

Adverse Childhood Experiences: Adversity Is Not Destiny

Community Justice Ayrshire Conference: Friday 15 March 2019



Background

Many of the recognised adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and other adversities, impact on the justice system. Children and adults with experience of ACEs may come into contact with the justice system – both as victims or witnesses and perpetrators of crime. The justice system therefore has a key role in preventing, and in particular, mitigating the impact of ACEs.

Research has shown that people who experience multiple ACEs are more likely to engage in risk taking behaviours which are harmful to health and potentially associated with criminal behaviour. Prolonged exposure to stress in childhood disrupts healthy brain development, which can manifest as emotional and conduct problems in childhood and risk-taking and criminal behaviours in adulthood.

ACEs have been linked to factors that can increase the risk of offending, including substance and alcohol abuse, deprivation, poor educational attainment and mental health problems.

In a survey of prisoners in Scotland:

- 45% of adult prisoners reported they had been physically abused in their home as a child
- 61% of adult prisoners have been bullied at school or somewhere else
- 56% of young people in custody said they had been sworn at, humiliated, or put down by an adult in their home

However, it is important to remember that evidence does not prove causality. Not all children who experience multiple ACEs become victims or perpetrators of violence in adulthood – adversity is not destiny.

There are a range of protective factors that can buffer or mediate the effects of childhood adversity and trauma and help more children reach their full potential and reduce crime and victimisation.

The protective factors against offending include:

- Low levels of poverty and social deprivation
- Behaviour and coping mechanisms
- Positive attitudes and self-esteem
- Education/intelligence
- Positive peers and neighbourhood connections
- Trusted adult and effective parenting

We all have a role to play in supporting people in the justice system whose lives have been affected by ACEs in order to reduce reoffending and prevent intergenerational crime and victimisation.

*“What is predictable is also preventable”
(Dr R. Anda)*

ACEs: Adversity Is Not Destiny

Knowledge and awareness of the impact of adverse childhood experiences and trauma has been growing across Ayrshire and beyond for some time now but the links between adversity and the justice system are potentially less well understood.

The Community Justice Ayrshire (CJA) ‘ACEs: Start Where You Are and Do What You Can’ conference held in 2018 aimed to raise awareness of ACEs and trauma, identify good areas of practice taking place and act as a catalyst for future partnership working.

The planning group for the 2019 conference were keen to:

- Showcase a range of trauma-informed work that has developed across Ayrshire
- Highlight developments that have taken place since the conference last year
- Raise awareness of the impact of adversity on the justice system
- Learn about innovative approaches being used in courts, in restorative practices and across the justice system
- Hear about upcoming developments linked to the NHS Education Scotland Knowledge and Skills framework for Psychological Trauma
- Show how we can collectively work together to ensure adversity is not destiny

Hosted by Councillor Anthea Dickson, Chair of Community Justice Ayrshire, inputs were provided on the day by a range of speakers:



The Value of Kindness

**Ben Thurman, Policy and Development Officer,
Carnegie UK Trust**

Helped to set the scene for the day and provided information on how the Carnegie Trust has been working with North Ayrshire Council to promote 'the value of kindness'

Public Health: Putting the Science into Action

**Lynne McNiven, Interim Director of Public Health,
NHS Ayrshire & Arran**

Showed a short animation showcasing some of the achievements made in the last year and spoke of the links between adverse childhood experiences and poorer health outcomes



Trauma Informed Policing

**Chief Superintendent Paul Main, Police
Scotland**

Provided an overview of Ayrshire Division's journey towards becoming trauma informed and an insight into what being 'trauma informed' means to police officers and partners



Impact of ACE Awareness on a Curious Defence Lawyer

Iain Smith, Partner, Keegan Smith Defence Lawyers

Spoke about his efforts to raise awareness of adversity and trauma throughout the judiciary in Scotland and to encourage the courts to look at people through an ACEs lens



The Power of Empathy

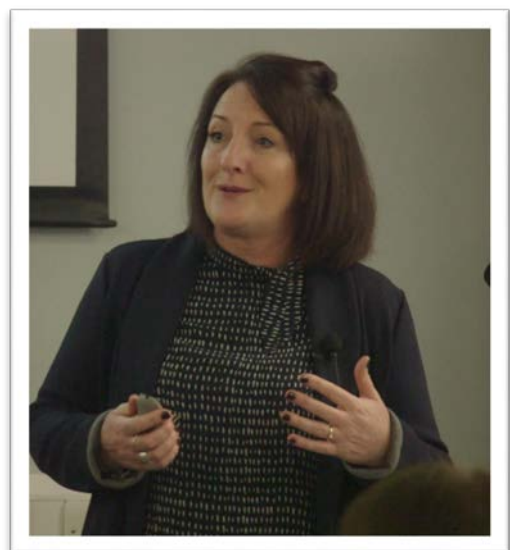
Jo Berry, Founder, Building Bridges for Peace

Discussed her work to resolve conflict around the world and how her life experiences led her to this. Jo advocates that empathy is the biggest weapon we have to end conflict

Transforming Psychological Trauma: Making it local and next steps for Ayrshire

Jennie Young, Principal Educator for Trauma, NHS Education for Scotland

Provided an update on the development of the 'Transforming Psychological Trauma' training framework and the rollout from a national perspective





***Transforming Psychological Trauma:
Making it local and next steps for Ayrshire***

**Dr. Laura Mitchell, Principal Clinical
Psychologist Pan-Ayrshire Addiction Services
and Transforming Psychological Trauma
Implementation Coordinator (Ayrshire)**

Spoke about her role in the local delivery of the
'Transforming Psychological Trauma' training
framework

Delegates were also provided with the opportunity to attend two of four different workshops on the day, highlighting some of the work taking place across Ayrshire to mitigate the impact of ACEs:

The Charlie Effect

Looking at trauma through the eyes of the children impacted by parental substance misuse. Attenders were encouraged to 'Come and feel the #Charlie effect for yourself'



Navigating Ayrshire - Meeting People Where They Are

The successful Violence Reduction Unit 'Navigator' project has recently been introduced at Crosshouse Hospital, Kilmarnock. This workshop looked at the role of the 'Navigators' and how they can improve outcomes for those who attend the emergency department in crisis



Strength in Recovery

Provided an insight into the work of the South Ayrshire Alcohol and Drug Partnership recovery community and the fantastic outcomes being achieved by peer mentors who are working with services to make recovery a reality for people traditionally regarded as 'hard to reach'



How a shared language keeps us moving forward – together

Looked at how Barnardo's South Ayrshire Families focus on maintaining a common approach to relationship-based practice across the life span, framing a conversation in a way that is accessible for all staff, parents, children and young people



Event Feedback

Over 120 people attended the conference. A short evaluation form was completed on the day and an evaluation form was circulated via SurveyMonkey after the conference. Some key points from the feedback are as follows:

1. After listening to all the speakers at the event, please state which presentation stood out the most and the reasons why?

*"Inspiring and refreshing.
Amazing to have lawyers on our
justice and trauma agenda"*

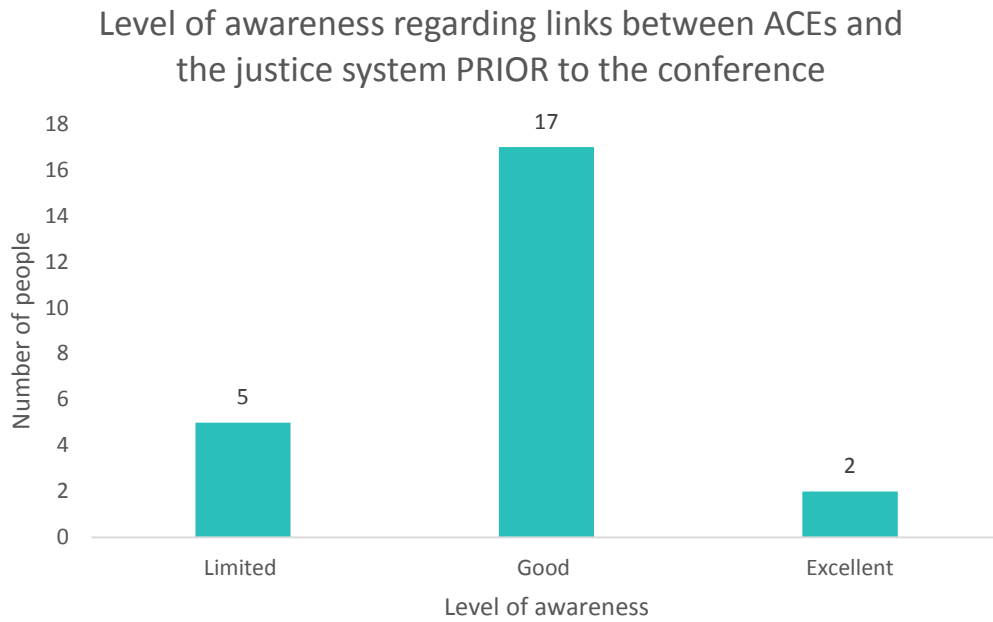
"I thought Paul Main's input in the morning was very good and his passion and commitment to making a positive difference to the lives of vulnerable children and young people came across strongly"

"They were all very good and brought together the different dimensions of ACEs and the justice system. I particularly liked the Ted Talks film and the workshops I attended were excellent"

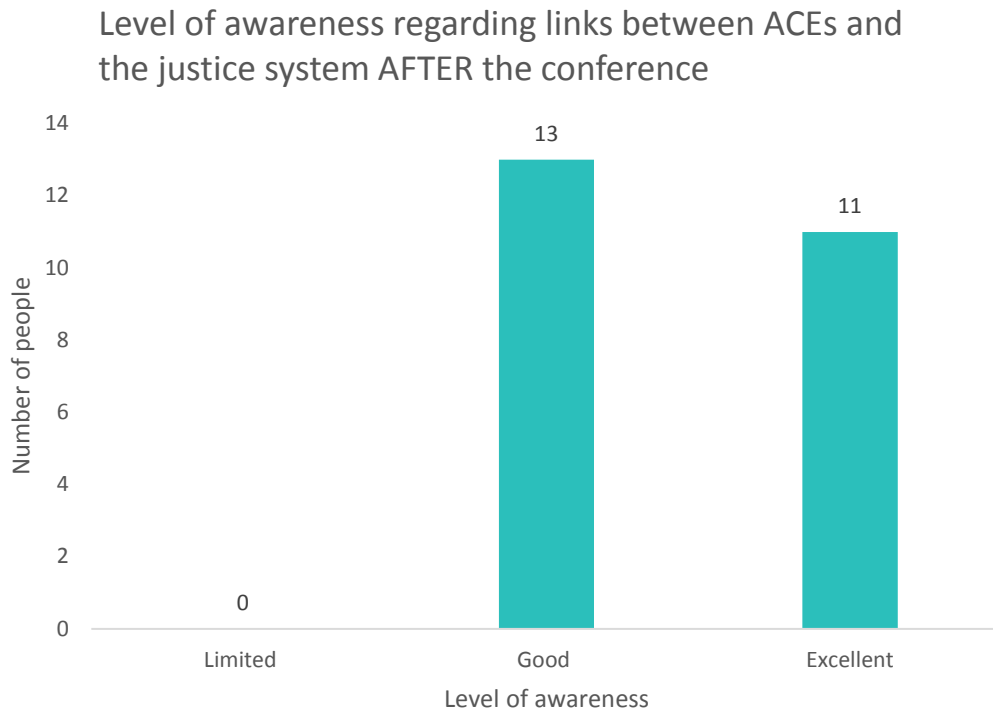
"I cannot separate the speakers, each were as excellent and thought-provoking as each other"

"Iain Smith for his passion and determination. Very emotive and genuine. He brought the audience with him by providing personal insights throughout. It was admirable and inspirational to see how much he cared for, and believed in, his clients. Living the term "they're not bad people, they just did bad things""

2. What was your level of awareness regarding the links between Adverse Childhood Experiences and the justice system prior to the conference?



3. After attending the conference, how would you now rate your awareness of the links between ACEs and the justice system?



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

"Gain information, network, improve understanding, and inform practice"

"To further develop my understanding of progression in trauma informed practice and to really change the way we respond to services"

"Better understanding of adverse childhood experiences and the impact this has on behaviours and the justice system"

"To learn more about the organisations and work across Ayrshire. Take away learning to help shape practice in own teams"

"Information, inspiration, the opportunity to network, meet and collaborate with a wide range of partners all working towards a cause they are so passionate about"

"Greater understanding and how it all connects together"

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

"A very thought-provoking day and at the very heart - be human, have empathy, consider approaches and language used when working for and with others"

"Absolutely, the speakers were inspirational. The workshops were fabulous – I could have done with more time in them. I think it's fabulous to see how much things are starting to change and how much more support we can now offer and engage with within our own localities"

"A good refresher and reminder of why I do the work I do. I'll go back to work ready to help people deal with their trauma in a more relational way. Reminded that often policy and demands of the job need to be looked at – are they really working for the service users"

"Was interesting to hear how far the agenda has progressed and how people are now using their awareness in their everyday working environment"

"It really did deliver through a series of insightful presentations of real situations. The theory can be read from any book, you can't achieve this level of insight without a looking glass into real situations by real people"

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

“Relationships are key to supporting others but are also important for my own self-care and ability to carry out my role to the best of my ability”

“Partnership, relationship, healing and kindness”

“How much Ayrshire is leading the way in developing a trauma/ACE aware nation. Changing our understanding of why people are the way they are and changing our response to give people a more helpful and healing recovery, and a purpose filled future”

“Be kind, be human, have empathy and keep this at the core of our work”

“Trauma needs to be better understood for true justice to be delivered. Justice isn’t always punishing the crime but repairing the damage that has led to criminal behaviour to prevent it happening again and opening, new, positive paths for survivors. Justice needs to be redefined”

“The importance of empathy and kindness, and how such a simple thing like asking the right questions – like ‘what happened to you’ and listening can make all the difference to an individual’s life”

“Procedural justice – new thinking. Distress behaviour rather than bad behaviour”

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

“Ensure staff realise the importance of support and that it is crucial the individuals are signposted to relevant services”

“Implementing more space for human kindness and compassion”

“Try and encourage people to be more understanding and less judgemental”

“Through our organisation we raise awareness of the impact of ACEs and trauma and we will continue to do so, in the hope that other services will also gain a greater understanding”

“Being flexible in approach to existing policies and procedures”

“Linking with people I met through the event and continuing to raise the profile of ACEs with my organisation”

8. In relation to ACEs, what do you think our next steps in Ayrshire should be?

“Keep up the momentum – ensure everyone is trauma informed – promote good practice – more networking events – continue to raise awareness”

“Rolling this out into communities and smaller organisations – everyone should be trauma informed and aware of the impact of ACEs”

“Appropriate training should be provided as standard, to enable all services to be trauma-informed”

“To continue raising awareness and gathering evidence of the difference it is making and ensure good practice across all agencies and services”

“A partnership commitment to identifying meaningful changes that are delivered in a trauma informed way to those individuals in crisis, in the justice system and recovery. This would have to be a full family approach”

“How we put our knowledge of ACEs into practice development”

9. If further events on trauma and adversity were to be held, which topics or issues would you like to hear about?

“More examples of good practice and how it is being used. The workshops were very interesting”

“Bullying in families”

“Where services have helped individuals and what service users feel worked for them”

“Updates on what has been implemented in other agencies, to consider adopting as good practice”

“Addiction, sex workers”

“How lives can be turned around when trauma is identified early. Real life examples”

“Good news stories”

“More on what can be done to intervene the justice system and provide effective interventions for people who need intensive support to heal. Look at the success of the CHARLIE programme, can there not be something like this as an alternative to custodial sentences? Surely people who are victims of crime heal better when they understand the crime and see change, reflection and understanding from the perpetrator”

“Like to see more practical presentations on how it has been embedded within services etc”

“Local case studies of working in a trauma informed way and the results including short, medium and long term”

10. Please provide any further feedback regarding the conference (e.g. speakers, layout, workshops, what was missing etc.)

"Vey well organised, good venue, delicious lunch and a good range of workshops and speakers. Well done!"

"I thought the event was excellent, but I did feel there were quite a lot of speakers in the afternoon session - I think it would have benefited from having a workshop in the morning and one in the afternoon"

"Loved it, loved it! Laughed, cried and laughed again. Brilliant and powerful"

"Excellent day, very informative, great workshops"

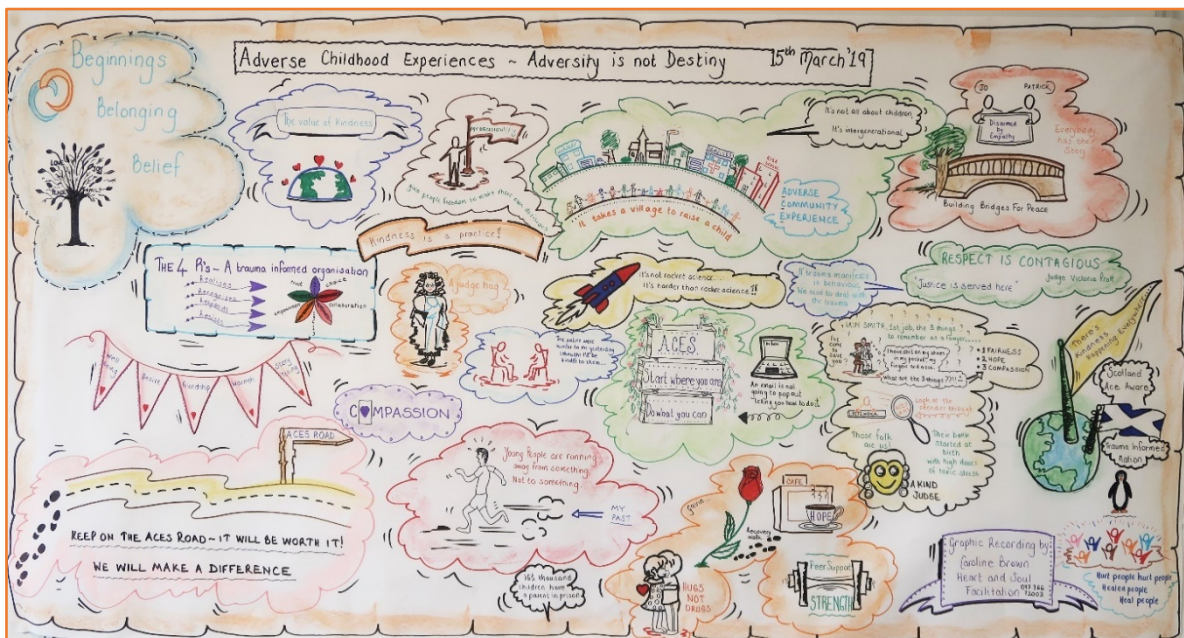
"I thought the vent was excellent, but I would have liked to experience the other two workshops and the ones I attended – Navigators and the Charlie Effect – were excellent"

"Thank you – was a really worthwhile day. Excellent speakers, venue and is always nice to have a lunch too!"

Next Steps

Following the conference, CJA will be releasing video clips of the presentations on the day. This will allow for further dissemination and provide teams with the opportunity to utilise the recordings in staff training sessions.

Further discussion on the feedback will take place and will be used to inform future work in this area.



Kirsty Baker
Planning and Performance Officer
Community Justice Ayrshire
May 2019