

## Our City

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is the term used to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other potentially traumatic experiences that occur to people under the age of 18. Adverse Childhood Experiences have been linked to risky health behaviors, chronic health conditions, low life potential, and early death. As the number of ACEs increases, so does the risk for these four outcomes. Early childhood adversity caused by a traumatic injury, poor mental health, poor maternal health, infectious disease, chronic disease, risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol abuse, unsafe sex and lack of positive life opportunities has a lasting impact on every child (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2019). At the School District-wide staff in-service last Friday everyone learned of the often life-long and profound impact of ACEs.

Two weeks ago I wrote of the raid in Mississippi and the impact it and other lesser known raids are having on our community. It is profound in ways hard for me to imagine. During our in-service last Friday, School District Superintendent Randy Jensen, spoke of a young person who had been accepted and admitted to a university and had received numerous scholarships. The student could not complete the financial aid forms because of their DACA status and citizenship status of their parent, not wanting to possibly alert authorities and provoke deportation. And while most of the tuition could have been paid by the scholarships earned class supplies could not be purchased and thus after only one day in college the student dropped out, reported Superintendent Jensen. I share this with you only because it is the most recent of so many examples. Many of our infants and students live in a constant state of fear and mental anguish thus prime candidates for ACEs.

Fortunately, we live in a community that gets it. After having shared his story Jensen and I called on a local business to see if they would be open to the idea of helping the student. They are. The student will interview this week and if it seems like a good fit the student will likely go to work shortly after. Should the fit prove positive the student will restart school at the university in the coming months with the help of the previously earned scholarships, other funds secured by Superintendent Jensen, the local business and quite possibly the FFA Alumni.

Ours, the community of American Falls, is not a perfect system but I have to say it is pretty darn good as I compare it to the national scene. How is it that bits and pieces, multiple communities all across the country, can be better than the whole? As I have served on Governor Little's education task force my belief in the value of real leadership, as exemplified by the Governor, Senior Education Policy Advisor Greg Wilson, task force Co-chairs Bill Gilbert and Debbie Critchfield has been forever solidified. Leadership is about inspiring others to identify and work toward common goals for the common good; not inciting hate and rancor among those who have different opinions or even beliefs than us. Real leadership is exemplified in the very idea of America.

ACEs, despite the real leadership of Superintendent Jensen and many in our community remain a part of life for far too many of our youth. Yet, as in the singular example above, perhaps we as a community can make positive differences in all the lives that need help in American Falls. I realize that this tract over the last few weeks may be tedious for many, but I truly believe we, our community, are exemplars for the very best parts of what has always made America America.

Until next week...