



the last word:

# Peace for victims of violence



**Dr Christine Wekerle** is an Associate Professor in Paediatrics at McMaster University, Canada, whose research focuses on improving health and resilience among maltreated populations. Here, she discusses the importance of finding peace within ourselves – even when our outer circumstances are turbulent and chaotic

**VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE** struggle to both gain inner peace and find peaceful relationships. The traumatic events of child abuse and neglect can disturb the peace of professionals working with children, adolescents and families. Therefore, it makes good sense that the 2015 Global Goals locate child maltreatment in the Peace and Justice Goal.

### **BUILDING RESILIENCE**

Child abuse and neglect can result in fatalities and substantial disability. At the same time that we resist 'gaze aversion' to child maltreatment, we must attend to children's self-righting efforts to interact with external resources to live and build resilience.

Resilience refers to the connection between outer resources and our own inner resourcefulness for better health. Wonderful resources include parks and green spaces, as well as opportunities for interacting with people and discovering something new. Yet it is equally important for us to build a home within ourselves. What pictures of wellness are you hanging up in your inner home? Self-efficacy? Gratitude? Self-compassion? Physical activity? Good quality sleep?

### **FINDING INNER PEACE**

As we go through external adversities, our bodies remind us – sometimes quite strongly and suddenly – that such adversities impact us on the inside too. Research shows that external happenings, like experiencing or witnessing violence and traumatic events, can disrupt our natural stress response system. If left unchecked, this will continue in a cycle, making us sensitive to threats and anxiety and compounding our fears of being unsafe. But no matter what happens externally or what someone else does to us, we can all focus on maintaining the health of our own inner homes.

### **COMBINING ART AND SCIENCE FOR PEACE**

Earlier this year, the McMaster Museum of Art hosted exhibitions related to peace. Seeking out peace, thinking about peace and taking time out for peace are great ways to boost our sense of positivity. Interestingly, the word 'museum' is based on the word 'muse'. Muse means 'to consider thoughtfully' – and can also be 'a source of inspiration' and 'a guiding genius'. Additionally, this word refers to the nine goddesses from mythology who preside over the arts and sciences.

Picturing Wellness, one of the exhibitions that ran at the Museum from January to March 2016, brought together the arts and health sciences by strengthening observational skills with formal art analysis methodology derived from the art world. Observation is a fundamental scientific and clinical practice skill; with more information, we can form better research questions and make better policy decisions, especially in complex situations of child abuse and neglect. We can also draw valuable lessons from art, where there is no right or wrong answer. Art can help us build our tolerance for ambiguity and negative effects.

Peace is a hard won and precious treasure. Once you know and feel it, you always want to return to it – even in the chaos of a home where maltreatment happens. There is a calm eye in the centre of a storm. The storm can build and dissipate, but peace can be the constant. Picture your own wellness and resilience in the face of adversity. Where does that guiding visual take you?

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