

Health and Wellbeing Board

1 March 2019

Gateshead – An ACE Aware Council

Purpose of the report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the support of the Health and Wellbeing Board in promoting Gateshead as an ACE, Adverse Childhood Experiences, Aware Council so that the wider workforce and partners understand the significant impact of ACEs on the health and well-being of Gateshead's children and adults.

The first of the council's 5 pledges under the Making Gateshead a Place where Everyone Thrives is:

Put people and families at the heart of everything that we do

Therefore it is essential that increasing the awareness of ACEs and the negative impact they can have on the lives of our residents is central to the council's policy direction.

Background

2. A large number of children growing up in Gateshead will suffer Adverse Childhood Experiences at some point in their life. Generally, children will not be severely impacted by a single ACE but the more ACEs a child experiences the more likely it is that their lives will be negatively impacted in a range of ways. ACEs lead to childhood trauma and, without very strong resilience factors in a child's life to combat the trauma, it is likely to have a hugely negative impact on the health and well-being of a child and the healthy life expectancy of that child.
3. Dr Nadine Burke Harris' research in America highlights how the repeated stress of abuse, neglect and parents struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues has real, tangible effects on the development of the brain. This unfolds across a lifetime, to the point where those who have experienced high levels of trauma are at triple the risk of some significant health issues such as heart disease and lung cancer.
4. The Scottish and Welsh governments have been very proactive in highlighting the importance of ACEs on a child's health and well-being. However, there is a need to do more in England.
5. There are currently no national guidelines relating to how best to tackle ACEs. However, a parliamentary enquiry that considered evidence-based intervention has recently been published. The publication recommended:

- Improving knowledge about ACEs and their possible effects amongst professionals
- Encouraging the use of data to assess the impact of early intervention initiatives
- Using evidence to increase the chances of successful programme implementation.

Overview of ACEs

6. Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful events occurring in childhood including which lead to toxic stress in children. They can include:
 - domestic violence
 - parental abandonment through separation or divorce
 - a parent with a mental health condition
 - being the victim of abuse (physical, sexual and/or emotional)
 - being the victim of neglect (physical and emotional)
 - a member of the household being in prison
 - growing up in a household in which there are adults experiencing alcohol and drug use problems
 - growing up in poverty
 - bereavement

ACEs and Health Inequalities

7. Preventing ACEs should be seen within the wider context of tackling societal inequalities and in the context of Gateshead supporting our council ambition of making Gateshead a place where everyone thrives. While ACEs are found across the population, there is more risk of experiencing ACEs in areas of higher deprivation. Additionally, in areas of higher deprivation the population may have fewer resilience factors, such as financial security, good quality homes, strong family/friend networks, positive self-esteem, stronger mental and physical health.
8. ACEs have been found to have lifelong impacts on health and behaviour and they are relevant to all sectors and involve all of us in society. We all have a part to play in preventing adversity and raising awareness of ACEs. Resilient communities have an important role in action on ACEs.
9. An ACE survey with adults in Wales found that compared to people with no ACEs, those with 4 or more ACEs are more likely to:
 - have been in prison
 - develop heart disease
 - frequently visit the GP
 - develop type 2 diabetes
 - have committed violence in the last 12 months
 - have health-harming behaviours (high-risk drinking, smoking, drug use).
10. When children are exposed to adverse and stressful experiences, it can have a long-lasting impact on their ability to think, interact with others and on their learning.

11. ACEs should not be seen as someone's destiny. There is much that can be done to offer hope and build resilience in children, young people and adults who have experienced adversity in early life.

National Action

12. The Scottish Public Health Network produced a report 'Polishing the Diamonds – Addressing Adverse Childhood Experiences' in 2016 which summarised the research and set out a number of areas for action in Scotland.
13. The Scottish Government has also set out its commitment to preventing and mitigating ACEs. There is a Scottish ACEs Hub to progress national action on ACEs.
14. The ACE Hub, working with the Scottish Government and other partners is involved in action to:
 - raise awareness and understanding about ACEs
 - contribute to developing the evidence base on ACEs
 - develop policy and practice approaches to prevent ACEs and mitigate their negative impact

Proposal and/or Issues for consideration

15. In Lancashire and South Cumbria, a structured approach to ACEs has been developed as a framework to help improve population health. The pentagon model could be used to structure an approach to tackling ACEs across Gateshead

Prevent

Taking action to ensure that children are not exposed to ACEs by tackling the circumstances and environments which cause them.

Detect

Taking action to find children who are experiencing ACEs, and to identify adults who have been exposed to them in the past.

Protect

Taking action to reduce/mitigate the risk of adverse outcomes in children if they are exposed to ACEs.

Manage

Ensuring that if children are suffering from the effects of ACEs, they are able to access support services quickly and receive the best quality care.

Recover

Enabling ACE survivors to live healthy, happy, fulfilled lives, and supporting them to overcome the impact of their ACEs.

16. Designate Gateshead as an ACE aware council in which helping to reduce the incidence, and mitigating the impact, of ACEs is everyone's responsibility by:
 - preventing household adversity
 - supporting parents and families
 - building resilience in children and wider communities

- enquiring about ACEs routinely in your services to respond appropriately
- encouraging wider awareness and understanding about ACEs and their impact on health and behaviour
- using encounters with adults in services such as homelessness services, addiction, prison or maternity services, to also consider the impacts on their children or future children.

17. All partners are encouraged to adopt a commitment to raising awareness of ACEs and to accept shared responsibility for the above initially through the Local Safeguarding Children's Board, Gateshead Health and Care System Partnership and the Health and Well-being Board but extending to all partnership boards over time.

Communications Implications

18. There will be a need for extensive dissemination of information to seek the views of the council workforce, elected members of the council and all partners. Additionally, a broad training offer will need to be developed to ensure all staff and partners are well informed and invited to express their views on the proposal to raise awareness of ACEs. There will need to be strong links to the council's existing anti-poverty work and its Thrive agenda.

Recommendations

19. It is recommended that Gateshead become an ACE aware council, in support of its Thrive policy, and embarks on a journey to raise awareness of, and commitment from, all partners.

Consultees:

The following officers have been consulted on the preparation of this report:

Alice Wiseman – Director of Public Health
 Sir Paul Ennals - Independent chair LSCB
 Val Hall, Service Director, Early Help
 Steve Horne, Service Director, Learning and Schools
 Elaine Devaney, Service Director, Children and Families
 Scott Hall - D/Chief Superintendent, Northumbria Constabulary
 Lynn Wilson, Service Director, Joint Commissioning and Quality Assurance
 Chris Piercy - Director of Nursing CCG

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