

# **ThedaCare: Shawano-area community explores impact of adverse childhood experiences**

Posted on Friday, May 18, 2018

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## Day-Long Event Delves into Trauma, Its Effects

Research indicates that a person with four or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is six times more likely to struggle with depression, seven times more likely to become alcoholic, 10 times more likely to inject drugs, and 12 times more likely to attempt suicide. He or she is twice as likely to have heart disease or be diagnosed with cancer. According to materials published by Shawano/Menominee area leaders who collaborated to plan a local day-long exploration of ACEs on Friday, May 18, these odds increase exponentially as one's exposure to ACEs increases.

ACEs are stressful or traumatic events during childhood that can involve abuse, neglect, and household dysfunction including domestic violence, substance abuse, incarcerated family members, and mental illness. People who experience ACEs are less likely to maintain relationships or hold a job as adults and more likely to end up in foster care, homeless, or in jail. It is estimated that about 10 percent of people in the Shawano area have four or more ACEs.

Jennifer Frost, a licensed marriage and family therapist and manager of behavioral health services at the Shawano County Department of Human Services co-chaired Friday's Community Health Action Team (CHAT) event along with Bill Schmidt, CEO of ThedaCare Medical Center-Shawano. CHAT is sponsored by ThedaCare. "What happens to us when we are young changes our brain development and becomes part of who we are," Frost said. "We need to facilitate a cultural shift and stop asking, 'What's wrong with you?' and instead seek to understand, 'What happened

to you?"

The day was structured as a community plunge, when participants travel together to a series of locations, organizations, and speaking engagements for high-intensity first-person exposure to a pressing community issue. Fifty-five attendees came from area governments, businesses, social services, health care providers, law enforcement agencies, school districts, and tribal organizations to learn about ACEs and how to recognize and support people who have experienced trauma, or to be trauma-informed. They gathered at SAM25, a local homeless shelter and traveled by bus to locations throughout Shawano.

Matty Mathison, a retired Shawano Community High School health and physical education teacher, is a CHAT member. In her 37 years in education, she facilitated small groups for youth who abused drugs and their parents.

Mathison invited local young people to speak at the plunge about their ACEs and educate participants about what is happening in the lives of young people today. "Our guests are people who had trouble, but they are survivors who have gone on to make a tremendous difference in our communities," she said. "They share the negative and positive ways they dealt with trauma and the importance of mentoring. We need to help young people cope and protect them from further trauma and build resilience."

Key presenters also included Jonathan Cloud, a Wisconsin-based national expert in special initiatives in youth outreach, family support, community organizing, and child protective services; Dennis Winters, chief economist at the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development; and Mindy Frimodig, MD, ThedaCare Physicians-Shawano, who has specialized training in providing trauma-informed care.

Frost hopes Friday's community plunge helped highlight what is being done to address the effects of ACEs and how to fill in the gaps that remain. "We can wrap our community around this issue just by recognizing the effects of ACEs in our personal lives, workplaces, or even at the grocery store. When we work together to build more protection and resilience, we build hope, and that's often what's missing in the lives of people who experience trauma."

The CHAT group will develop opportunities for community members to join small work groups on the topic of ACEs and how to be trauma-informed, including

workplace training and community education events. To learn more, contact Paula Morgen, ThedaCare Director of Community Health.

For more than 100 years, ThedaCare® has been committed to finding a better way to deliver serious and complex healthcare to patients throughout Northeast Wisconsin. The organization serves over 200,000 patients annually and employs more than 6,700 healthcare professionals throughout the region. ThedaCare has seven hospitals located in Appleton, Neenah, Berlin, Waupaca, Shawano, New London and Wild Rose as well as 31 clinics in nine counties. ThedaCare is the first in Wisconsin to be a Mayo Clinic Care Network Member, giving specialists the ability to consult with Mayo Clinic experts on a patient's care. ThedaCare is a nonprofit healthcare organization with a level II trauma center, comprehensive cancer treatment, and stroke, orthopedic and cardiac programs, as well as a foundation dedicated to community service. For more information, visit [www.thedacare.org](http://www.thedacare.org) or follow ThedaCare on Facebook and Twitter.

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