



Lessons Learned in Washington State

Six key themes emerged from Lowell Johnson & Emily Clary's interviews with champions of the Washington State ACEs Response & are highlighted in the free webinar [Reducing ACEs & Building Resilience in Washington State](#). Quotes in this handout & additional reflections from leaders of the Washington State ACEs Response can be found in Emily Clary's paper [Walla Walla Washington's Community Response to Adverse Childhood Experiences](#).

1. An ACEs Response Requires a Paradigm Shift



Developing a community-wide effort to reduce ACEs is slow work and requires a change in our mental models. We must shift our thinking about how we approach behavior from a punitive lens ("What's wrong with you?") to a trauma-informed lens ("What happened to you?").

The typical response is 'I can't do anything more.' Well, part of the education on that kind of an answer is that we are not asking you to do anything more. We are asking you to understand the framework of this [trauma-informed] approach because everything else you do should be from that framework. - Teri Barila

2. Begin by Building Trust

Sometimes it can be most effective to "slow down" and focus on relationship building before you can "speed up" and work on action steps and strategies. Take time to build trust when working with those who have been most affected by ACEs.



When you are working with very hurt and vulnerable people, building trust needs to come before you can shove down their throat so much information that they back away from it. If you do a little bit at a time, build the trust, take them for a cup of coffee, go for a walk or something, then you are building that trust with them... Then they can see that you mean business and that you really want to be there to support them. - Annett Bovent

3. Nurture, Expand & Share Leadership



Parents, community members, practitioners, and policymakers all have a role to play as leaders of an ACEs Response. Diverse perspectives and leadership of an ACEs Response will create a stronger community-wide response. Recognize and honor the wisdom that individuals most affected by ACEs contribute, and encourage their leadership in an ACEs Response.

Nurture the most dedicated leaders of an ACEs Response, as they will energize and sustain the movement.

We didn't find that there was a particular combination of sectors that needed to be present. There were all different combinations of sectors sitting at the table across the state and all different combinations of different forms. It didn't seem to be so critical about which combination, but it was critical that there be leadership that held different perspectives from each other. - Laura Porter

In every case where we had really amazing results there was one person or a very small group of people - maybe three or four - that were just relentlessly committed to improving the children's lives and families' lives - and it was not a job to those people - it was a life mission or a calling or they might describe it in different ways, but that sort of unending commitment. So that is essential and it will emerge on its own. It's not like you can totally grow it, but you can notice it and pay attention when it starts showing up... - Laura Porter

4. Communicate Strategically about ACEs & Resilience

Strategies that were used at the local and state level to promote an ACEs Response and develop a common agenda around ACEs & resilience in Washington State include:



a. Saturating the community with education about ACEs and allowing for **multiple “doses” or exposures**

We get on the agenda in lots of different places and talk about what we are doing... We also are busy writing op-ed pieces for the newspaper and we have met with the editorial staff with the newspaper and have gotten their buy-in on this. Those are a lot of the things we do – just getting up and letting people know. – Stan Ledington

b. Ensuring that **parents and individuals most affected by ACEs understand** the health implications of ACEs, and the related brain development and resilience research that provides a message of hope

Everybody has a piece of this puzzle and we are not going to have it work if people are walking around with one piece of the puzzle... It truly does take a community-wide response, including every single parent. – Teri Barila

c. **Customizing the message** and helping different sectors and community members recognize how they can support a community-wide ACEs Response within their sphere of influence

[The Chamber of Commerce] didn't realize that this impacted their staff – that this impacted people coming in late for work, and their stakeholders, even their donors or investors also have ACEs – so, this is broader than just the context of social services, and especially children. – Rick Griffin

d. **Educating policymakers** about ACEs to sustain this work over time

Our best years had a strong champion in two out of the three offices [in the Governor's Office, the State Senate, and the State House of Representatives] ... We tried at every turn to make sure to have 2/3 of those groups sort of covered in terms of an internal voice that understood our work and could stand up inside of their caucus and really talk about it. - Laura Porter

5. Evaluate & Reflect on Progress



Qualitative and quantitative evaluation can highlight the value of investing in a community or statewide ACEs Response, enhance buy-in from funders, and increase the credibility of the effort. When developing an ACEs Response, outline a theory of change and identify evaluation measures early in the process so you can begin collecting data and tracking progress.

Reflection on progress can guide community action and strategies, and inform when modifications are needed.

Begin with the end in mind. Target a particular community goal, identify community-change strategies appropriate to that goal, and then align the community's collaborative network and collective capacity to support those strategies. – Peter Pecora

6. Celebrate Success

Reducing ACEs and building protective factors in a community requires a multi-generational approach and will take time to achieve. It is important to celebrate successes along the way!



If we want to deliver some quick wins to get people really excited, then we have to strategically design early work in a way where at least some of the measurable kinds of things could reasonably occur within three or four years - but we don't want to limit our work to only that because we will not get the longer term, bigger outcomes we are aiming for. – Laura Porter