



Pinetree Institute initiative focuses on childhood trauma

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PORTSMOUTH -- Most people have heard the adage that an abused child will themselves become an abuser to their own families, but the reality goes much deeper than that, and the staff of Pinetree Institute in Eliot, Maine has decided to take on the impacts of childhood trauma and the damage it causes as the children become adults.

The Pinetree Resilience Conference, held Friday in Portsmouth brought together members of health care, educators, social services, addiction services, law enforcement and community and business leaders to outline a three-year-initiative they are launching, and to seek a buy-in from all members of the community.

Two keynote speakers, Dr. Robert Anda and Laura Porter spoke about a study done on the effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the trauma care needed to stop the cycles of abuse and trauma that create changes in how children develop, leading to physical, mental and behavioral problems as the children become adults.

“Those abuses really do tend to be carried on, said Larry McCullough, executive director of the Pinetree Institute.

According to their website, Pinetree Institute is undertaking a “major initiative focused on Community-based Resilience and Trauma-Informed Care. Utilizing research from the CDC-Kaiser study of Adverse Childhood Experiences and data collected from the implementation of trauma-informed and resilience-building initiatives around the country, Pinetree Institute is implementing a program of community-wide awareness and training. Through direct outreach to community leaders, town management, law enforcement, health professionals,

and educators, this endeavor will address the crisis of ACEs and their role in a variety of societal challenges, including the widespread opioid epidemic, in the NH Seacoast/York County, ME region.

“Contributing factors to ACEs in adult experiences are substance abuse, addictions, suicide and domestic violence,” said McCullough. “By addressing these problems on a community-wide basis, we can create healthier communities. Today we learned about one state who implemented this education early in the process and have save \$1.4 billion in services, simply by addressing the root causes, ACEs.”

The key is education, McCullough said, using the 20-year-campaign to get people to quit or never start smoking as an example.

“People did not start decreasing the smoking rates until they began to learn how bad it is for people,” McCullough said. “There is a clear correlation between ACEs and addiction. The opioid problem here is one of our main drivers to beginning this initiative.”

Anda said the study showed a clear connection between ACEs and the health and social issues of communities in countries across the world and here in America.

“The more ACEs a family has to deal with, the more they pile up,” Anda said.

“The stress can affect the way the brain grows and develops. It explains the many ranging health and emotional issues we see in society today. We see it in schools. It leads to addiction. It is a pathway to health problems like heart disease , diabetes and cancer. Our hope is that if we can reduce ACEs from one generation to the next, we can see if the problems start to go away and our community health gets better.”

In order to do that, Anda said it becomes necessary to teach the entire community what ACEs are and how they affect health.

So, how is that accomplished?

Porter said they have learned that face to face is the best method.

“Rob and I train trainers, who work in their own areas to educate the community,” Porter said.

McCullough said that is the first role Pinetree will take. They are bringing in the master trainers and they are going to train more trainers, until the Seacoast is awash in people willing to educate more people until communities are all on board.

“There are a lot of agencies out there, doing great work,” said McCullough. “We want to link them all with a common goal.”

Anda said there is no one target group for the education. It can be young adults who are parenting small children. It can be high school students, who are the next generation of parents.

Mark Carney, a high school resource officer from Kennebunk, Maine, said he loved the program and plans to try to bring back some type of program for his students.

“I will bring it back to the town and see where we can get involved,” said Carney. “I am glad I came. I learned a lot about the effect of trauma on our children, and got some ideas of a way to approach this.”

Phyllis Macky, a licensed marriage and family counselor in Portsmouth, attended the program and said she works with a lot of trauma in her practice.

“I think the more people can know about, and understand trauma, the better for families,” said Macky. “The idea of educating a community, the concept of the ACE framework is wonderful.”

McCullough said they plan to base their initiative on a multi-state model already being developed.

“Over the three-years, we will saturate our communities with knowledge,” he said.