1. Issue Brief, Sept. 2019


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Impacts
The effects of poverty and trauma cascade: If one lives in poverty, the likelihood of encountering trauma that exacerbates the poverty risks. Equally, if one experiences trauma, especially during childhood and the years of the greatest brain development, the incidence of poverty also rises. In other words, the two experiences frequently intertwine and produce outcomes that result in higher rates of mental and physical health problems that ultimately burden the economy through stresses on the health care, government, and criminal justice systems. These systemic woes then become community woes with taxpayers, ultimately financing the cycle.

Addressing the Problem

Trauma-Informed Continuum
Trauma Aware: One’s first introduction to the concepts
Trauma Sensitive: Recognizing the signs of trauma
Trauma Responsive: Mobilizing and equipping stakeholders to respond to trauma
Trauma Informed: A full understanding of how to help individuals overcome trauma with a holistic, organization-wide cultural approach that informs all policies

The Language
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs): Traumatic or disruptive events that happen in childhood. The term springs from the CDC/Kaiser Permanente study of more than 17,000 subjects published in 1998 that looked at 10 categories of ACEs and their impact on subjects’ future health and success, including physical and emotional neglect; physical, verbal, and sexual abuse; parental abandonment; parent mental illness or drug use; an imprisoned family member; or parental death, among others.

Generational Poverty: When two or more generations of a family have lived in poverty.

Situational Poverty: The brief experience of a family living below the poverty line due to an economic event such as job loss.

Toxic Stress: Stress that stems from prolonged exposure to an event, such as illness, which can rise during times of fear, crisis, and grief – and has been linked to the concepts of developing resilient strategies propels the work forward.

In USD 308, Rick Kraus, assistant superintendent of human resources, said the district sits in the “early stages” of a four-phase strategic continuum in which most 308 staff members possess a knowledge of the trauma-informed movement’s concepts and are working to implement strategies for resilience.

For nearly two years, Kraus and Lewis-Pankratz have spearheaded an effort dedicated to helping schools and organizations move further along that four-stage continuum to become fully trauma informed. Residence Reno County, composed of organizations and community members, draws 20-25 participants to monthly meetings and maintains an email list of about 120. The group acknowledges the larger social and economic impact of unaddressed trauma on communities.

Recently, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment did a survey,” Kraus said. “In Reno County, about 20% said they don’t feel mentally or physically well at least 14 days each month. This has far reaching implications for all employers and organizations across the county. The CDC estimates depression to cause 200 million lost workdays each year at a cost to employers of $17 to $44 billion.”

At ESSENDACK, the energy generated by the positive social impact of developing resilient strategies propels the work forward.

“Watching this movement happen – there is implementation inside of school systems for all ages of kids,” said Lewis-Pankratz, “and the outcomes for this are decreased suspensions and expulsions, increased graduation, reduction in suicides, math and reading go up, teacher sick days go down, teacher well being increases to where teachers are saying they feel hopeful about coming to work again. It’s powerful.”

Future Story
For Rose, 35, and her husband, Therón, poverty was what they knew. The couple earned $420 a month between the two of them during their first years of marriage.

By the time Rose stood in line at the backpack giveaway 16 years later, the couple and their four children had weathered layoffs and bouts of physically severe and financially debilitating health problems and had “hit a point where we just couldn’t grow anymore, no matter what we tried, and just weren’t making progress.”

When Rose eventually joined Circles of Hope, she gained not only the budgeting knowledge she sought but also a new support network, increased ties to her community, and tools to address social and emotional barriers that stemmed from a childhood of trauma.

The first thing she learned, Rose said, was “being able to see what a healthy relationship looks like.”

Poverty and trauma are often rooted in the generations. Rose, through her Circles education and ACEs assessment, can now more clearly see those connections in her life. She now pondered if a childhood of health and learning problems, economic hardship, and being let down by those she trusted contributed to the health problems she has faced as an adult.

“The big piece for me was understanding why things happened the way they did; how I acted,” she said. “I tried to put that blame aside and look at it with no emotion as if it wasn’t me and find that understanding of why I was in that situation, why did people fail me.”

With the support she found in Circles came an improved sense of self-worth and confidence: “The longer I stick with it, I think relationships is the biggest piece.”

For Rose, the journey has been both difficult and hopeful. Today the couple live in a two-bedroom trailer on a half acre of land. Rose has earned a degree in psychology and is working toward future opportunities in social work.

Next, the couple plans to build a house on their property in Reno County. To that end, in the summer of 2019, she became an ally with Ministry, and in the fall of 2019, she became a Hope Coach with Ministry. Rose knows that her future story will also include helping others in poverty and trauma achieve theirs. To that end, in the summer of 2019, she became the coordinator for the Hutchinson chapter of Circles of Hope. And when she feels ready, she will pursue another aspiration.

“My ultimate goal is to become an Ally.”

For Rebecca Lewis-Pankratz, ESSDACK’s poverty resolution and trauma-informed representative, the exciting stories they are about to sign to officially purchase their first home on June 21, 2019.

Having finally crossed the federal poverty threshold, the Rose’s next income goal sits $58,000 away. In the meantime, they continue tucking off milestones on their journey toward what Circles calls their “future story,” which had them laugh a little openly might lack like. Along with the income goals and whittling down medical debt, they reached their next big moment: home ownership. The couple closed on their first home June 18, 2019.

And now after her Circles experience, a deep connection resides within Rose that her future story will also include helping others in poverty and trauma achieve theirs. To that end, in the summer of 2019, she became the coordinator for the Hutchinson chapter of Circles of Hope. And when she feels ready, she will pursue another aspiration.

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"The emerging trauma informed movement seeks to educate school districts, employers, and other organizations about ACEs and help them develop practices that foster resilience. In collaboration with ESSDACK, Reno County school district continues conversations about effective methods in supporting children who exhibit behaviors stemming from trauma and the subsequent prolonged exposure to elevated levels of the stress hormone cortisol, which can lead to a variety of physical and mental health problems." 8, 11

"IʻPBL is really important for the kids to come off the edges of the group and start to contribute because Project Based Learning kind of even the playing field because kids arenʻt competing against each other, theyʻre building projects,“ she said.

Other classroom strategies that teachers now deploy focus on guiding students on self-assessing moods, communicating them, and regulating their responses to those moods. By way of early intervention, Horizons Mental Health Center administers a $460,000 grant-funded three-year pilot program known as Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up (ABC) that launched in spring 2017 at five test sites encompassing 35 Kansas counties. The program is part of Project NeuroNurture, an effort led by United Methodist Health Ministry Fund aimed at encouraging science-based early childhood programs such as ABC. In addition to United Methodist Health Ministry Fund, the REACH Healthcare Foundation, Kansas Health Foundation, Wyandotte Health Foundation and Hutchinson Community Foundation are founding partners on the initiative. The home-visitation program connects trained coaches with parents of children 6 to 24 months of age to help them identify stress triggers that can lead to prolonged cortisol exposure. Researchers at the University of Kansas also collect samples from a subsection of child participants to monitor cortisol levels over the course of their engagement with the program.

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At ESSDACK, the energy generated by the positive social impact of developing resilient strategies propels the work forward.

"Watching this movement happen… there is implementation inside the district calls their ‘future stories,’ what did they think they would be like 10 years from now?“ she said. As a student, they’ve trained to put that aside and look at it with no emotion as if it wasn’t me and find that understanding of why I was in that situation, why did people fail me.”

With the support she found in Circles came an improved sense of self-worth and confidence: “The longer I stick with it, I think relationships is the biggest piece.”

For Rose, 35, and her husband, Theron, poverty was what they knew. The couple earned $450 a month between the two of them during their first year of marriage.

By the time Rose stood in line at the back porch giveaway 16 years later, the couple and their four children had weathered lowwage jobs and bouts of physically severe and financially debilitating health problems and had met “at a point where we just couldn’t grow anymore; no matter what we tried, we just weren’t making progress.”

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The first thing she learned, Rose said, was “being able to see what a healthy relationships looks like.”

Poverty and trauma are often rooted in the generations. Rose, through her Circles education and ACEs assessment, can now more clearly see those connections in her life. She now ponders if a childhood of health and learning problems, economic hardships, and being let down by those she trusted contributed to the health problems she has faced as an adult.

“The big piece for me was understanding why things happened the way they did, ’cause I had a lot of guilt,” she said. “I used to put that blame aside and look at it with no emotion as if it wasn’t me and find that understanding of why I was in that situation, why did people fail me.”

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**POVERTY & TRAUMA IN RENO COUNTY**

**Reaching FOR Resilience**

**ISSUE BRIEF, SEPT. 2019**

**POVERTY & TRAUMA IN RENO COUNTY**

When Bobbi Rose stood in front of the woman handing out school backpacks at a First Call for Help giveaway a few years ago, she was tired. She was tired from a relentless struggle to make ends meet, exhausted by the mercilessness of a life in poverty.

As so often happens when funds persistently run short, life’s problems compound. For Rose, that meant living through a series of one-thing-after-another episodes where the “breaks” taunted just out of reach if they even appeared at all. She wasn’t one to seek help, and on the rare occasions she did — with appeals to all of the usual programs aimed at helping those in need — she was denied. She just needed some guidance.

“There’s nobody in town that does free budgeting classes,” she told the woman handing out the backpacks. Rose continued to voice her frustrations, and the woman continued to listen. And then the woman pointed her to a program unlike others that Rose had encountered: Circles of Hope.

“She gave me information for Circles and was like ‘Go. Just have dinner once and see what they’re about,’” Rose recalled.

“Circles is hard to describe, I think, until you actually go through it.”

When Bobbi Rose entered the doors of Circles of Hope, she found a support network, community connections, and guidance in achieving economic goals as a member of Circles of Hope.

**The Issue**

Reno County paces or outpaces state and national averages in almost all poverty indicators. Reno County’s population is 64,342. The U.S. Census Bureau can define the poverty status of the population; that’s 13.4 percent of that definable population. Statewide, the Kansas average for 2019 is 15 percent. Reno County ranks 68th out of 105 Kansas counties in overall health indicators.

Evidence also suggests that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), or childhood trauma, coincide with economic hardship.6 Though data for Reno County is not currently tracked, a 2014 Kansas Department of Health and Environment survey found that 54 percent of participating Reno County adults reported an ACE score of at least one. An ACE score refers to the points accumulated from a roughly 10-question survey assessing the number of adverse childhood experiences in a respondent’s background.

Every affirmative answer receives one point. According to the KDHE, a score of three or higher was more common in households with an annual income of less than $15,000 compared with adults whose households made more money. Additionally, ACEs prevalence was higher for those who did not graduate from college.7 Nationally, the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, is 14 percent.8

**Notes**


**POVERTY & TRAUMA IN RENO COUNTY**

11.9 percent of the population lives in poverty.1 The 2018 national poverty; that’s 13.4 percent of that definable population. Statewide, the Kansas average for 2019 is 15 percent. Reno County ranks 68th out of 105 Kansas counties in overall health indicators.4 And in 2018, 55.62 percent of Reno County students qualified for free and reduced lunches.5