

Wednesday, December 30, 2020  
For Immediate Release

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### **Childhood Inequities, Neglect, Abuse Hidden in Pandemic** *CCC&Y reveals how intentional actions strengthen lives, families, communities*

Those in the social service industry are worried about our families. Coconino Coalition for Children and Youth (CCC&Y) Executive Director Virginia Watahomigie says isolation, depression and anxiety – all conditions that can be made worse by the pandemic – are increasingly having a negative effect on children in Arizona, particularly in rural areas where resources are less available than in larger cities and distances to travel for support are far greater. She’s encouraging individuals and communities to resolve to make a difference in children’s lives in the New Year.

“Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) increase the chances for children to grow up with addiction and substance abuse problems, chronic health and mental health issues and other negative outcomes later in life including violence and criminal behavior,” she says. “But much can be done to counter the impact of ACEs and promote resilience.”

A decades-long study that started in 1955 on Kauai, Hawaii, identified protective factors that help buffer against adversity and may have more of a long-term impact than any one risk factor. Researchers identified pathways for how resiliency is developed and offered three major categories that make a difference in children’s lives: 1. Internal disposition factors such as intelligence and temperament; 2. Connections with family and other caring adults; and, 3. External groups or systems that reward competence and provide a sense of coherence. According to the study, all three lead to positive responses from those around the child.

“Self-healing communities are important for all of us,” said Flagstaff attorney and newly elected District 1 Coconino County Supervisor Patrice Horstman. “We all see the effects of childhood trauma. It’s a huge cost to our communities when you consider chronic health and mental health problems, addiction and substance abuse. We see a higher percentage of poverty and teenage suicides in Coconino County than the national average. Poverty, racism, unaddressed Adverse Childhood Experiences and marginalized populations all add to traumas we see here.”

Horstman, who is a member of the CCC&Y, has participated in many of the organization’s trainings and volunteers with the Arizona Cactus-Pine Girl Scouts, adds, “Being that caring neighbor or adult, promoting equity and equality in the community, possessing a cultural awareness and acceptance – all of these play a role in developing a child’s self-worth and building a resilient, caring and healing community.”

Former Flagstaff Unified School District Board member and teacher Julianne Hartzell, a CCC&Y volunteer, points to the CCC&Y website for resources and encourages community members to donate, which enables the non-profit organization to bring trauma awareness training to more schools. She also suggests, “When you see children, smile. Compliment them. Ask how they’re doing. It’s simple. Wouldn’t you like someone to smile at you and say, ‘Hey, you’re doing a great job!’”

Watahomigie imagines future communities in which the effects of childhood trauma are clearly understood, the impact of inequitable experience is acknowledged and people are aligned toward creating access to assets and protective factors that support positive life outcomes.

CCC&Y is offering a free live training at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, Jan. 27, via Zoom. “This training will explore the roadmap to creating change at the community and system level by using the findings of both leadership research and today’s thought leaders,” said Watahomigie. To register or to learn more, visit [coconinokids.org](http://coconinokids.org). Webinars can be found under the prevention tab.

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**Photo caption:**

Studies reveal that having caring, involved adults in children’s lives helps them build protective factors. Coconino County Supervisor Patrice Horstman, shown here in the back row on the right before the pandemic, is one of many Northern Arizona women who volunteers her time with Girl Scouts.