

2016 State of Our Children LA
Denise McCain-Tharnstrom's Closing Remarks & Next Steps

Please join me in thanking our moderator, JIM NEWTON for overseeing our dialogue with the inspiring group of panelists. We are truly fortunate to have such an experienced policy journalist contribute his expertise and time to oversee our conference.

Also let's once again thank our keynote speaker, UCLA's DR. NEAL HALFON, a nationally renowned researcher and academic in the field of toxic stress and childhood

And OUR PANELISTS were amazing! THEY WERE TRULY THE HEART OF OUR LEARNING EXPERIENCE! I'd like us to thank again:

PANEL 1-

DR. ASTRID HEGER, DR. ELISA NICHOLS, & CHAPLAIN JAVIER STAURING- the dynamic trio of incredible local expert practitioners who have each made significant impacts in the field of childhood trauma, even before the terms toxic stress and trauma informed care entered the language of their respective fields of practice, AND

PANEL 2- PAUL CURTIS, TED LEMPERT AND JILL HABIG- the exceptional state policy leaders who are guiding the conversation around the need to reform our early childcare, education, juvenile justice, foster care, and homeless system responses using a trauma informed lens: ...If you get a chance to speak with this panel be sure to give them a special thank you for joining us- Each of three leaders flew themselves to LA (at their own or their agency's expense) to join us today here today.

I will now try to summarize our morning and review our call to action

Opening Speaker: Dr. Halfon opened the morning by sharing with us the Brain Science of Stress, and the disruptive role of toxic stress in reducing memory, increasing the likelihood of dysfunctional behaviors health declines and cognitive deficits. He helped us understand:

- * The real need for interventions and practices that work to buffer our children from harms caused by trauma
- * The need to balance the risks with protective factors-
- * The need to create universal programs that emphasize the need to change environmental disparities if we are to protect these vulnerable children from the "earthquakes" in their lives.

Panel 1 Brought to us their experiences with children who have suffered from toxic stressors and shared with us intervention models.

- a) Dr. Heger, Director of the Violence Intervention Program focused our attention on Foster Youth- and the plight of those children who have been traumatized in households where the parent or caregiver is a substance abuser—and particularly on the plight of the children who suffer Fetal Alcohol Syndrome... She really drove home to us the role alcohol plays in creating toxic environments for children – including its role in exposing children to violence, crime, & sexual assaults, and leading to youth homelessness, and criminal behaviors.

Resilience rests on having someone who cares and Dr. Heger urged us to build the wealth of services and interventions needed strengthen to families if we are to heal and prevent the cycle of abuse and violence and to reduce the need to take a child from her/his family and place her in the child welfare system.

- b) Dr. Nichols, CEO of The Children's Clinic, emphasized that the health care system must offer quality trauma informed care for all- from the youngest patient to their families and forcibly made the case that prevention is better than intervention. She urged us to support programs that address the needs of our at risk communities. She helped us to understand that children and youth who have high ACES scores are not beyond hope... that they can be healed with the right family and individual interventions.

Referring to the success of The Children's Clinic Everychild Foundation Grant Project, she argued that all clinics and health providers should be trained in trauma informed interventions. She suggested that effective promotion of quality health interventions will require continually working to strengthen community partnerships amongst and between providers such as what they are doing in her clinics in Long Beach.

- c) Chaplain Javier Stauring, Healing Justice Coalition, shared with us the story of the young man who had killed another child but couldn't kill the family goat, and with this true story drew us a picture of the before and after life of a youth in the juvenile justice system and connected this system to the long-term adult prison pipeline. An advocate of restorative justice, he reminded us that Youth convicted of offense that land them in camps and jails to serve out their sentences have had a disproportionately high number of ACES. And the camps themselves are traumatic.

He encouraged us to connect the dots: support youth who have been caught in the systems, recognize that, given their age, they can have a different outcome and that we should be funding programs and supporting policy changes that incorporate trauma-informed treatment programs within the juvenile justice system.

Panel 2 educated us on how the use of a trauma-informed approach informs proposed systems changes when looking at youth homelessness, as well as the educational, justice and early childhood systems.

- a) Paul Curtis, E.D. of California Coalition for Youth, described for us the traumatic lives of homeless youth... fleeing domestic violence, abuse and neglect, parents who are chronic substance abusers, or parents who have tossed their children on the streets b/c they are LGBTQ, -- Sadly these youth have reason to believe that the desperate life on the street is safer than life at home...

He also reminded us that we should not be placing homeless youth under age 25 in with the chronically homeless. Youth are developmentally different than the older homeless population, they are often afraid of exploitation and abuse in the company of older homeless. And we should not want to introduce them to the chronic lifestyle.

Paul discussed the failure of the current system to recognize the unique vulnerability of homeless youth under the age of 25. He noted that the state of CA only funds 4 programs for homeless youth—indeed he told us that CA is the 2d worse in the country in sheltering homeless youth. He then urged us to support AB 1699 –A Bill designed to expand funding for Homeless Youth Emergency Needs and Transitional Living Programs.

- b) Ted Lempert, President of Children Now discussed proposed trauma informed systems changes being advocated today– He urged us to consider supporting expansion of broad supports for at-risk families including nurse home visitation programs, quality childcare, early identification and intervention programs, improved and accessible mental health services for children and their families, reduced criminalization of youth and trauma- informed educational supports. Arguing that making silo'd changes is not enough he recommended that we support AB1644, Early Metal Health Initiative, to fund educators/schools to help children adjust to difficulties including toxic stress.

Ted closed by calling for us to work together for those affected by childhood trauma with a special focus on those at-risk, or who are very young and those living in high stress environments.

(By the way, Ted has offered to send us an advance copy of Children NOW's new policy brief on Toxic Stress – we will send you the link!)

- c) Finally, Jill Habig, Special Counsel to Atty General Kamala Harris talked to us about the leadership role undertaken by the AG Office through its Bureau of Child Justice and Defending Childhood State Policy Initiative. The AG Office is encouraging a shift in both law enforcement and state level agencies to prevention. It was heartening to hear we have an Attorney General who encourages law enforcement to “prevent, identify and heal”- and whose office actively promotes a process designed for efficiency and equity. Jill’s discussion on Early Intervention Strategies, increased funding, improving data quality and pushing for the ability for statewide data- sharing are strategies we all can support at the local and state levels.

So What Is Today’s Action Plan?

Children’s Policy is simply put... Our Choices for Our Children.

And today we have been challenged to think about choices that impact children and youth who have suffered Toxic Stressors. We’ve also been challenged to consider systems change questions---The Tipping the Scale Game is right... Policy is about making difficult allocation choices, but these choices are often reflect policymakers’ responsiveness to citizens, funders and advocates who have made a case for change...

So what case did we make today?

First: It was clear from today’s remarks that ACES is not about shame and blamebut providing trauma informed care and interventions.

Second: We need to consider funding, policy and systemic changes using a trauma-informed lens.

Third: We need to engage our communities to work together to address health disparities and create health y environments for all of our children.

Fourth: We can’t afford to do nothing... as Dr. Shonkoff warned in the film clip Resilience- the awful power of toxic stress suffered in childhood is “THE MIND FORGETS BUT THE BODY DOES NOT”...

But fortunately, the body and brain want to heal... If the toxic stress stops and is replaced by practices that build resilience, the brain can slowly undo many of the stress-induced changes.

Fifth: Focus on Resiliency: Dr. Halfon told us at the beginning of this morning..... the way forward requires us to focus our attention on the Science of Toxic Stress AND the Science of RESILIENCE—

Dr. Nichols and Dr. Heger spoke of the need for community health and family practices capable of instituting resilience into the fabric of a child social and emotional development—so that they are buffered from toxic stress

Jill Habig & Javier Stauring also offered a roadmap towards building resilience using a restorative justice vehicle... to heal at-risk communities as well as reform institutional climates which foster inequities –

IT IS CLEAR THAT BUILDING RESILIENT CHILDREN, RESILIENT FAMILIES AND RESILIENT COMMUNITIES MUST BE OUR ULTIMATE GOAL.

I hope you all found the Evaluation Form on the left side of your white program folder.

* We hope you will fill this out-

* As you leave, there will be Everychild Public Policy Committee members standing near the back doors to collect the forms. There is also a box on the check-in table where you can deposit your evaluation.

And now, before I turn this over to our Founder, Jacqueline Caster to say goodbye, we have one final trailer to watch...

Also by Jamie Redford... the film Paper Tigers is a story of hope...and the power of Resilience....And how one school used a trauma-informed approach to heal and transform the lives of their students:.....Paper Tigers....