**KEEPING STRONG DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC**

Thank you to those at Barnwood Trust for inviting me to speak today. It is an honour, and I only wish I were able to meet and speak to you personally rather than virtually. May I wish you all a very warm welcome and, on your behalf, thank the Barnwood Trust for organising this on-line conference at short notice in the midst of all their wonderful work supporting individuals and charities in Gloucestershire.

**Opening**

One of my favourite sayings is: *When life gives you lemons, make lemonade”*

Across the globe each and everyone has received a huge delivery of very ripe lemons and many of us are struggling to find the blender to make the lemonade and others have no way of getting a blender.

It applied to me as I started in my role of High Sheriff on 15th March, I was due to have attend the Legal Service and Declaration at Gloucester Cathedral with about 400 people attending. It was cancelled for obvious reasons 2 days before. With the help of some wonderful people we managed to have a smaller event with friends and family, creating special memories. We had lemonade!

My diary emptied overnight and in the following weeks I adapted to be a virtual High Sheriff, once I had recovered from Covid-19. I decided to still focus on my theme for the year of ACES – Adverse Childhood Experiences. More on that later.

And in the last 2 months after following the response to this ghastly pandemic and speaking with a number of organisations in the county, I have been struck by 3 things: COMMUNITY; COMPASSION; COLLABORATION

**COMMUNITY**

We have all witnessed and I am sure many of you have supported the efforts of local neighbourhoods and communities to work together to support those on their doorstep, connecting whether through a knock on door, delivery of a leaflet, phone call or social media, connecting with neighbours they usually pass on the street without any acknowledgement. This is in the midst of a pandemic where the priority is saving lives.

On the matter of health, there is a Ted Talk, by Susan Pinker on The Secret of Living Longer, published pre Covid-19. In the developed world on average, women live 6 to 8 years longer than men.. In her research, she identified a village in Sardinia with super longevity of both sexes. In this “Blue Zone”, there are 6 times as many centenarians as on mainland Italy and the men live as long as women. She says that 25 per cent is down to genetics and the remaining 75 per cent is attributed to lifestyle.

What are these lifestyle factors? The village is densely populated with a strong community interaction. We all hear the health advice on not smoking or drinking, exercise, diet, flu vaccines (very topical) etc etc. But according to research, the top predictors on long life are in first place Social Integration, being part of a community and connected with others. In second place is close relationships. It is a biological imperative to know that we belong to a community

We know about the shocking number of deaths in Italy. In that Sardinian village, there has only been 1 reported case of Coronavirus of someone who had been aboard. No deaths.

As most of you know Barnwood Trusts’ model focuses on community building. What lessons can be learned from this health crisis to build upon the foundations of the selfless contributions through philanthropy of time and money?

How do we build upon that sense of community and make it sustainable and make lemonade?

**COMPASSION**

We are all thinking about contagion right now due to coronavirus, but let’s not forget that compassion and kindness are also highly contagious. Scientists at Harvard and Yale measured the contagiousness of kindness in 3 social steps. That is when you show compassion or kindness to someone else (social step 1 from you) because of how you made that person feel, the recipient of that kindness will be kind or kinder to someone else( 2 social steps from you) and the recipient of that kindness will be kind or kinder to someone else (3 social steps from you).

In practice compassion and kindness is “circularly contagion” like the way a wave travels outwards when you drop a pebble in water.

There have been so many incredible acts of kindness by individuals and organistions, whether charitable or corporate, from standing on our doorsteps to clap for the NHS and carers, Captain Tom Moore’s walk raising over £32 million, the number of new volunteers making scrubs, or delivering food in their community. The list goes on and on and continues to grow. I have never seen anything like it in my lifetime.

How does our community capitalise on that compassion and make it sustainable and make lemonade?

**COLLABORATION**

We often use words and don’t know their true meaning, so I thought I would check it “the action of working with someone to produce something. I take from this the productivity. It’s not just talking about it, it’s getting on and doing.

Again, since mid-March we have seen so much collaboration producing incredible results delivered with compassion for the benefit of the community of Gloucestershire.

In the early weeks, the grant making organisations local and national collaborated with the resulting Gloucestershire Funders: The Long Table in collaboration with the Diocese, commercial companies such as Creed Catering and charities such as the Nelson Trust and the Wiggly Worm set a goal of feeding 5000. I believe that this is now about 30,000. In Barton and Tredworth the Friendship Café and Fairshares and Gloucester Services and others are collaborating to produce meals for those in need in their community. The list goes on and on. It is so good to see the public, private and third sectors “working together to produce something. This demonstrates a civil society.

How do we maintain that collaboration delivered with compassion for the benefit of our community and make it sustainable and make lemonade?

**ACES**

Before I conclude, I will spend a few minutes on my focus for the year of ACES Adverse Childhood Experiences, which I am sorry to say will be even more relevant as we emerge from this crisis.

I see a 14 year- old. Let’s call him Jimmy. He lives in Matson with foster parents- his 3rd family in the last 6 years. He’s been excluded from school, is well known by the Police and is being targeted by a county lines gang from Birmingham. And the question I ask is not what’s wrong with him but what’s happened to him.

I want to help Jimmy have a positive future.

ACES – they are traumatic events in a young person’s life before the age of 18 that causes toxic stress. Science shows that this impacts on their health and life outcomes.

ACES include Abuse: physical; emotional; sexual: Neglect: physical and emotional: Household adversity, such as substance misuse; mental health; domestic abuse; incarceration of a parent; parental separation

Scientific evidence shows that the impact of ACES causes social, emotional and cognitive impairment. Here are examples of how 4 more ACES will impact a young person:

They are 2 x more likely to be morbidly obese; 5 x more likely to have a teenage pregnancy; 5 x more likely to be victim of domestic abuse; 8 x more likely to have hit someone in past 12 months; 9 x more likely to be in prison or cells; 10 x more likely to be a heroin or crack user

I am sorry to be gloomy but here’s the good news. With the support and engagement of trusted adults, it’s possible to change theses outcomes. More good news. Action on Aces; this is a Gloucestershire initiative of statutory agencies including the Police, the NHS; the County council and local councils, Chelt Boro Homes and voluntary organisationwho are working together to support at risk youngsters in Gloucestershire.

So, let’s go back to Jimmy. Though a chance meeting, Jimmy met Dan who was talking to a mate about his time in the Army. Jimmy told Dan he wanted to join the Army so he could hurt his Dad the way his Dad had hurt him. His Dad was in prison. Dan through a voluntary organisation worked with Jimmy on his fitness and they formed a trusted relationship. One day, Dan asked Jimmy why he always showed up for him but not for meetings with his social workers or teachers. Jimmy’s answer? You are the first person to spend time with me and not being paid to do so. Jimmy is now in the Army.

**Conclusion-**

So, what makes us strong in a pandemic?

COMMUNITY COMPASSION AND COLLABORATION.

I invite you personally and in your organisations to reflect on 3 questions

**How do we build upon that sense of community and make it sustainable?**

**How does our community capitalise on that compassion and make it sustainable?**

**How do we maintain that collaboration delivered with compassion for the benefit of our community and make it sustainable**?

**Extract from The Boy, the mole, the fox and the Horse**

**By Charlie Mackesy**

“Is your glass half empty or half full?” asked the mole.

“I think I am grateful to have a glass” said the boy.

“We don’t know about tomorrow” said the horse, “all we need to know is that we love each other”.

“When the dark clouds come….keep going”.

“When the big things feel out of control….focus on what you love right under your nose”

“This storm will pass”

After the storm

“We have such a long way to go,” sighed the boy.

“Yes, but look how far we’ve come” said the horse.

“Sometimes I want to say I love you all”, said the mole, “but I find it difficult”.

“Do you?” said the boy.

“Yes, so I say something like I’m glad we are all here”

“OK,” said the boy.

“I’m glad we are all here”

“We are so glad you are here too”

“What’s your best discovery?” asked the mole.

“That I’m enough as I am” said the boy.

“I’ve realised why we are here, “whispered the boy.

“for cake?” asked the mole.

“To love,” said the boy.

“And to be loved, “said the horse.

**Each and every one of us has gifts which we can use to live in the moment, to share with others. Who knows what might be achieved if we share that love to get through the storm to make lemonade!**

Helen Lovett

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