Long Lasting Effects of Childhood Trauma

by Gary Cavalier

It’s rare that the homeless folks we try to help share stories of their childhood. When they do, they’re usually so sad and terrifying that I couldn’t imagine enduring one day of what they went through. It’s heroic that they have survived into adulthood.

I was helping a man find a weekly apartment a few years ago when the manager gave us a second floor apartment. We walked up the stairs and I got to the door, but didn’t see him. I turned around to find him profusely sweating with a look of terror on his face, slowly inching his way along the inside wall with his hands outstretched, leaning on the wall and staying as far away from the outside railing as possible. I asked if he was afraid of heights, but it turned out his father had held him out over the railing as a toddler to punish him. Fortunately, we were able to get another small room on the first floor.

During my 35 years of working with the homeless, I have heard many similar shocking stories. The U.S. Government Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has new emergent research on how Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs) have impact throughout someone’s life.† According to the CDC, “Children with toxic stress live much of their lives in fight, flight or freeze mode. They respond to the world as a place of constant danger. With hormones and unable to function appropriately, they can’t focus on learning. They fall behind in school or fail to develop healthy relationships with peers or create supports to families, providing quality care, parenting skills, and intervening to lessen stress or highly traumatic experiences and may become toxic when there is prolonged results when a child experiences ACEs may become toxic when there is prolonged stress or highly traumatic experiences and the absence of a supportive, adult relationship.‡ “Researchers have found many of the most common adult life-threatening health conditions, including obesity, heart disease, alcoholism and drug use, are directly related to ACEs.”†

“Here is what we seek: a compassion that can stand in awe at what the poor have to carry rather than stand in judgment at how they carry it.” –Fr. Greg Boyle

It was enlightening for me to hear Fr. Greg Boyle speak at UNLV a few weeks ago and share the stories of recovery of L.A. gang members he has helped through the largest gang intervention program in the world. Most of the gang members had suffered tremendous trauma as children. Through his Homeboy and Homegirl Industries, Fr. Greg has helped many with his “Jobs not Jails” program and now they offer an intense therapy program to address those early childhood traumas.

In my work at the soup line and other projects, I do not excuse bad behavior, but having heard so many tragic childhood stories among the homeless and studying this research lead me to be more compassionate with those we serve. These children are born into our society and through no fault of their own suffer neglect, beatings and terror; then as adults, their traumas can lead to homelessness, incarceration and dysfunction.

Research has shown that there are things we can do as a community to build resiliency for children undergoing crisis. These include strengthening economic supports to families, providing quality care and education early in life, enhancing parenting skills, and intervening to lessen harms and prevent future risk.³ With community support, we can reduce the impact of ACEs among those suffering the consequences.

†Center for Disease Control and Prevention CDC.gov  ‡From the Fall 2019 article by Lance Cheslock of La Puente Homes in Alamosa, Colorado.  ¶From the Fall 2019 article by Lance Cheslock of La Puente Homes in Alamosa, Colorado.
Reach
by Robert Majors
Take me how I am
Imperfect to your plans
But deserving of your hand
I know it’s hard to reach it out
For fear that I may pull you down
or that you couldn’t pull me up
But the compassion is the touch
Where that leads is in the grey
The dirty rough where diamonds lay
All the faults that time has made
All the pleasant things I see
Are shared but not to keep
Unless you choose to take that seed
to cultivate all that it means
that purpose traces back to love
Back to the good in life to come
A hopeful act for what could grow
That every life has come to know
But some are harder to let go
and like my hand must be released
So that my hope too, will be free
free to grow and free to sink
Like the pulse my heart will beat
losing breath and breathing deep
Where each step is taking me
It is a trust that life will teach by the
Way each step is taking me

Campaign Nonviolence National Conference
Aug. 6 - 9, 2020 | Albuquerque, NM
Dolores Huerta, Richard Rohr, Martin Sheen, Frida Berrigan, John Dear, Erica Chenoweth, Rev. Lennox Yearwood, Jr., Roshi Joan Halifax and more.
paceebene.org/events
Sacred Peace Walk
Walk from Las Vegas, NV to the NNSS (Nevada Nuclear Test Site) April 4 - 10, 2020 (702) 646-4814 NevadaDesertExperience.org
Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast for the Homeless
Saturdays- April 11, May 9, June 13, July 11, Sept. 12
Soup Line Closed
August 5 - 15, 2020
Empty Bowl Benefit
March 14, 2020
No Camping Ordinance is the REAL Crime!
by Julia Occhiogrosso
In November 2019, the City of Las Vegas, amidst much opposition, passed a no camping ordinance. This ordinance does nothing to effectively address the housing crisis. It only serves to place the burden of anxiety and hassle on people who are already struggling to make it from day-to-day. As Gary discussed in his article, many of the people on the street suffer the consequences of early trauma. The criminalization of the homeless is a brutal policy that causes harm to people that are hurting already. In order for any intervention to have a sustainable and far reaching positive effect, it must start with a willingness to look thoroughly and empathetically at research and models that have made some inroads and invest resources in creating permanent housing and supportive services for the extremely low income.
This crisis did not arrive overnight. It is the result of decades of defunding affordable housing, mental health and other support services. It is from inflated housing prices and an unwillingness to increase a living wage.
It is time to stop blaming and punishing the victims of the failures of governmental

“Trident is the Auschwitz of Puget Sound”
- former Seattle Archbishop Raymond Hunthausen
On March 2, 2020, Gary Cavalier, Julia Occhiogrosso and eleven others were arrested at the gates of the Kitsap-Bangor Naval Base (Trident Nuclear Weapon Submarine Base) for briefly stopping traffic into the base. They were detained and released for “walking on the roadway where prohibited.”

Nuclear Stations of the Cross
On Good Friday, April 10, 10:30 a.m. at the Mercury Gate of the NNSS (former Nevada Nuclear Weapons Test Site) presented by the Las Vegas Catholic Worker, call (702) 647-0728 for more info and directions.

PLEASE JOIN US:
Wed.-Sat., 6:00 a.m.:
Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.
Wed.-Sat., 6:30 a.m.:
Breakfast served to 175-250 poor & homeless people.
Wed., 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.:
Hospitality Day, we invite 20 homeless folks home for showers, to wash clothes and for a great lunch.
Thurs., 9:00 - 10:00 a.m.:
Vigil for Peace: Thursdays in front of Federal Courthouse, 333 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
Thursday, 10:30 a.m.:
50 lunches taken to the homeless.
Second Sat. of the month:
Knights of Columbus Pancake Breakfast for the homeless.
Third Sat. of the month:
Deliver food boxes to homes in need.

500 W. Van Buren Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106-3039
(702) 647-0728 mail@lvcw.org www.lvcw.org

Raymond Hunthausen
(former Seattle Archbishop)

Robert Majors before arrest
and corporate establishments that have not lived up to the decency of investing in the well being of the most vulnerable ones in our society. This is the real crime.

On January 21, approximately 200 protesters gathered in front of city hall and then marched through the Fremont Street Experience to protest the city’s no camping ordinance. Robert Majors joined thirteen other protesters who were arrested for blocking the street as they set up a mock encampment to illustrate the injustice of the ordinance.

Police arrested Robert Majors for “walking on the roadway where prohibited.”