

Encouraging businesses to help society

International child abuse prevention experts Randell and Sandra Alexander recently met with business leaders, politicians and health professionals, during a two week visit to New Zealand. Hosted by Child Matters, the visit generated discussions and information sharing around the topic of child abuse and what can be done to prevent it.

Part of the Alexanders' message was to encourage businesses to work collaboratively with their communities and other organisations, with the aim of creating safe, stable, nurturing environments and relationships for children, both within the workplace and in society.

The Alexanders are highly regarded within their respective fields: Randell Alexander is a professor of paediatrics at the University of Florida, an internationally recognised forensic paediatrician who leads Florida's medically led Child Protection Teams, while Sandra boasts over 40 years' experience in child abuse prevention, bringing a specialist, multi-faceted dialogue to the area of child abuse and prevention issues.

The couple toured New Zealand sharing their knowledge and expertise about the role of businesses, health professionals, organisations and individuals in preventing child abuse and neglect.

Included in their New Zealand visit (which involved a parliamentary breakfast, meetings with business and organisation leaders), the couple provided thought provoking discussion to almost 100 health and other professionals and business people in Hamilton, at Wintec Atrium.

A key focus of the presentation entitled 'International Perspectives on Children's Health and Wellbeing', centred around the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study (ACE); one of the largest studies ever conducted to assess associations between childhood maltreatment and long term health and well-being.

The study showed that the more adverse childhood experiences a person had, the more likely it was they would miss work, work at lower productivity or experience work related injury.

"Child abuse and other kinds of bad experiences can impact our lifelong health and wellbeing, our brain health and how our brain develops, educational achievement, intellectual development and even workforce readiness and productivity," said Sandra Alexander.

"It's that public health burden, the impact on all the different things that makes this such a priority. It increases the use of health and mental health services, the justice services, other

kinds of remedial services; all of which have a huge economical impact as well as a human impact.

“So we recognise that child abuse and adverse childhood experiences are a public health issue. It’s also the public’s health issue. So that means everybody in the community owns the problem too.”

Randell and Sandra highlighted some of the long term effects that adverse childhood experiences have on business; in terms of productivity, absenteeism, employment and work related injuries.

The research outlined the role businesses could play in changing the way we treat children in our society and helping create a society which works to prevent child abuse and the ongoing lifelong repercussions.

Businesses were encouraged to:

- Learn about the importance of creating safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments
- Understand that they are employing the families and their respective “situations”
- Understand how child abuse and neglect directly affects business and the hidden costs of adverse childhood effects
- Explore and implement concrete actions to promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments: with employees, in their sector and in their community.

The Alexanders’ messages reinforced Child Matters long held belief that everybody has a role to play in preventing child abuse.

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