

children without poverty (CWP) monthly newsletter: July 2008, ed. 27

Working locally (Calgary, Alberta) to stop the cycle of poverty for the children.

www.childrenwithoutpoverty.com

“When I pick up a hungry person from the streets, I give him rice and bread, and I have satisfied the hunger. But a person who is shut out, feels unwanted by society, unloved and terrified – how much more difficult is it to remove that hunger?”

You in the West have the spiritually poorest of the poor much more than you have the physically poor. Often among the rich are very spiritually poor people. I find it is easy to give a plate of rice to a hungry person, to furnish a bed to a person who has no bed, but to console or to remove the bitterness, anger, and loneliness that comes from being spiritually deprived, that takes a long time.”

Mother Teresa

How does your RESILIENCE keep you on a healthy path?

Mother Teresa eludes to how important resiliency is in our lives to keep us on a healthy path. Are your children on that healthy path? Are you? Is your community?

Resilience in life brings protection against what stress or catastrophe may be around the corner in your life. Building your resilience is like getting a Hepatitis shot before you travel – just in case. It's like the savings account with two months expenses for a rainy day. Wikipedia and the psychology discipline define **resilience** as

the positive capacity of people to cope with stress and catastrophe and resistance against future negative events.

Building individual resilience and family resilience is important to aid us with skills, resources, and hardiness for when we encounter significant adversity and trauma in our lives. It may be the difference between where you find yourself today, and if you reflect where you might have ended up in your past if you would have made that wrong decision at some point along the way. It can be what assists families in coping and moving out of homelessness or 'high risk' situations. It can also be what can prevent families from continuing to spiral downward into homelessness.

Look around yourself. Examine a tough situation (work, home, personal) what keeps you getting up in the morning and tackling that tough situation. Look at your past, how did you get through something. Do you feel more resilient than others? Do you feel others are more resilient than you? Does that difference impact how well you succeed or they succeed. Is it really a part of everything?

When I googled 'resilience', the topic is mostly located in the psychological realm, though I did find some application to environment and community resilience. But if resilience is a part of almost everything to assist us in succeeding – why didn't googling 'resilience' end up with all sorts of references to a lot of other topics? That seems to be what happens whenever I am looking for something else, I am inundated with pages of irrelevant reference web sites. The trick? Use Google Scholar, www.google scholar.com.

CHILDREN WITHOUT POVERTY A Foundation of Alberta will soon be a registered charity. The newsletter is aimed to educate people with facts and information so that they can make informed decisions around their own personal philanthropy, citizenship and social responsibilities.

children without poverty's Sustain a Family Program is based on the fundamentals of 'Building Family Resilience'. Which begs the question, how do we go about building our mental health, building our resilience – for today; for a rainy day; or for mentoring and showing others how to build their own Resilience?

Emmy Werner was one of the first scientists to use the term resilience in 1970s. She studied a cohort of children from Kauai (Hawaiian Islands). Kauai was quite poor and many of the children in the study grew up with alcoholic or mentally ill parents. Many of the parents were also out of work^A. Werner noted that of the children who grew up in these very bad situations, two-thirds exhibited destructive behaviors in their later teen years, such as chronic unemployment, substance abuse, and out-of-wedlock births (in case of teenage-girls). However one-third of these youngsters did not exhibit destructive behaviors. Werner called the latter group resilient^B. Resilient children and their families had traits that made them different from non-resilient children and families.

Being proactive and building resilience to give children another way to express themselves in our society is so important.

How can we build resilience? – Let's use an example of building resilience for a child

This is where the research is astounding and exhaustive and too large to cover off in three pages. I have chosen the most concise example to put in here to give you a taste of an approach. This section is reprinted from materials written by Big Brothers Big Sisters about Resilience and Mentoring.

1. **Foster a 'Resiliency Attitude'** – the attitude that 'your strengths are more powerful than your risks.' Communicate to the child that he/she has strengths and value, regardless of what he/she may have done in the past. "I see what's right with you" is an attitude that can instill a sense of self worth that is so important for a child to overcome adversity. Provide care and support for the child by showing confidence in them, trusting them and hence prove that they are worthy of a person's trust.
2. **Assess strengths and nurture them.** Focus on the strengths and attributes of the child. Identify these strengths and then reinforce and nurture them. Set up a 'resiliency chart' that documents 'problems/challenges' on one side and 'strengths/positive supports' on the other. These can be attitudes, behaviour, talents, personality traits, positive interests and capabilities. Brainstorm on the positive and then encourage the child to focus on these attributes.
3. **Build an environment that fosters resilience.** This involves three main strategies, in addition to the three components of the protective factors, (caring & support, high expectations, and participation).
 - a. Increase Bonding by encouraging connections between the child and resilience fostering adults (through involvement in any social activity such as sports, clubs, drama etc.)
 - b. Set Boundaries, by setting rules and consequences for breaking those rules. This develops a sense of stability and consistency and encourages a feeling of responsibility in the child.
 - c. Teach Life Skills, by encouraging cooperation, communication, healthy conflict resolution and stress management. Also resistance and assertiveness skills will help the child say NO in tempting situations, such as taking drugs, drinking, smoking or engaging in criminal activities.
4. **Be Consistent and Persistent** – do not give up on a child. Because resilience is not a constant – it will ebb and flow over time, it is crucial to deliver the resilience message consistently and persistently.

Next steps

If you haven't been able to relate so far or need further examples to put you in touch with this subject, then I leave you with some statistics on childhood violence. Take a look at these American statistics and go through in your mind how a resilient 12 year old could deal with a circumstance of violent confrontation at school vs. a child who is not as resilient. Do you have two

^A Werner, E.E. (1971). The children of Kauai: a longitudinal study from the prenatal period to age ten. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

^B Werner, E.E. (1982). Vulnerable but invincible: a longitudinal study of resilient children and youth. New York: McGraw-Hill



children in mind. If this concerns you, do your own googling to see how you can assist your children or neighborhood children in building their resilience.

Take the concept of resilience and apply it to a situation in your life. And ask yourself how do you foster an environment of resilience for those in your realm of influence (yourself; your partner; your family; your children; your neighborhood; your community; your city).

Did you know?

Bouncing back from today's stresses is one of the best life skills children and youth can develop.

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant forms of stress. (APA, The Road to Resilience, 2002)

- More than fifty percent of all school-associated violent deaths occurred during transition times during the school day - either at the beginning or end of the day or during lunch-time.¹
- Homicide is the leading cause of death among 15 to 24 year olds.¹
- In 2000, the juvenile male arrest rate for Violent Crime Index offenses was 4.2 times the rate for females.²
- 40% of youth have been concerned about a potentially violent classmate.³
- 71% of youth say they are interested in learning about the warning signs of violence.³
- A child will have viewed 8,000 murders and 100,000 other acts of television violence by the time they are 11 years old.⁴
- Young adults between the ages of 12 and 24 face the greatest risk of being a victim of violence.⁵
- One in twelve high-school students is threatened or injured with a weapon each year.⁵

¹ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control

² National Center for Juvenile Justice

³APA, Warning Signs of Youth Violence, 1998

⁴ National Television violence study

⁵ APA, Warning Signs of Youth Violence, 1999



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