



NW CHILDREN'S FUND 30^{YEARS}

Making hope work.

Childhood Adversity and the Developing Brain: Newest Brain Science Digs Deeper into ACEs

The groundbreaking Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Study¹ showed a direct link between traumas suffered in childhood and health and social problems later in life. Now, Kate McLaughlin, a renowned child psychologist and psychiatric epidemiologist, is spearheading research that reveals that different types of childhood adversity (e.g. violence vs. neglect) affect the developing brain in different ways. Here are excerpts from our recent conversation with Dr. McLaughlin about her cutting-edge work.

¹ The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study was conducted from 1995 to 1997 by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente.

NWCF: What led you into the research you've been doing?

Dr. McLaughlin: I've been interested in how we could best intervene to prevent the onset of mental health problems in kids who have been exposed to trauma and other forms of adversity. My research is focused on identifying developmental mechanisms. In other words, what typical developmental processes get disrupted that ultimately lead kids to be at higher risk for anxiety, depression, substance abuse problems, and problems in school performance and other domains? The obvious thing to look at is how the brain develops.

There's been this explosion of research on ACEs and their impact on health across the life course. And while that research has been tremendously important, **I began to be concerned about the tendency to just lump together every kind of bad thing that could happen to a child and then count up the number to see what it predicts.**

There are lots of limitations to that kind of approach, because it implicitly assumes that very different kinds of experiences—having a parent who is depressed, being physically abused, being neglected, growing up in poverty—influence development through the same mechanisms and the same pathways. It just doesn't ring true

that all of these very different kinds of experiences would influence development in exactly the same way.

NWCF: What have you learned about the way different types of ACEs impact the brain?

Dr. McLaughlin: As we began to look through the existing literature as well as our own research, we found very different kinds of patterns associated with the two dimensions of the environment that research had focused on the most—threatening experiences, like being exposed to violence or being abused, and experiences that involved

Continued on page 2



Dr. Kate McLaughlin



Newest Brain Science (continued from page 1)

the absence of some kind of expected input from the environment such as deprivation or neglect. When you separate out these two dimensions, they appear to impact the way the brain develops really differently. That's important for thinking about intervention, because ultimately if we want to get these developmental processes back on track, we need to be targeting those mechanisms that are causally related to particular kinds of environmental experiences.

NWCF: Where do you take the research next?

Dr. McLaughlin: We're really just at the very early stages of learning how particular kinds of environmental experiences shape the way the child is evolving. Not just in terms of their brain development, but in all aspects of development—emotional, cognitive, social, as well as neurobiological. We're also very interested in starting to identify what are the important protective factors that help to buffer kids from developing problems, following being exposed to an adverse environment.

Understanding these mechanisms, understanding how the environment shapes the way the brain develops and shapes other kinds of developmental competencies in children will ultimately provide us with the targets for intervention to help kids stay on a healthy developmental trajectory in order to avoid the onset of problems down the road.



To Learn More

Dr. Kate McLaughlin was the keynote speaker for NWCF's Annual Forum, held March 27 at Town Hall. After her lecture *Childhood Adversity and the Developing Brain: Using Neuroscience to Inform Effective Interventions*, she was joined in a panel discussion by representatives from three NWCF-funded agencies: Childhaven, HopeSparks, and King County Sexual Assault Resource Center. To find out more about Dr. McLaughlin's research, visit her lab website at: www.stressdevelopmentlab.org.

Many thanks to our Premier Forum Sponsor, The Thomas V. Giddens Jr. Foundation, and to all our Forum participants and guests.

To watch a video of Forum 2015 and to read the entire interview excerpted above, visit www.nwcf.org.

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2100 24th Ave. S.
Suite No. 320
Seattle, WA 98144

T 206-682-8447
F 206-682-8173
nwcf.org

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Winter 2015 Grant Recipients

Agency / Program Description	Grant (\$)	Agency / Program Description	Grant (\$)
Healing Abused Children			
Amara: Foster-Adoption Program / Parenting and adoption services to create safety and permanence for at-risk and special-needs children.	15,000	Mary Bridge Children's Hospital & Health Center: Parenting Partnership Program / Intensive therapeutic support for families raising medically fragile infants under socially vulnerable conditions.	12,800
Birth to Three Developmental Center: CHERISH Program / In-home early intervention service addressing trauma-exposed foster children's attachment and adjustment needs.	10,000	Rochester Organization of Families / Resources and services for children, youth, and families to achieve a healthy, positive, and drug-free community.	19,000
Brigid Collins Family Support Center / Therapy, case management and parenting education for at-risk families with children birth to 12 years old.	10,000	Vision House / Transitional housing and integrated support services for homeless mothers and their children.	10,000
Dawson Place / Coordinated medical, mental health, advocacy, protection and law-enforcement services for abused children in Snohomish County.	10,000	Wellspring Family Services: Homeless Infant Mental Health Program / Helps homeless infants/toddlers create strong emotional bonds with their parents.	7,500
Family Education & Support Services: Kinship Support Program / Program to help related caregivers of abused children gain skills, support and resources to ensure the children in their care thrive.	9,000	YMCA of Greater Seattle: Building Blocks Behavior Support Program / Support for families of previously CPS-involved children to increase safety and structure in the home and prevent abuse and neglect.	9,000
Family Law CASA / Advocates for at-risk children in high-risk custody cases.	16,000	Helping At-Risk Youth	
Permanency Planning Foster-Adopt / Permanency planning and case management for foster children and their families.	10,000	Big Brothers Big Sisters of Island County / Mentoring for low-income, high-risk, and pre-teen girls in Island County.	7,500
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project: Immigrant Child Advocacy Project / Legal services and advocacy for abused, abandoned, and undocumented immigrant children.	15,800	Big Brothers Big Sisters of Southwest Washington / One-on-one mentoring for at-risk youth, including foster youth and Native American populations.	10,000
Olive Crest: Foster Family Program / Recruitment, training, and licensing of foster families for children traumatized by abuse and/or neglect.	9,800	Cocoon House: Transitional Housing Program / Quality, safe and stable housing for homeless youth for up to 18 months.	13,000
Pediatric Interim Care Center / Immediate, short-term, medically supervised care for drug-exposed and medically fragile infants.	12,000	Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services / Support groups, parenting classes, counseling and CPS case management for youth and parents exposed to domestic violence and/or sexual assault.	20,000
Secret Harbor: Foster Care Resources / Transition resources for youth in residential programming, training and support for foster families, and case management for high-needs youth.	13,000	Friends of the Children / Pairs children from distressed neighborhoods with paid, full-time professional mentors for 12 years.	15,500
Sound Mental Health: Children's Domestic Response Team / Specialized counseling services to help children and their supportive parent recover from domestic violence.	20,000	HopeSparks / Specialized counseling for children who have been abused or traumatized, family/kinship support and parent education.	20,000
Strengthening Fragile Families			
Center for Human Services: Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Program / Therapeutic support for caregivers to promote development of healthy and safe relationships with their children.	16,000	Neighborhood House: BridgeStart Program / School-based case management for 9-14 year-olds at risk of drug and criminal involvement.	14,000
Child Care Resources: Homeless Child Care Program / Helps homeless families find a child care provider and other supportive services.	6,000	Readiness to Learn Foundation / Promotes academic success for K-12 children experiencing difficult circumstances at home.	9,000
Encompass: Family Support Services / Wrap-around services for vulnerable families including home visitation, family counseling, parent education, and parent-child training.	9,600	Teen Feed: Meal Program & Street Talk Outreach Program (STOP) / Provides meals, outreach, and case management to homeless youth in Seattle and Auburn.	6,000
Friends of Youth: Healthy Start Program / Home visitation services to support at-risk young, first-time parents.	12,800	University District Youth Center - Catholic Community Services / Critical services for homeless, at-risk, runaway and/or street-involved youth ages 13-22.	9,500
Housing Hope: ChildHope Child Development Program / Therapeutic programming to help homeless and at-risk families overcome barriers to age-appropriate development for their children.	12,050	Youth Tutoring Program - Catholic Community Services / After-school tutoring and enrichment program for kids living in Seattle low-income communities.	10,000
Lydia Place: Family Services Program / Emergency and transitional housing and housing services for homeless families, including life skills programs and case management.	12,500	YouthCare: Adolescent Emergency Shelter / Shelter, case management, service referrals, crisis resolution and family reconciliation as appropriate for homeless adolescents.	12,650

\$425,000
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