

# Building Flourishing Communities Update

## Why is this important?

[Science tells us](#) that the root cause of the leading social, emotional and health challenges are due to the [“toxic stress”](#) too many children experience growing up.

Violence, drug and alcohol abuse and/or lack of a nurturing adult in their life, leave their imprint on the child’s developing brain in a [variety of ways](#).

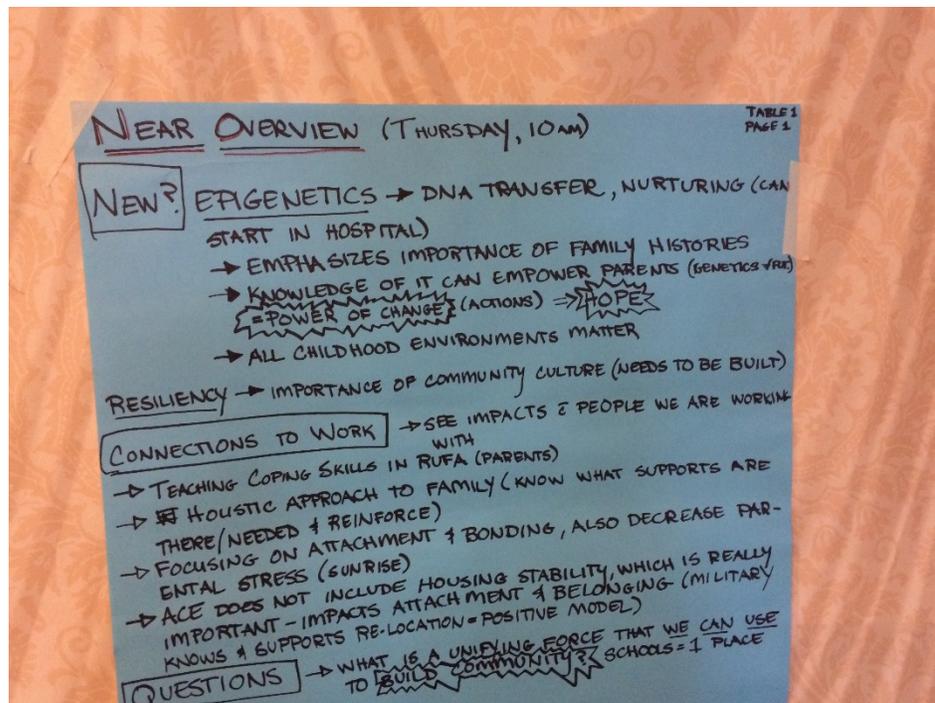
These children are more likely to have difficulty managing their emotions, making friends and succeeding in school. As they grow, they are more likely to use drugs and alcohol, have unprotected sex, and drop out of school.

As adults, they are more likely to have any of a range of chronic diseases.

In early December of 2016, 300 people from across Vermont gathered at the Lake Morey Resort in Fairlee to learn about the [Self-Healing Communities Model](#). Social workers, mental health counselors, teachers, school nurses, doctors, nurses, law enforcement, early childhood experts of all disciplines, and lawmakers are just some of the professions that were represented.

## Implementing Self-Healing to Reach Flourishing

While knowledge about the life-long impacts of early childhood adversity has become widespread in Vermont, evidence-informed, public health methods of preventing such adversity have been lacking.



A page of notes from one group of participants at the Building Flourishing Communities Summit. All notes are being compiled into a single document, which every Summit attendee will receive.

## What are ACEs?

The [Adverse Childhood Experiences](#) concept comes from a landmark study published in 1998, that demonstrated the correlation between a burden of early childhood adversity and later risky behavior and poor health outcomes.

Over 17,000 people took part in the study. They were mostly white, college-educated and middle- to upper-middle class.

More than half of the study participants reported experiencing at least one type of early adversity, such as emotional or physical abuse or neglect, sexual abuse, seeing the mother battered, divorce of parents, living with a substance abuser or a mentally ill family member, or having a family member incarcerated. One quarter reported two or more.

As the number of types of adversity reported increased, the researchers found that the likelihood of adult health risk behaviors, such as substance abuse, unprotected sex and development of a broad range of chronic diseases also increased.

For data on the number of ACEs common in Vermont, see the box at right.

Work to prevent ACEs, intervene and provide treatment has a long history in Vermont, and direct services remain critically important to respond to the needs created by adversity. There are many effective, successful programs to intervene, educate parents (which can prevent the “handing-down” of trauma in the family), and provide treatment. Such services do not, however, stem the flow of people into those services across Vermont’s entire population. To prevent early childhood adversity across the entire population, we need a public health approach to changing the causal factors that support high levels of trauma and lead to people needing assistance. The Self-Healing Communities Model, with more than 15 years of impressive outcomes and return-on-investment data, provides such a preventive, health-promotion approach.

Since the summit, a small “think tank” has been convened to plan for implementation. The Building Flourishing Communities Think Tank (BFC Think Tank) includes representatives from Building Bright Future, the Vermont Food Bank, an Accountable Community for Health, philanthropic foundations, a community mental health agency, a community justice center and Agency of Human Services staff from Integrating Family Services and the Departments of Mental Health and Children & Families. Our first tasks:

1. Maintain enthusiasm statewide while implementing
  - a. Demonstrate how BFC ties into work underway
2. Create a Steering Committee
3. Identify a “backbone” agency that can administer funds

The BFC Think Tank has met once. We’ll meet again in March, but the group has agreed to read materials and do some work via email in the interim.

## Legislative Interest

In other news, there is strong interest in the legislature in the ACEs issue. Rep. George Till (Chittenden-3) of Jericho, has introduced [H. 23](#), which, as written, would require family wellness coaching training for school nurses, training in ACEs concepts for pre-kindergarten teachers, trauma-informed training in Vermont’s schools, and provide trauma-informed programs for children of incarcerated parents. The bill has 18 co-sponsors and has been assigned to the House Human Services committee.

