

Press Release

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SIGNIFICANT EU INVESTMENT TO HELP TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF VULNERABLE FAMILIES

Cross border conference highlights the costs of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Leading experts speaking at the first cross border Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) conference highlighted that children who have been exposed to situations such as domestic violence, alcohol/drug abuse, mental illness and bereavement can experience negative impacts which last well into adulthood. Such impacts can include poorer educational achievements, employment status and health and well-being.

The 650 plus attendees at the event were informed that ACEs are more commonplace than we think and that many of us will have experienced at least one ACE in our childhood.

Attendees included people from health & social care services, education, policing, justice, community and voluntary sectors from across Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The high turnout demonstrates the strong interest in learning more about the potential negative impact of ACEs on children, young people and adults and how organisations, communities and families can be more ACE aware and pro-active. The remarkable accounts from three young people who provided personal testimonies on how they overcome adversity and difficulties in their lives was one of the conference highlights.

As part of the conference held in the Millennium Forum in Derry City, a three year, €5.01 million EU INTERREG VA funded cross-border project was launched. The CAWT Multiple Adverse Childhood Experiences (MACE) Project secured the EU funding from the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB). This EU funding will be used to help transform the lives of vulnerable families who are at risk from multiple adversities in their lives, through identification, early intervention and the provision of support within their communities.



The CAWT (Co-operation and Working Together) Partnership which secured the funding comprises the HSE, the Southern Health and Social Care Trust, the Western Health and Social Care Trust, the Public Health Agency and the Health and Social Care Board. Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is also a MACE project partner.

The project will establish five cross border community networks to deliver tailored interventions to identified families and will build upon existing community infrastructure and supports on both sides of the border. The five network areas are Derry / Letterkenny & Inishowen; Strabane/West Donegal; Fermanagh/Sligo & Leitrim; Armagh/Monaghan & Cavan; and Newry/ Louth.

Welcoming the project Gina McIntyre, CEO of the Special EU Programmes Body said: **“Adversity and hardship can occur in any family at any time, however some families are more vulnerable than others due to a combination of circumstances. This project will deliver upon one of the key objectives of the EU’s INTERREG VA Programme, which seeks to improve the health and well-being of thousands of citizens living in this region, by helping to identify vulnerable families who will benefit from early parenting and family development assistance. This support is designed to nurture families and ensure the best outcomes for the children involved, on a cross-border basis.”**

Speaking at the conference and project launch on behalf of the Department of Health in Northern Ireland, Alasdair MacInnes, Head of Child Protection Unit, said: **The Department of Health is working in partnership with colleagues across health and social care to transform services over a 10 year period, in line with the strategic direction set out in ‘Health and Wellbeing 2026: Delivering Together’.** This includes significant investment in children’s services, based in large part on recognition of the impact of trauma and the need for early intervention – to identify and address issues before they arise, when possible. Recognition of the impact of ACEs helps professionals identify why some children do not thrive as they should. This project, with assistance from the EU’s INTERREG VA programme, will harness the strengths of communities and services on both sides of the border and should lead to better outcomes for families and children.

Also commenting Éimear Fisher, Assistant Secretary at the Department of Children and Youth Affairs said: **“Prevention and early intervention are critical to the reduction of trauma in the lives of vulnerable children. This EU-funded programme, which crosses many sectors, is a strong step in the identification of and support for such children and their families. By working together in structured multi-agency projects, we can provide valuable interventions to address difficulties and improve the well-being of those who have had adverse childhood experiences.”**

Jim Gibson, Chief Operations Officer, Tusla outlined his support for and importance of the project. He said: **“The MACE project very much aligns with Tusla's policy context, vision, mission and strategies - and really provides us with the opportunity to engage in innovative practice whilst also deepening our partnership with the HSE and making new partnerships on a cross border basis. We acknowledge the EU INTERREG VA funding and are grateful for the opportunity to support the implementation of the project and to bring the learning from its implementation forward to inform the work of our whole organisation into the future”**

Speaking on behalf of the CAWT Project Board, which is managing the overall project in the border area, Kieran Downey, Western Health and Social Care Trust, said: **“On behalf of the MACE Project Board, I am delighted that the health services has been able to secure valuable European Union funding to enable us build more ACE aware & trauma informed communities on a cross border basis. The theme of today’s event is hope and resilience and our guest speakers have given us a road map to implementing the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) approach. By building supportive communities, we can increase the levels of resilience in children and adults and ensure those who suffered ACEs can avoid many of their health harming consequences.”**

Commenting on the significant EU investment, Director General of the CAWT Partnership, Damien McCallion from the HSE said: **“The cross border MACE project is aligned closely to current policy and practice aimed at reducing the impact of multiple negative experiences or ACEs in childhood. The CAWT partners, and Tusla as a project partner, will be utilising this considerable EU investment to implement practical supports and programmes which directly benefit families and communities in the border region. ”**

Speakers at the conference included Trevor Spratt, Professor in Childhood Research, Trinity College, Dublin; Pamela Cooper, Regional Implementation Manager at TUSLA and Dr Karen Treisman, a renowned clinical psychologist and author.

Match-funding for the project has been provided by both Departments of Health in Ireland.

-ENDS

Notes to editors:

- ACEs relate to the number of multiple adverse childhood or negative experiences to which a child is exposed.
- The context for the development of the MACE Project stems from the fact that the project partners, as statutory providers of health and social care within the eligible area, recognise that there is a raft of compelling evidence that underpins the importance of early intervention and support for families to ensure the best outcomes for their children. The work across early years and early adolescence is based on the evidence that these are the optimum times for support and the development of children and young people.
- In Wales a study shows that compared with people with no ACEs, those with 4 + ACEs are:
 - 4 times more likely to be a high risk drinker
 - 6 times more likely to have had or caused a teenage pregnancy
 - 6 times more likely to smoke tobacco or E cigs
 - 11 times more likely to have smoked cannabis
 - 14 times more likely to be a violence victim in last 12 months
 - 15 times more likely to have committed violence in last 12 months
 - 16 times more likely to have used crack cocaine or heroin
 - 20 times more likely to have been incarcerated

Source: [ACEs and their impact on health-harming behaviours in the Welsh adult population](#) Published January 2016

- The CAWT MACE project is scheduled to complete in 2021.
- The CAWT MACE project partners are the HSE, Western Health and Social Care Trust; Southern Health and Social Care Trust; Public Health Agency, Health and Social Care Board and Tusla



- The project is one of four cross border health and social care projects within the Co-operation and Working Together (CAWT), the cross border health and social care partnership, suite of EU funded projects.
- The CAWT MACE Project has received grant funding totalling €5.01 million and is funded through the European Union's INTERREG VA Programme, managed by the Special EU Programmes Body, and match funded by the Northern Ireland Executive and the Irish Government with support from the Scottish Government
- The Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance in Northern Ireland and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU Structural Funds Programmes, PEACE IV and INTERREG VA which are designed to enhance cross-border cooperation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society. The Programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG VA, Western Scotland.
- The INTERREG VA Programme has a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) contribution of €240 million and aims to address the economic and social problems which result from the existence of borders.
- For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu