact this will have. In our sector we may not work directly with children but we are engaging with those people who have suffered from ACEs and are now adults.
- NA ADP consistently raises awareness of recovery, offering hope and inspiration to others. The power of lived experience is something that needs to be increased.
- Share information from this conference with colleagues and encourage to access the website for ACEs. Ideally some consideration should be given to set up trauma informed groups.
- Through changing practice, making Health and Wellbeing the priority, not literacy and numeracy.
- Centre my approach to working with young people on well-being and mindfulness. This conference has reinforced my belief that this is the right thing to do.
- Involved in service planning and change management – I am going to make sure I include a clear reference to ACEs and the importance of a trauma-informed approach in all of my documentation, encourage discussion about it at all stages.
- Building practice approaches that focus on the relationships and critically examine how processes and current practices either support or get in the way of relationships.
- Discussion with Line Manager in relation to whether we could complete an ACES evaluation for Adults who have had an Adult Support and Protection referral made for them

- I would like to be able to carry out routine enquiry, as I work with the victims of domestic abuse, most of whom I would consider would have high ACE scoring. I would like to be able to talk to them not only about what this means in terms of public health but also how to get help
- We are mindful of ACE and trauma in the young people we work with. We have adopted alternative ways of working in order to help such as mindfulness. We are also working closer with CAMHS to share knowledge and experience. I will continue to share the information and contacts I made at the conference with my colleagues, including the video of the conference when it becomes available.

Question 8. What do you think is required to make Ayrshire, a trauma informed area of excellence? How can you contribute to this?

- **Knowledge and understanding** at all levels and not just expect that this is someone else's job. An awareness raising campaign may raise the profile of this.
- Not just raising awareness – but **changing our approach**.
- **Moving away from a medical model**- assessing strengths and not deficits, and recognising the value of lived experience. Changing values and attitudes at all strategic levels. A collective strategic approach from all planning partners, as one can lead with others
- Education, communication, awareness raising, **commitment** from all Council departments and partner agencies, be open to new ideas and approaches, review of current policies and procedures and dedication
- A **strategic and planned programme of early intervention** that has time and budgets ring-fenced to enable real change to take place
- Awareness raising and people becoming **ACEs champions** to spread the word. Awareness needs to be raised amongst services such as social work, medics, mental health etc., also an awareness amongst the general public would reinforce this. Third Sector.
- **Blanket awareness raising of ACES at induction** across all agencies.
- Prevention has to be a big part and that take time, resources and more capacity within services. We need to stop the ongoing ACES as well as manage the existing ones. A shared language, a shared vision, a shared understanding that adversity is not destiny and unleashing the potential of us all to be that one safe trusted individual
- Needs an **ACE Partners Forum** to help strategic and cultural change and ensure we do things co-ordinated and in partnership to ensure a sustainable change. I think doing what you can individually and looking into forums in order to share across services. By joining two forums already in existence and highlighting to my colleagues I am sharing information.
- Talking about this - **keep up momentum** - maybe an event in six months to see what has happened in Ayrshire following the February event - would help with event

Question 9. If Ayrshire was to have an ACEs hub / forum, what do you believe would be essential for this?

- Having representation by people with lived experience incorporated from the outset; funding for earlier intervention and prevention approaches due to the current funding arrangements with funding allocation to acute settings. These funding arrangements need to be addressed at a national level down to local; strong and brave leadership to accept current approaches are not working and require culture change- this is a great opportunity!
- Multi-disciplinary workers - Social Work Children and Families, Family Support, Addictions and Justice, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Counsellors, Therapists, etc. who have robust knowledge and

practice experience of integrated working to safeguard and support children and young people affected by ACEs. A Pledge and a commitment to ensure we deliver our services differently to improve the outcomes for our communities.

- Commitment from all local authorities, strategic leaders including political administration and NHS. Decision makers with 'resources' involved. Buy in from Chief Officers. Multi agency partners sharing practice, support, ideas and an understanding that now all trauma sufferers will require mental health support, it's a tiered approach. Awareness of Adult Protection and Child Protection is required – GIRFEC focus.
- Centrally located area for people to meet, deliver training and gather information and resources. Social media campaigns to get the word out. Buy in from local and national partners to ensure best practice from around the world is explored as soon as possible to see if it might be relevant to Ayrshire. A central point which would enable information exchange. Access to resources and links to further reading. A website with FAQ would also be helpful. We need to make the concept easy to understand for the public if we are to win hearts and minds.
- The right people with the necessary knowledge, skills and experience who are able to work with all stakeholders. Passionate workers with advanced awareness and training and also people with lived experience. It would also have to be accessible and have a variety of supports and treatment options. Well informed staff with a variety of skills, time to dedicate to the needs of the people, services to signpost on to.
- To harness the knowledge and expertise around us....build confidence to take this to our local communities...what does the evidence really mean. Translate this into real words and actions that are accessible for all.
- Input from all justice services, in particular adult services where it can be more difficult to respond to difficult behaviour which may well be linked to ACE's. Easy access to high quality information, including video links to the conference; an ongoing calendar of follow-up activity.
- Don't over complicate – keep it simplistic.

Question 10 – Please provide any further feedback regarding the conference.

“Speakers were excellent and really knowledgeable. The development session was short but I think we did manage to cover all areas. The venue was good and the catering was excellent all done by volunteers. All in all a very good day although at times **very emotional.**”

“The conference and film was excellent. I enjoyed all the contribution that each speaker and brought on the day. They were all very open and honest and to share their personal experiences and passion for change inspired me. The development session was really good but maybe more time .However, consideration might be useful for three Ayrshires to get together and **discuss how we plan to become trauma informed. I am really hopeful that Scotland can be the first trauma informed country.**”

“It would have been good if the group facilitators had had a chance to feedback to the conference regarding the discussions and topics brought up. Speakers who brought more in depth understanding of the effect ACEs have on brain development and how positive relationship in adulthood would have been helpful. Also, a speaker who talked about the positives and pitfalls of working in a trauma informed way would have been informative.”

“Every speaker was very interesting. **Probably the best event I have attended in a long time.** Venue great, food great, organisation Great....well done organisers!”

“ACE's tends to take a pathological approach to issues and less attention is paid to structural issues like poverty and deprivation. **We cannot lose sight of Adverse Community Experiences.**”

“One of the **most impactful conferences I've ever attended.** Looking forward to a future where services and communities work together to make a difference. Loved the segments covered by James which related to the theory and academic study shared by the speakers. **What an inspiration.**”

“I thoroughly enjoyed the day and felt it left me feeling very inspired to come up with ideas to bring our practice up to a higher standard in relation to trauma and traumatised people. I also found the whole input in relation to the self-regulatory system insightful. **I think a roll out of the Resilience film again within the area would be beneficial now following the conference** and the buzz that has come from it.”



Graeme Smith
Alice Dillon
Community Justice Ayrshire
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