

# Your Turn: The gift of empathy for trauma victims

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(Photo: Provided photo)

It is common during the holiday season to express gratitude for a comfortable station in life by giving generously to others. Expressions of generosity typically come in the form of holiday gifts or food to help families with scarce financial resources to enjoy the holiday season.

I am writing today to make you aware of an opportunity to be generous of heart. You see, more people than you might guess experience adversity, toxic stress and trauma during childhood. Those affected have a heightened stress response, and may exhibit a misplaced "fight or flight," reaction usually stimulated by a literal threat to survival. In children, this can look like misbehavior, defiance or withdrawal.

With this in mind, the best gifts we can give to children and adults who may have experienced trauma are empathy, compassion and assurance of their safety. We can also learn together as a community how to build hope and resilience in ourselves and those we interact with regularly.

To launch a communitywide conversation on adverse childhood experiences and trauma, Pro Action recently co-sponsored a screening of the movie, "Resilience: The Biology of Stress & the Science of Hope." Produced by KPJR Films and directed by James Redford, "Resilience" chronicles the birth of a new movement among pediatricians, therapists, educators and communities who are using cutting-edge brain science to disrupt cycles of violence, addiction and disease.

The movie highlights the landmark Kaiser-CDC Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, which demonstrated links between exposure to numerous adverse childhood experiences (such as violence, addiction, mental illness, divorce, parent incarceration and poverty) and poor long-term physical health outcomes.

More than 60 community members representing the general public, faith leaders, health practitioners, educators, child care providers and human service professionals gathered at Vernon E. Wightman Primary School in Bath on Oct. 30 to dine together, view the film and begin a community dialogue about how to become a trauma-informed community. A trauma-informed community is able to respond sensitively to the burden of childhood trauma carried by so many of our neighbors, and provides counteracting positive experiences that allow for and help to build hope and resilience.

Pro Action, Care Compass Network, the Corning-Painted Post Area School District and Prevent Child Abuse New York are partnering to host another "Resilience" screening and community conversation at C-PP High School on Jan. 10. The registration link will be circulated by these partners. Please watch for an opportunity to participate.

And please remember this holiday season that your gift of empathy may make a world of difference for someone in your path who has been through more than you know.

*Laura Rossman is executive director of Pro Action of Steuben and Yates Inc.*

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