Start your own Collective Impact Initiative to Prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences and Build Resilience in your Community

Prepared by Toward Common Ground
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What are Adverse Childhood Experiences?

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic or stressful experiences that may happen in a person's life before the age of 18.[1] Repeated activation of the stress response can lead to wear and tear on the body and increase the risk of stress-associated diseases in adulthood.[2,3]

The landmark Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study was one of the first to identify the link between early adversity and health outcomes later in life. Based on that study, ACEs were divided into ten categories that fall under three types (abuse, neglect, and household challenges).[1]

Due to our improved understanding of the brain and long-term effects of the toxic stress response, we now know early adversity is not limited to the ten ACEs originally identified by the ACE Study.[4,5] Stressors such as racism and discrimination, chronic poverty, and exposure to community violence can have the same wear-and-tear effect on the body.

Since the landmark ACEs study, additional research confirms:

- ACEs can increase the risk of negative health outcomes later in life, such as adult-onset chronic disease.[1]
- As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for negative outcomes.[1]
- ACEs are common and universal and can affect anyone, regardless of their gender, level of education, occupation, income, neighbourhood, and culture.[6,7]
- ACEs commonly happen together – if a person has one ACE, they are at risk for others.[8]
- Although ACEs affect people in all communities, research consistently suggests race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status can contribute to an increased risk of adversity.[9,10] Such risks must be understood in the context of structural and systemic inequities in policy, practice, and social norms that discriminate against and disadvantage certain groups of people.

Types of ACEs

Abuse
- Physical abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Sexual abuse

Neglect
- Physical neglect
- Emotional neglect

Household Challenges
- Substance use
- Mental illness
- Parental separation
- Incarceration
- Intimate partner violence

Other Adversity
- Bullying
- Community violence
- Natural disasters
- Refugee or wartime experiences
- Witnessing or experiencing acts of terrorism
- Racism and discrimination
- Chronic poverty

What is Resilience?

Resilience is a person's ability to successfully adapt to adversity and maintain their wellbeing.[11] Resilience is not an individual trait that someone has or doesn't have, and there is not one way to show resilience. Resilience can look different within individuals, and in different circumstances, contexts, and communities.[12] Although it is easier and cheaper to build resilience during childhood, it is never too late to build resilience.[13]

Science suggests resilience is a process that relies on our interactions with the people and environments that surround us.[12] Resilience is influenced by the accumulation of negative experiences (risk factors) and positive experiences (protective factors) over time. The connections we feel to family, friends, community, and culture are protective factors that work together to strengthen resilience and buffer the effects of risk factors like abuse, neglect, violence, and discrimination.[12]

Protective Factors[12]

- Nurturing and supportive relationships
- Structure and routine
- A powerful identity
- A sense of belonging and control
- Safety and support
- Physical wellbeing
- Financial wellbeing

There are many protective factors that promote resilience – while this list is not exhaustive, it is a good start.

What is Collective Impact?

"**Collective impact** is a form of collaboration which brings together different sectors to solve large complex problems".[14]

There are five conditions that support collective impact initiatives:[15]

- **Common agenda** – Participants have a common understanding of the "problem" (what do we want to change and why?) and agree on an approach to solving it (what will lead to the change we want?).
- **Shared measurement** – Participants agree on the ways that success will be measured and reported, and consistently apply these measures.
- **Mutually reinforcing activities** – All participants do not have to do the same things, but the actions of each participant must be coordinated with and support the actions of others as well as the overall goal of the initiative.
- **Continuous communication** – Continuous formal and informal communication between all participants is necessary to develop trust, respect, and equal representation within the group.
- **Backbone support** – A dedicated staff separate from the participating organizations to coordinate the initiative and provide ongoing support (e.g., logistics, facilitation, data collection, and reporting).

> ### Tip:
>
> Remember that collective impact is a means to an end. It is a framework to help us to achieve our goal(s) but should not become our main goal. Always stay focused on the issues you are trying to solve and the goal(s) you are working to achieve. Use collective impact as a tool to guide the action you take to address pressing issues and reach your goals.

Tools to Guide your Collective Impact Initiative

Logic Model

A **logic model** is "a visual illustration of a program's resources, activities and expected outcomes".[16] Logic models can be used to clarify and create a shared understanding about a ***program, service, or intervention's intent***, main activities, impact, and resources needed to support implementation. Logic models can also be used as the starting point for an evaluation plan and or a grant application.

A logic model often includes:

- Goal(s)
- Inputs
- Activities
- Audience
- Outputs
- Outcomes

> **Tip:**
>
> Check out Logic Model – A Planning and Evaluation Tool for a description and examples of the logic model components listed here.

Theory of Change

A **theory of change** is "a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context".[17] More simply put, a theory of change is how and why the world will be different because we took action. A theory of change is a tool that can be used to clarify and create a shared understanding about a ***collective impact initiative*** that is addressing a complex problem. Theories of change can also be used as the starting point for an evaluation plan and or a grant application.

A theory of change starts with a long-term outcome (or vision) and backward maps to identify the pre-conditions that are necessary for the long-term outcome to be achieved. A theory of change process may also include identifying shared "assumptions" about the pre-conditions that have been identified, as well as rationale to support the identified pre-conditions. Once a shared theory of change is developed, interventions and actions can be identified and prioritized.

> **Tip:**
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> A theory of change is not the same as a logic model and the terms are not interchangeable, but they can be used for the same purpose.

Strategic Plan

A **strategic plan** is both a roadmap and a guide for an organization or an initiative. A strategic plan should inform action and guide decisions about how time and resources are used. A strategic plan often also acts as a public document that tells community partners and interested stakeholders more about your organization or initiative.

A strategic plan is often made up of the following components:

- **Vision** – The "north star" or the long-term goal you hope to achieve.
- **Mission** – How you will achieve the vision.
- **Values** – The principles or ideals that underpin and guide your work.
- **Strategic directions** – The main "buckets" of your work or the priority areas that you will focus on.
- **Actions** – What you will do within each strategic direction to work toward your vision, through your mission.

> 💡 **Tip:**
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> Try to make your vision and mission as succinct and clear as possible. A long sentence or paragraph is hard to remember and therefore apply as you take action and make decisions.

The following are components of the Community Resilience Coalition of Guelph & Wellington's strategic plan.[18]

Vision: A resilient community that prevents and reduces the effects of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Mission: We work together with our community to decrease risk factors that impact health and wellbeing and increase protective factors to build resilience.

Strategic directions	Actions (Examples)
ACEs & Resilience-informed systems	Develop and maintain online training for human service providers.
ACEs & Resilience-informed parents and caregivers	Offer learning opportunities (e.g., webinars) and develop resources for parents and caregivers.
ACEs & Resilience-informed communities	Host Community Resilience Summit.
Evaluate the impact of the ACEs Coalition	Conduct an evaluation for all actions and interventions.

Terms of Reference

A **terms of reference** is a document that outlines how you will work together to implement your strategic plan and take action. The development of a terms of reference provides an opportunity to think through your "rules of engagement" before an issue or tough decision arises. It also provides new partners with an overview of how you work together.

Terms of reference often include:

- **Purpose of your initiative**.
- **Roles and responsibilities** – What is expected of members, chairpersons, etc.?
- **Committee structure** – What type of committee is this (e.g., steering versus advisory?). How are sub-committees and work groups structured?
- **Decision making** – How are decisions made?
- **Conflict of interest** – What is a conflict of interest? What do you do if you have a conflict of interest?
- **Confidentiality** – What and when are issues considered confidential?
- **Meeting structure** – How often do you meet and for how long? Are there any set agenda items or other flow to meetings that needs to be documented?
- **Terms of membership** – Membership eligibility, expectations, commitment, and length of term.
- **New members** – How are new members recruited and/or how do they express interest? How are new members on-boarded?
- **Membership list** – Who are the current members of the committee?

> ## 💡 Tip:
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> When developing a terms of reference, start with a draft for your group to review. If you don't start with something, the process can take a very long time and you may lose momentum or excitement about the work you are doing.

Evaluation Plan

An **evaluation plan** describes how you will monitor and evaluate your initiative to determine if you are achieving your goals. Your evaluation plan may focus on measuring or understanding process and/or outcomes. Process evaluation looks at whether you have implemented activities as planned. Outcome evaluation looks at whether you have achieved your intended outcomes.[19]

An evaluation plan often includes:[20]

- **Goal** – The purpose of the evaluation (different than the goal of the initiative or program).
- **Evaluation questions** – Specific questions that you want to answer through your evaluation.
- **Indicators** – Specific, measurable accomplishments or changes that show the progress made toward achieving a specific activity or outcome of your initiative.
- **Methods** – How you will collect the data for your indicators (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus groups, secondary data sources).
- **Analysis and interpretation** – How you will analyze the data and who will be involved in the interpretation of findings.
- **Knowledge mobilization** – The strategy for sharing results and developing recommendations.

> 💡 **Tip:**
>
> Develop your logic model or theory of change first and use it to guide your evaluation plan.

Here is an example of an evaluation plan for an initiative aimed at increasing social connections within a neighbourhood by planting a communal garden.

Goals:
1) Assess whether participating in the communal garden led to an increase in social connections.
2) Identify ways to increase opportunities for connection.

Evaluation questions:
- What types of social connections are made between garden participants?
- What are the factors that led to social connections being made?
- What actions would increase opportunities for garden participants to connect?

Indicators:
- Self-reported connections made between garden participants
- Self-reported factors that supported the connection between participants
- Garden participants' suggestions to increase opportunities for connection

Methods:
- Interviews with garden participants

WHAT

What is the "problem" you are trying to solve?

What evidence do you have that this is a problem?

WHO

Who is the (most) impacted by this problem?

Who needs to inform your understanding of the problem and identification of solutions?

BARRIERS

What might make it difficult to address the problem?

ENABLERS

What might help you to address the problem?

HOW

How will you address the problem? What is your solution?

How do you know it will work?

IMPACT

What impact do you hope to see if you address this problem?

PLAN

Where will you start?

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