



ACERT (ADVERSE CHILD EX-
PERIENCES RESPONSE TEAM)
MANCHESTER, NH

There are things no child should ever have to experience or even witness. And in the summer of 2015, they were happening in Manchester at alarming levels.

The Manchester Police Department identified over 400 children exposed to domestic violence. More than 30 others had been sexually assaulted by a peer. On top of that, the number of kids who watched their parents misuse and overdose on drugs was rising.

While victims of violence receive advocates, police officers knew children exposed to trauma didn't receive similar services. So they rolled into action. They brought together community partners from sectors such as mental health, early childhood development, early parent education, and child welfare to discuss solutions. "We were sick of walking into homes and thinking, this kid is doomed and we can't do anything about it," says Sergeant Peter Marr. "We are trying to break the cycle and advocate for these kids."

That series of meetings with community partners produced a change. The police department revised its protocol for determining if a child was present during domestic violence or traumatic events. If they were, the officer briefly educated the parent about the harmful effects of such events and asked them to sign a release form authorizing a child advocate to call. "A child with a score of six or higher on ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) is ten times more likely to use IV drugs," says Lara Quiroga, director of Strategic Initiatives for Children at Manchester Community Health Center. "It doesn't take a lot to get to six ACEs. If we don't focus on prevention to mitigate risk, we are going to be seeing a much worse problem in 10-20 years."



SOLUTIONS TO HELP CHILDREN IMPACTED BY SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

According to the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children, over nine million children in the U.S. live in a home with at least one parent who uses illicit drugs. These children are at an increased risk for depression, suicide, poverty, delinquency, anxiety, homelessness, and substance misuse. And many children who have a family in active addiction live in kinship or foster care.



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Authorities realized more families could be reached through this different approach. So the Adverse Childhood Experiences Response Team (ACERT) was launched in July 2016. ACERT consists of a police officer, a community health worker and a victim advocate.

The team interacts with individuals as soon as crime scenes are secured. Members offer a release form to families, providing for a smooth hand-off to social service agencies. It also allows those agencies to call the family directly. The form provides a built-in resource for parents who may not know where to turn to help their children. Moms and dads are assured that the release has no impact on legal proceedings or any law enforcement involvement.

The ACERT follows up when the family is no longer in crisis, and the rotating team goes out twice a week for four hours. Sometimes the team finds it more appropriate to follow up a few days after the event, determining follow-up approach on a case-by-case basis.

But this much is the same in every case: by working together as a team, parents can receive access to a wider array of services, from a broader spectrum of courses, than would otherwise have. Our children deserve no less.

NUMBERS:

- October 2015-June 2016: 51 children referred to services
- July 2017-July 2018: referred over 800 children and contacted more than 1,000 children.

SUMMARY:

- Adverse Child Experiences Response Teams (ACERTs) consist of a police officer, a community health worker and a victim advocate.
 - The team offers a release form to families which provides for a warm handoff to social service agencies and allows for the agencies to call the family directly.
 - Participants receive referrals to many services in the community including support groups, mental health counseling, early childhood education, art therapy and child-parent psychotherapy. Parents receive education about toxic stress, ACES and trauma.
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