



# Scotland's ACEs Journey

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Our thanks go to all who reviewed drafts of this booklet.

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Portraits by Susannah Jeffries, Instagram: @MrsJDraws

Printed by H B Rutherford & Co, Dundee



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Marking  
**20**  
years



# Our ACEs Journey

Over the last 20 years, Scotland has found itself in the midst of a movement that aims to boost public understanding of the long-term impacts of children's experiences. How did that journey start, and how effective has it been? That is the story we tell in these pages.

The path our country has travelled in relation to the science of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) has been a winding one, full of unanticipated turns and determined energy. Many Scots don't know this history, so we thought it important to find a way to tell it. We hope our story may be of value to other regions of the world who are engaged in their own ACEs journey.

Along with highlighting key moments in this story, we've drawn attention to some of the people who helped to drive it. It's easy for any history to lose track of those individuals. We are in no doubt that without these insistent leaders, Scotland's ACEs movement would never have been born.

We know there will be many names and moments we have missed in this small booklet. That's why we want to acknowledge the contributions of every single person who has helped in any way to bring about Scotland's ACEs movement. You have played a part in preventing trauma for children in the future, and you have nurtured healing for those who endured suffering in the past.

Thank you.

**Jan  
2005** Violence Reduction  
Unit is founded



**VIOLENCE**  
reduction unit

The Violence Reduction Unit is founded, based in Strathclyde Police. It is led by two senior members of the force - John Carnochan and Karyn McCluskey. They work to have violence reframed as a public health issue. Relationships are at the core of their thinking.

**Sep  
2005** Harry Burns appointed  
Chief Medical Officer



The key message of Harry Burns, the newly appointed Chief Medical Officer of Scotland, is that emotionally attuned relationships are essential for human health. During his nine year tenure he talks continually to audiences about attachment, trauma, ACEs, community and the triumph of hope over despair.

July  
2007

WHO Violence Prevention  
Alliance welcomed

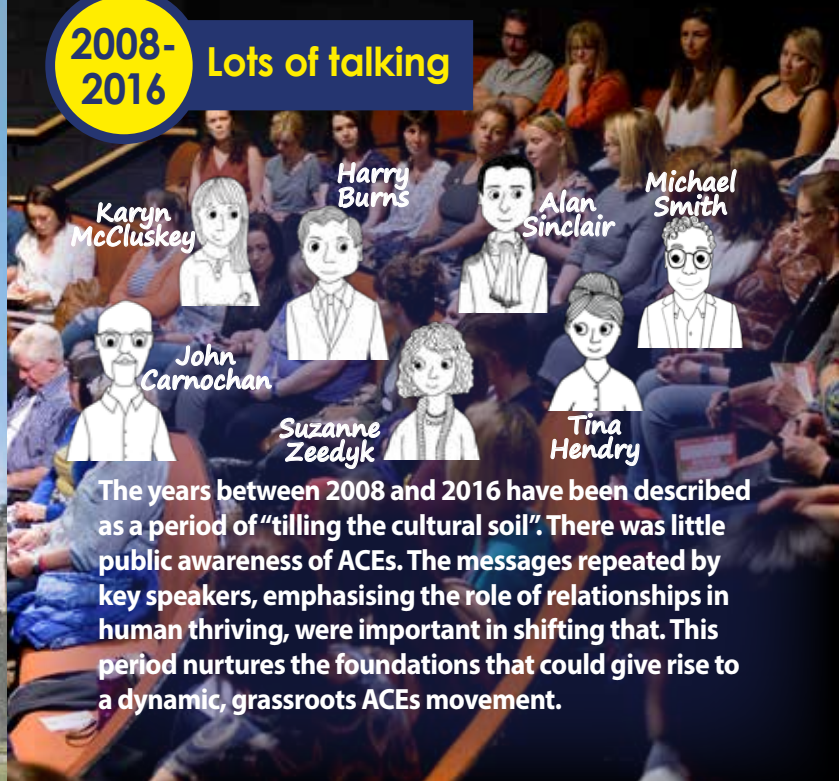


The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit hosts a major 3-day event, in partnership with the World Health Organisation's *Global Campaign for Violence Prevention*. Held at the Police College in Tulliallan, several hundred people attend. The speakers include Dr Vincent Felitti, co-author of the ACE Study.



2008-  
2016

Lots of talking



The years between 2008 and 2016 have been described as a period of “tilling the cultural soil”. There was little public awareness of ACEs. The messages repeated by key speakers, emphasising the role of relationships in human thriving, were important in shifting that. This period nurtures the foundations that could give rise to a dynamic, grassroots ACEs movement.

April  
2016

Centre hosts seminar  
exploring ACEs



The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) hosts a seminar on ACEs, featuring Jane Stevens as their international guest speaker. Based in the USA, Stevens had founded ACEs Connection Network in 2012. Members of the GCPH are keen to learn from her experience of conveying ACEs information to the public.



Nov  
2016

Polishing Our Gems  
Conference calls for action



NHS Health Scotland invites Sir Michael Marmot to chair a conference on tackling childhood adversity through a public health approach. Attended by 200 professionals, it is intended as a call to action for identifying next steps. The associated report *Polishing the Diamonds* gains traction amongst the general public.



Nov  
2016

## Scottish ACEs Hub is created

physical illnesses

violent behaviour

relationship difficulties

self-harm

substance misuse



The Scottish ACEs Hub is created as one of the follow-up steps to the seminal *Polishing Our Gems* Conference. Overseen by NHS Health Scotland, the Hub brings together leading voices from a range of sectors. It provides a site of leadership and direction for designing strategy that addresses ACEs.

April  
2017

## Resilience documentary premieres in Scotland

**RESILIENCE**  
THE BIOLOGY OF STRESS & THE SCIENCE OF HOPE



The Scottish Premiere of *Resilience* is hosted by two small independent organisations. The film's director, Jamie Redford, is in attendance, along with a packed audience of 100 people. A panel takes questions on how to implement the insights of this film.



connected baby



RE ATTACHMENT

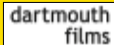


Summer  
2017

## Resilience documentary tours Scotland



Intense interest in *Resilience* leads to an unexpected tour of the film, led by connected baby and Reattachment, the two organisations who brought it to Scotland. Over the summer, 25 community screenings and panel discussions are held. Most are sold out. Over 2500 people see it, with many calling for further screenings. The London-based distributor, Dartmouth Films, is delighted with the public enthusiasm.



June  
2017

## Community ACEs Hubs start to emerge

As awareness of ACEs grows, community networks set up their own ACEs Hubs, spreading the word with events and talks. Activist Tina Hendry is a major driver of this vision. In time, all 32 local authorities in Scotland would host at least one hub.





June 2017 ACEs Scotland Forum is founded



The ACEs Scotland Forum grows spontaneously out of public hunger to better understand how the science of ACEs can help in personal lives and professional practice. Its social media base makes it easy for people to become involved. Within only months, thousands of people have joined.

Autumn 2017 Scottish Resilience tour inspires Northern Ireland



Marie Blaney



Deirdre McLaughlin

The energy of Scotland's spontaneous grassroots ACEs movement ripples out to Northern Ireland. The two leaders of the organisation Connected For Life are inspired to host their own tour of *Resilience*, with screenings eventually held in six communities.

Connected for life

Sep 2017 ACE-awareness reaches the business sector

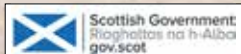


The organisation Tigers, under the leadership of Pauline Scott, begins to take ACE-awareness to the business community. Through their delivery of apprenticeships for young people, Tigers has strong partnerships with the construction industry. This information is especially valuable given the high rate of suicide in the sector.

tigers

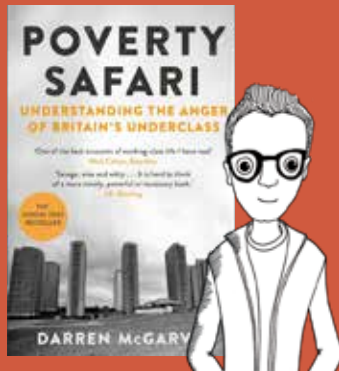
Sep 2017 Programme for Government incorporates ACEs

2017 marks the year in which the terms 'adverse childhood experiences' and 'trauma' begin to be used regularly in the *Programme for Government*, published annually by the Scottish Government. It signals a shift in policymakers' understanding of the long-term consequences of childhood distress.



Nov  
2017

Books on ACEs in  
Scotland are published



Publication of two books provides in-depth insight into ACEs within a Scottish context. Carol Craig's *Hiding in Plain Sight* reflects on the history of Scottish culture. Darren McGarvey's award-winning *Poverty Safari* tells the story of growing up in poverty and anxiety.

Dec  
2017

Scottish Prisoners  
Survey includes ACEs



SPS  
SCOTTISH  
PRISON SERVICE

The biennial survey conducted by the Scottish Prison Service enquires, for the first time, about prisoners' exposure to ACEs. The decision to include these questions was one of the outcomes of the 2016 *Polishing Our Gems Conference*. Nearly 50% report seeing or being subjected to physical violence in their home as a child.

**March 2018** NHS Health Board promotes trauma awareness

The board members of NHS Ayrshire & Arran decide to take forward trauma-informed work across the whole of their health board. They publish a strategy document which contains the core message that “trauma is everyone’s business”. Over the next year, more than 50 screenings of the film *Resilience* take place, with many staff describing their insights as “compelling”.



**June 2018** National Trauma Training Programme launches

The *National Trauma Training Programme* is designed with a big vision: an entire workforce informed about childhood trauma and ACEs. Funded by the Scottish Government and delivered through a partnership of agencies, it offers a range of freely available training resources. They enable anyone, from any sector, to understand more about the origins of and responses to trauma. A central theme is the power of relationships in prevention and recovery.



June  
2018

Portobello Learning  
Festival is initiated

Ruth  
McKay



Suzanne  
Zeedyk



David  
Cameron



Scotland's newest independent learning festival, held at Portobello High School, draws more than 300 members of the education community in its first year. Its three organisers ensure the focus is on relational practice. They make clear its connection to the unfolding national conversation by giving it the title *ACEs: The science, the reality, the responses*.



June  
2018

Parliamentary cross-party  
group on ACEs formed

A Cross-Party Group is established within the Scottish Parliament, bringing together politicians, organisations and individuals keen to collaborate on the challenges presented by ACEs. The group signals the breadth of their considerations by choosing the title *CPG for the Prevention and Healing of Adverse Childhood Experiences*.



Aug  
2018

Falkirk Council ensures all  
new teachers are ACE-aware



Falkirk Council decides to make sure that their new teachers know about childhood trauma. They ask the Headteacher at Bainsford Primary, Susanne McCafferty, to help lead this. She always tells the story of how she ripped up the Behaviour Policy she had written and replaced it with a Relationship Agreement.



Sep  
2018

ACE-Aware Nation  
Conference takes place



Two organisations – Tigers and connected baby – host a 2-day conference with an ambitious title: *Making Scotland the World's First ACE-Aware Nation*. The global campaigner Dr Nadine Burke Harris is invited as keynote speaker, with a massive 2300 people attending. The phrase 'ACE-Aware Nation' begins to be used widely.



Sep  
2018

## Foster carer sets up charity to reach caregivers

Foster carer Suzanne Scott leaves the *ACE-Aware Nation Conference* with her life moving in a an unexpected direction. She is so inspired by what she has heard that she sets up the charity *Trauma Informed Parenting*.

The workshops they deliver are soon described as “transformational”.



Oct  
2018

## Debate about ACEs unfolds



Debate about the ACEs framework has existed for some time within the academic literature. As ACEs become better understood amongst the public, the reach of the debate expands in surprising ways. Mainstream media and professional magazines feature discussions about research methods, terminology and appropriate practical applications.

Nov  
2018

## NHS Health Board highlights impact of ACEs

*The Annual Report of the Director of Public Health in NHS Highland focuses on ACEs. It brings together a range of relevant evidence, considering not only recent*

*challenges but also their intergenerational histories, such as the Clearances of the 18th century. The report calls for greater emphasis on relationships, listening and connection. These themes result in the report gaining a wider readership than is often the case for public health documents.*

The Annual Report  
of the Director of  
Public Health



2018



Adverse Childhood Experiences,  
Resilience and Trauma Informed  
Care: A Public Health Approach to  
Understanding and Responding to  
Adversity

To learn more visit:  
Website: [www.nhs.uk/information/\\_ajury\\_prevention/prevention/inspire](http://www.nhs.uk/information/_ajury_prevention/prevention/inspire)  
Facebook: [www.facebook.com/whoarewepreventin](http://www.facebook.com/whoarewepreventin)

Nov  
2018

## Stirling University commended for mental health nursing

The University of Stirling is recognised for their trauma-informed approach to nursing. The Mental Health Undergraduate Programme Team become known for their innovative teaching practice. Students leave with more than confidence in their clinical skills. They see themselves as agents of change.





Jan  
2019

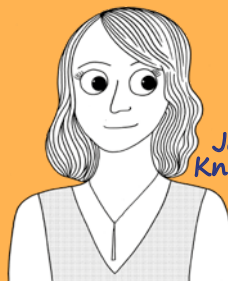
Scale of ACEs amongst  
Scottish children revealed

Researchers at the University of Edinburgh investigate the prevalence of ACEs for Scottish children. Their findings are stark. Two out of every three children have suffered at least one ACE by the age of 8. Boys are at greater risk, as are children living in poverty. Almost a quarter have suffered physical punishment.



April  
2019

The language of 'distressed  
behaviour' spreads



Jenn  
Knussen



Pitteuchar East Primary School put ACE-awareness into practice with a simple language change. They ceased using the traditional phrase 'challenging behaviour' and replaced it with 'distressed behaviour'. This shift transformed the school culture. Other schools followed their example. In 2019 the school is commended in *TES* for their leadership.

June  
2019

**ACEs to Assets  
Conference is held**



Two individuals with lived experience of ACEs – James Docherty and Kim McGuigan – dream of bringing trauma specialist Dr Gabor Maté to Scotland. They approach the ACE-Aware Scotland team for help. The Royal Concert Hall is booked, which easily accommodates the 1900 attendees keen to learn more about the links between trauma and addiction.



Aug  
2019

**Debate on ACEs continues**

fringe

Debate continues about the ACEs framework, focusing on issues including its conceptual basis, terminology, policy applications and funding. Critiques appear in the press, academic journals, professional newsletters and even minutes of committee meetings. One of the more unusual settings is a public lecture at the arts festival, Edinburgh Fringe, as part of *The Cabaret of Dangerous Ideas*.

Dec  
2019

Teddy bear named  
amongst Scots of the Year

Three West Lothian primary schools combine forces to create a set of Teddy Bear Policies. The educational magazine *TES* names one of their teddies, Furball, amongst the *Top Ten Educational People of the Year*. He is regarded as "a symbol of changing attitudes to ACEs in Scotland".

Revealed: Tes' 10  
most influential  
people of 2019

tes  
magazine



Feb  
2020

*The Promise* pledges respect  
for care-experienced children

Following a 3-year listening process, Scotland launches *The Promise* as a commitment to children and young people whose lives are touched by the care system. "You will grow up loved, safe and respected." The power of relationships to harm and to heal is core to its vision for 2030.

Feb  
2020

## Early years guidance encourages attention to trauma

The launch of the document *Realising The Ambition*, from Education Scotland, is warmly welcomed by the early years sector. It is steeped in the language of relationships and attachment, and it draws explicit attention to the growing national awareness of childhood trauma and adversity. Early years staff gain from it a sense of their importance in buffering the impacts of ACEs.



Feb  
2020

## Clydebank High School hosts Learning Festival

Clydebank High hosts its first ever Learning Festival, keen to contribute to the growing momentum on ACEs. The title *Nurturing Positive Relationships* reflects the ethos the school has successfully developed. A total of 600 people attend, and staff are later invited to speak at international events about how a relational approach helps to raise academic attainment.



2020-  
2021

## Covid pandemic descends

The Covid pandemic slows momentum of the ACEs movement. Many people use the knowledge they have gained to ensure that a sense of social connection is sustained during this time of stressful uncertainty. They know this will help to mitigate against long-term impacts. They worry not everyone realises the importance.

2020-  
2021

## Conversation Series on ACEs hosted

During the pandemic, ACE-Aware Scotland joins the rest of the world in moving online. A *Conversation Series* is broadcast live, featuring leading voices addressing prominent themes within ACEs debates. These include human rights, screening, poverty and language, amongst other topics. The online format means Scotland can reach people well beyond our shores.



Poverty + Addiction + Leadership + Screening +  
Language + Human rights + Memorial For Tina +  
International perspectives + Poverty + Addicti

July  
2020

ACEs movement features  
in BBC documentary

Home Episodes Clips Contact us Information and Support

The BBC investigative series *Panorama* broadcasts a TV programme on the reduction Scotland has achieved in street violence. The journalist and producer, Kate Silverton, places the story within the wider ACEs movement, emphasising the breadth of its reach across multiple sectors.



BBC

How Scotland Cut Violent Crime

Sep  
2020

Data gathered on prevalence  
of ACEs in Scottish population

For the first time, questions on ACEs are included in the Scottish Health Survey commissioned annually by the government. Results show that verbal abuse is the most common ACE. Approximately 70% of respondents report an ACE score of at least one, while 15% report a score of four or more. These results suggest a high prevalence of ACEs in the Scottish population.



**Oct  
2020**

## Trauma-informed approaches to housing explored

Public Health Scotland gathers examples of trauma-informed practice within the housing sector. They consider council, private and housing association providers, with the goal of showing how all housing services can be delivered in a way that recognises trauma. The words 'trust', 'stability' and 'relationships' appear frequently in the report.



**Nov  
2020**

## Arts sector championed

The early years arts charity Starcatchers launches an extended exploration of a fascinating question: What would a trauma-informed arts sector look like? The initiative is delivered online, during lockdown, drawing participants from around the UK. Feedback shows they believe that wider society benefits when artists have a chance to consider their place in this movement.



**Mar  
2021**

## **Dementia care considered**

**The charity Iriss, which supports the social care sector in Scotland by bringing together research and innovation, publishes a briefing on dementia. It emphasises the importance of relationships and attachment in providing dementia care. Terms such as 'stress', 'regulation' and 'trauma' are included, signalling its links with the wider conversations unfolding across the country.**

 Iriss

**June  
2021**

## **Links between ACEs and Attachment Theory emphasised**



**Writer and activist Simon Partridge publishes his latest editorial article, emphasising the historic links between the fields of attachment and ACEs. He explores forgotten overlaps in their language and frameworks, arguing that had the ground-breaking attachment theorist John Bowlby been alive today, he would have warmly welcomed the emergence of the ACEs field.**

 KARNAC  
*living the mind*





Nov  
2021

**Certification course for lawyers introduced**

The Law Society of Scotland develops a certification course enabling all lawyers to become trauma-informed. It proves to be very popular. The impetus for the course has come from the growing number of criminal and civil lawyers who argue that justice and fairness is impossible in the absence of a trauma-informed perspective.



**Trauma  
Aware  
Law**



Jan  
2022

**New guideline on sentencing young people issued**

The Scottish Sentencing Council issues a new guideline on the sentencing of young people aged 24 and under who have been convicted of a crime. It requires the court to take account of the young person's maturity, including the impact of any ACEs, psychological trauma or language and communication needs. The importance of rehabilitation is emphasised.

The logo for the Scottish Sentencing Council, featuring the text 'Scottish Sentencing Council' and a royal coat of arms.

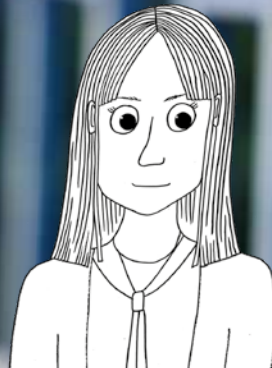
**Feb  
2022** **West Lothian College  
launch *The Trust Project***

As awareness of ACEs gathers momentum, West Lothian College makes a commitment to becoming a trauma-responsive organisation. They launch *The Trust Project*, designed to support students who have experiences of trauma arising from, for example, the justice system or the care system. They would go on to win national awards for this development.



**June  
2022** **Compassionate Prisons  
Conference is held**

ACE-Aware Scotland hosts its annual conference by focusing on the question of how to bring greater compassion to prisons. International activist Fritzi Horstman is invited as guest speaker. Partners include the Scottish Prison Service, SISCO, Trauma Aware Law and the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit.



Sep  
2022

Dentists receive  
training in trauma

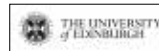


The Dental Hospital in Dundee sets out on the novel path of being the first to offer training in trauma to their staff. Participants report a boost in their confidence to care for patients with a history of trauma, and the outcomes are reported in academic journals. Dentists' awareness matters because there is a strong association between ACEs and poor oral health.

Aug  
2023

Bairns' Hoose launches

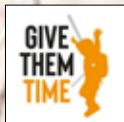
The charity Children First leads a group to open Scotland's first Bairns' Hoose. It creates a safe space for children who are victims or witnesses of violence to get all the help they need, under one roof. Children helped design the space, and they hope it will enable adults to listen better. Feeling heard is a child's right.



Bairns' Hoose

**Aug  
2023** Funding of school  
deferrals becomes law

The *Give Them Time Campaign* wins their battle. They change the law! All children are now guaranteed funding for an extra year in early years, enabling them to defer starting school until the age of 5, if their parents wish. Two strong mums, Diane Delaney and Patricia Anderson, have changed the future for all Scotland's children.



**Sep  
2023** Immersive Event with  
Dr Gabor Maté hosted

Dr Gabor Maté is invited to return to Scotland, as part of his European tour. His insights on compassion fatigue and the links between mind and body are considered to be especially valuable in this post-pandemic period. The 600 seats available sell out in weeks.



Oct  
2023

Parents share stories of insight



THE COURIER  
Evening Edinburgh

Amidst the stories that emerge from the ACEs movement are those shared by parents. Knowledge about the stress system and emotional regulation boost confidence and self-compassion, altering how parents relate to their children. Many feel able to talk publicly about those changes, such as mum Melanie Stuart, who describes to her local newspaper how she reduced her use of shouting and punishments.

Nov  
2023

Boarding school abuses highlighted by journalist



The Herald

Journalist Neil Mackay publishes the latest in his long-running series of articles on boarding school abuse. He has been steadfast in his efforts to ensure that this, often hidden, form of childhood suffering is made public. Survivors speak of their gratitude to *The Herald* for their willingness to reveal these shocking histories.

**Feb 2024 Carnoustie High creates new Positive Relationships Policy**

Carnoustie High School introduces their new Relationships Policy, to replace their previous Behaviour Policy. Respect, recognition and consistency are central themes. Its creation has been a joint effort between the staff, young people, parents and carers. It is a welcome illustration of a shift being taken by many schools.



**July 2024 UNCRC Scotland Act comes into force**

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is finally incorporated into Scots law. Children's human rights must now be at the heart of policy and decision-making. This follows a decade of campaigning by children, young people and members of the Together (Scottish Alliance for Children's Rights). Celebrations follow!



Oct  
2024

## The Strength of Community event takes place

ACE-Aware Scotland's annual event features two esteemed speakers with vast experience of building community by focusing on relationships. Epidemiologist Sir Michael Marmot and Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham, bring insistent hope that health inequalities really can be tackled. The online format allows attendance from far afield. The message is that healthy human lives depend on connection.



Nov  
2024

## The Little Iceberg Musical comes to Fife

Anam Alba bring their captivating production to Fife, demonstrating the power of the creative arts to forge new ways of talking about trauma. Based on the story written by Nicky Murray and illustrated by Sylvia Lynch, this metaphoric tale of loss reminds us of the courage it takes to trust.



Autumn  
2025

## Influence of Scottish Violence Reduction Unit celebrated

The enduring influence of the SVRU is highlighted in a new book, following research published by the University of Glasgow. The researchers reflect on the power of storytelling in bringing about social change, exploring how the narrative around violence has shifted from criminality to public health. Poetically, they draw links with the oratory tradition exemplified by St Mungo, patron saint of Glasgow.

**VIOLENCE**  
reduction unit

University  
of Glasgow

St Mungo mural by Snug

# Thank you

We know there are lots of enthusiastic people and organisations who are part of Scotland's ACEs Journey, whom we haven't had space to feature in this book.

That's why there are steps afoot that will let everyone share how they have put this information into action. Stay tuned!

Thank you all for your commitment and courage.



## Further Information

## Reports & Articles

- 2016 *Polishing the Diamonds Report*  
[tinyurl.com/zvzjun5f](https://tinyurl.com/zvzjun5f)
- 2018 NHS Highland Public Health Report  
[tinyurl.com/5xj946pj](https://tinyurl.com/5xj946pj)
- 2019 ACEs Debate at Fringe Festival  
[tinyurl.com/n7bd7u5n](https://tinyurl.com/n7bd7u5n)
- 2020 *Violence is Preventable, Not Inevitable*  
[tinyurl.com/bdefu28p](https://tinyurl.com/bdefu28p)
- 2020 *Ending Childhood Adversity*  
[tinyurl.com/4wte77km](https://tinyurl.com/4wte77km)
- 2020 *Scottish Health Survey Report*  
[tinyurl.com/7z8k844r](https://tinyurl.com/7z8k844r)
- 2021 ACEs & Attachment Theory  
[tinyurl.com/4rjsr4pm](https://tinyurl.com/4rjsr4pm)

## Further Information

## Videos

- 2005 Scottish Violence Reduction Unit  
[tinyurl.com/3xyh9tv6](https://tinyurl.com/3xyh9tv6)
- 2016 *Glasgow Centre for Population Health Seminar*  
[tinyurl.com/2myh9nmf](https://tinyurl.com/2myh9nmf)
- 2016 *Polishing Our Gems Conference*  
[tinyurl.com/5n6tn37j](https://tinyurl.com/5n6tn37j)
- 2018 Children's Rights at YouthLink Scotland  
[tinyurl.com/52xj9vpt](https://tinyurl.com/52xj9vpt)
- 2018 ACE-Aware Scotland YouTube Channel  
[tinyurl.com/exfvhbyw](https://tinyurl.com/exfvhbyw)
- 2022 ACAMH ACEs Research Panel  
[tinyurl.com/2svv4ktv](https://tinyurl.com/2svv4ktv)
- 2022 Scottish Sentencing Council  
[tinyurl.com/mtz974yk](https://tinyurl.com/mtz974yk)

## Further Information

2019 Ryan McCuaig

2019 Kim McGuigan

2019 James Docherty

2020 ACE Interrupters

2021 Kevin Neary

2021 Chris Kilkenny

2022 Jay Haston

2023 Michelle Brennan-Jones

## Lived Experience

[tinyurl.com/4dbdr3n4](https://tinyurl.com/4dbdr3n4)

[tinyurl.com/y96puhzp](https://tinyurl.com/y96puhzp)

[tinyurl.com/bdd4774e](https://tinyurl.com/bdd4774e)

[tinyurl.com/4saj35xu](https://tinyurl.com/4saj35xu)

[tinyurl.com/ytccnmh4](https://tinyurl.com/ytccnmh4)

[tinyurl.com/2w9yya7w](https://tinyurl.com/2w9yya7w)

[tinyurl.com/bdf2nsh7](https://tinyurl.com/bdf2nsh7)

[tinyurl.com/3ar837th](https://tinyurl.com/3ar837th)

...and if you want even more information about any of the pages in this book, this QR code will give you tons!



[tinyurl.com/4rjsr4pm](https://tinyurl.com/4rjsr4pm)

Marking  
**20**  
years

