

AEP speech to propose motion 33 on the need for a strategy for children and young people

President, Congress

A recent report from the Children's Commissioner in England reported that there are 2 million CYP who are living in circumstances that make them vulnerable to the impact of a range of adverse childhood experiences.

Experiences that can lead to immense stress – neuroscience tells us that excessive stress can severely impair the growth of the brain's neural pathways so that children's physical, intellectual and emotional development are all literally stunted.

What are those experiences? They arise from many different sources in children's homes and communities – from misuse of drugs and alcohol within the family, from living in overcrowded conditions, from being separated from parents – because of adults' hospitalisation, or having to work away from home - from social isolation, from poor nutrition, from disjointed care because of parents working long, unsocial and sometimes unpredictable hours, from abuse and domestic violence, from poverty, from discrimination, from having to care for other children and sick or disabled parents, from forced re-housing because of short term lets and lack of affordable housing which cuts them adrift from familiar people and surroundings, which leads to a lack of consistency in their lives and their schooling

You may ask why have we brought this motion to Congress – but those 2 million children identified by the Children's Commissioner are living in our families and communities – they

will have parents who are members of our trade unions and we would hope that they will grow up to become trade unionists themselves in the future – their lives and the way they have to live them are our business – the key themes of this year’s Congress – the economy, Brexit, respect and a voice at work, good services and strong unions affect adults and children.

In any society children require adult protection – from their parents, from their extended families and from local and national government - to reduce sources of stress, to support responsive relationships and to strengthen core life skills. But, sometimes, those very adults can inadvertently cause those adverse experiences for CYP.

Some of those experiences can be caused by circumstances directly related to parents’ work

Not being able to make ends meet and provide a balanced diet or to be able to afford decent housing with safe outside space to play **because of poor pay**

Not being able to attend to your children’s educational, health needs **because of long hours and restrictive working practices,**

Not being able to arrange good quality, caring substitute care for your children **because of not having next week’s roster or being required to work extra hours without proper notice**

Having to move your children’s school and support network **because of forced workplace moves**

Watching your children’s health suffer **because of the effects of environmental policies**

Little or no access to safe affordable public transport **because of transport policies and practices**

Economic policies have led to the fragmentation and disintegration of those organisations who help children and families, have led to diminishing public services

Congress, is anyone scrutinising and recognising the overall impact of a whole range of current economic, industrial and social policies and working practices on today's CYP?

We need that scrutiny and recognition and we need a national debate across all our communities about all our children and young people and their basic needs – we need to develop a consensus about what experiences our children need in order to thrive so that they develop successfully as active and fulfilled adults in our communities

The outcome of that debate should then inform the government to develop and publish a joined up strategy for CYP which is guided by the ever growing body of research on the effects of early and adverse childhood experiences, which promotes the holistic development and well-being of **all** our CYP and ensures that all new government policies at national and local level (which may ostensibly be aimed at adults) are assessed in terms of their impact upon CYP before agreeing to implement them.