

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 their brains overloaded with stress 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 problems with teachers and principals because they are unable to trust adults. Some kids do all three. With despair, guilt and frustration pecking away at their psyches, they often find solace in food, alcohol, tobacco, drugs, inappropriate sex, and/or work and over-achievement. They don't regard these coping methods as problems. Consciously or unconsciously, they use them as solutions to escape from depression, anxiety, fear and shame."‡

From infancy to 18 years, some ACEs commonly occur, regardless of race, economic class, and geographic region; however there is a much higher prevalence among those living in poverty. While some stress in life is normal—and even necessary for development—the type of stress that



ARTWORK BY FRITZ EICHENBERG

Common Forms of ACEs†

(Adverse Childhood Events)

Experiencing one or more of these "events" can elevate stress to a toxic level in the mind and body of a child:

Abuse

Emotional abuse, Physical abuse

Sexual abuse

Household Challenges

Domestic violence, Substance abuse

Mental Illness, Incarcerated parent

Parental separation/divorce

Neglect

Emotional neglect, Physical neglect

4 or more ACEs lead to:

3x the levels of lung disease and adult smoking

11x the level of intravenous drug abuse

14x the number of suicide attempts

4x as likely to have begun intercourse by age 15

4.5x more likely to develop depression

2x the level of liver disease

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.† With community support, we can reduce the impact of ACEs among those suffering the consequences.

†Center for Disease Control and Prevention CDC.gov and acestoohigh.com ‡From the Fall 2019 *La Puente* 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

hands that I have seen

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 empathically 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



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.

“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.”



PHOTOS BY FELICE COHEN-JOPPA

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.
Peace Vigils at Los Alamos, NM
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

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.

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