**Will You Marry Us?**

An open letter to Sonoma County ACES Connections members

We have some exciting news! We were just selected to receive $100,000 to expand our ACES work! It is thrilling, scary and inspiring all at once. This changes many things. We now have serious obligations and responsibilities. So please sit down, we need to talk about our relationship.

Up to now, our relationship has been pretty casual. It’s been “Hey, haven’t seen you in a while, we’re having a meeting next month, love to see you, but if you can’t make it, no big deal.” Well, now it is a big deal. We need to take it to the next level.

We have talked a lot about adverse childhood experiences, and how such experiences early in life can set a pattern for future behavior. What is true for children is true for fledgling organizations as well. We have also talked about the importance of resilience. A resilient person has loving, caring and responsible persons in their life to serve as mentors, role models and resources. A resilient organization needs those same kind of people too. We have several committed persons on board, but we can always use more. Whoever heard of having “too many good influences” in your life?

The next few meetings will really matter. We need to define fundamental things, like our rules and structure. While that may not sound exciting, think of your own family and how different the rules were in your house compared to those of your friends. Those rules and structure say a lot about the level of trust, freedom to speak up, and responsibility to and respect for others in that household. What are the rules in the house you would want to live in?

Deciding on details like this means we need to be very thoughtful about the choices we make. “Mindfulness” sounds like one of those “New Age” terms, but when traumatized children simply repeat what they learned from their parents you cannot expect progress. So just doing things the usual way may, in fact be why things are not getting better.

That’s why I was a bit dismayed to see a proposal that we create committees like “public health”, “mental health” and “criminal justice.” Seriously? How many times have we said compartmentalizing services just adds to the problem? How are we going to transform the County by “doing things the way we’ve always done them?”

Too often, we simply join the committee our boss would tell us to join. If you are an educator, you gravitate towards the Schools committee. I’m proposing creating committees based on what your heart says. If you enjoy spreading the word about ACES, join our Community Education Committee. If getting a copy of the newest assessment tool excites you, join our Best Practices Committee. And since terms like “implied structure” and “underlying assumptions” turn me on, you know I should be on the Operations & Planning Committee! (For a full list of my proposed committees, see my previous post, “Thoughts About Next Steps for Sonoma County ACES Connection.”)

Defining committees, developing a charter, and clarifying our vision and values are just some of the big topics we need to discuss. Mindfulness means walking your talk. We have talked a lot about ACES and how a trauma informed approach would be different than what exists at present. Now we have a chance to do something about it.

Maybe you want to wait or think more before committing. I hope that is not the case, because we are giving birth to this organization now and all this is going to happen whether you are here or not. You will miss out on those important first steps. We need you to be present and involved at the next few meetings. We need your commitment now. So as I said at the beginning, will you marry us?