

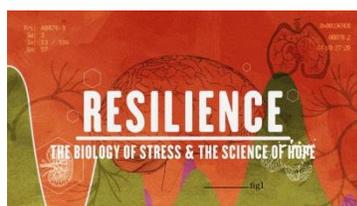
**Community Conversations @ the Library 2018/2019:  
Resilience Partner**



The Community Conversations project launched in 2017 with the aim of showcasing libraries and the library system as a community partner in three areas:

- Community education that provides an informed context for exploring current issues.
- Dialog with experts and community members that models a thoughtful engagement with diverse perspectives.
- Awareness of opportunities for action, from ongoing learning to active support of an issue or project.

Building on the experience and partnerships engaged in the successful 2017 program addressing criminal justice issues, the 2018 program turned to the topic of childhood trauma and resilience. In



collaboration with several prior and new partner organizations, we began a series of library-hosted screenings and discussions focused on a one-hour documentary film – Resilience: The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope (released late 2017). Using both data and personal narratives, the film succinctly communicates the evidence reported to

the scientific community two-decades earlier about the strong correlation between adverse childhood experiences and chronic illness in adults, e.g., heart disease, cancer, high blood pressure, obesity, and depression, to name just a few. Especially relevant in the light of the active national discussion of the opioid epidemic, the film offers new insight into the mechanism of trauma and its prevalence and impact on communities. Finally, it shows how communities have responded and what individuals can do to both prevent and mitigate the impact of trauma among all ages.

Concurrent with the screenings, content on the Community Conversations website ([conversations.westchesterlibraries.org](http://conversations.westchesterlibraries.org)) was expanded to support this theme. The site supports event awareness, provides additional information on the topic, includes a way for the partner agencies to be recognized and is means for community members to connect with the Coalition.



In 2018, 26 public screenings were offered, reaching 851 people. Additionally, 68 private screenings took place, involving county agencies, nonprofits, school districts; these were attended by more than 2,200 individuals. Resilience Coalition members include small and large nonprofits, county agencies, schools, and individual community members. These members worked collaboratively to facilitate post-screening discussions and support individuals in their response to the potentially frightening and worrisome content of the film. Perhaps more importantly, as a Coalition, facilitators began a new dialog about what communities could do to build resilience.

In December, the Coalition Planning Team met and reviewed key outcomes from the year. As a group, we confirmed the need for continuing the work of awareness building. We also resolved to collaborate

on several key projects that would allow us to better respond to communities and organizations seeking to address this critical public health topic. Key Coalition projects include:

- Awareness building – Continued offerings to the general public as well as targeted outreach to school districts, foster parents, PTA and SEPTA (Special Education PTA), seniors, disability groups, youth bureaus, and Spanish-speaking audiences. Given the strong community interest, we are exploring offering an online book club to engage interested professionals and consumers in a deeper understanding of trauma impacts and responses. A local conference is being considered for early 2020.
- Agency/Provider Actions and Training – A model is emerging whereby agencies/provider organizations would objectively assess trauma-informed service attitudes and understanding. One of several programs could then be offered to educate and sensitize staff.
- Models for Action – In conjunction with the County Department of Community Mental Health, we are preparing a summary of models for action that are being executed in other counties/states to address early childhood trauma prevention, mitigation, and individual and community resilience.
- Consumer education/guidance – A team of Coalition members is assessing options such as:  
1) a provider pledge that would signal an understanding of trauma-informed service principles,  
2) a set of questions consumers can productively ask of trauma service providers,  
3) an explanation of costs, approaches, rights, and responsibilities in navigating mental health services in Westchester County.
- Public Training – In response to outreach by specific communities such as foster parents, seniors, school districts, reentry/corrections specific trainings have been developed to incorporate an explanation of the mechanisms of trauma and the specific skills that can be cultivated to mitigate its impact, i.e., activities that promote an experience of safety, connection and self-regulation. As these trainings develop, they will be made available to member libraries as well as community groups.

For WLS, the success of this project has been in three key areas: public awareness of libraries as a forum for community education and engagement, expansion of relationships and new relationships with agencies vital to outreach efforts, and development of content and approaches to serve the needs of Westchester communities to address trauma and foster resilience.

Just some of the “wins” thus far have been WLS’s invitation to offer staff trainings at Department of Social Services offices; the inclusion of the film and subsequent trauma training among County corrections staff; participation in several school district staff training events; introduction of this subject matter into foster parent trainings; engagement with the Regional Youth Justice Initiative on the subject of trauma and resilience education; and a growing understanding among diverse groups that this is a subject that crosses Westchester’s socio-economic divides.

While there are additional topics ready for this library-based community engagement program, we seem to have more to gain and learn from this subject, possibly taking us through 2020.