



THE
~~ACCIDENTAL~~
Social Worker

— TRANSFORM YOUR COMMUNITY FOR JESUS —
BY UNDERSTANDING POVERTY, TRAUMA, AND ADDICTION

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The Accidental Social Worker

Dear friend,

Are you an accidental social worker?

Did you get into ministry wanting to “be the hands and feet of Jesus” and now you’re trying to figure out how to rescue others when you’re barely in the lifeboat yourself?!?

You keep trying. Giving out money. Giving out clothes or furniture. Bags of food. You help folks find jobs and inexpensive housing. You try everything you can think of. You pray and worry and pray some more.

Research shows that up to 70% of the money and resources you are giving out does NOT produce the results you are aiming for. In fact, it doesn’t even actually help those less fortunate!

Far too many fall back into lifestyles of drugs and alcohol. Bad decisions. Bad relationships.

And you wonder where you failed.

What you could have done differently. Better.

Where is that magic wand you’re supposed to wave to move this family or this single mom or this homeless vet from instability to safety and security??

I understand. I’ve been there. And I can help!

I understand your frustration, as well as your love for the people, made in God’s own image, that you want to serve.

I’ve spent the last 20 years, after some seriously bad choices, working in service to Jesus. After working many years in business and volunteering on the side, eventually the Lord led me to start a maternity home for pregnant, homeless women.

We teach things like coping skills and household budgeting, job readiness and cooking, childcare and healthy relationships. ([Click here to learn more about Foundation House Ministries.](#))

Between earning a Master’s degree in Marriage & Family Studies, and several certifications in trauma and addiction, I have learned a tremendous amount about the

lasting impact of trauma on still-developing minds as well as the poverty mindset, drug culture, jail culture, opioids, violence and gangs.

I have learned so much through our clients too. Working with them is a learning experience every day!

We are seeing a magnificent transformation in many of our clients and now the Lord is telling me it's time to share with you – my comrades-in-arms – what I've learned.

How many more lives could we impact for the Kingdom of God if more of us can repeat the trauma- and poverty-informed practices that are working so well for us, here at Foundation House Ministries? To God be the glory!!

So, let's dive in! Through each chapter, you will meet real people, in real situations.

You'll have the opportunity to both explore ideas of how to help as well as discuss what the church or ministry did in each case, and how that turned out!

I hope you enjoy learning about the fascinating and complex issues of poverty, trauma and addiction.

Blessings,



Suzanne Burns
😊

Chapter 1 - Trauma's Impact on the Developing Brain

Trauma is something that nearly every person will experience in their lifetimes. We humans invariably experience some type of traumatic event, whether it be a car accident, a cancer diagnosis, an abusive relationship, or another type of dangerous situation.

Our bodies were created with a beautiful system for emergency management, the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS). When this system works well, it enables our bodies to move into protective measures against the traumatic event. Whether we are taking evasive action or freezing in position, this system sets off the emergency warning signals in our brains which trigger our body's instinctive protective response to unknown or dangerous situations.

Autonomic Nervous System

This system is composed of two parts, the Sympathetic and the Parasympathetic Systems.

Imagine you are eating lunch in the park on your break from work. You've just finished eating your sandwich and chips and are cleaning up your mess. You are preparing to head back to your car and return to work when suddenly, in the distance, you hear a pack of angry, yelping dogs heading your direction. Instantly, your body shifts its attention from gently digesting your sandwich to increasing blood flow to your legs so that you can run away.

This is the Sympathetic System in action. Frequently referred to as the "Hot" system, it accelerates your heart rate, constricts blood vessels and raises things like blood pressure and muscle tension, and amplifies physical sensations. All for the express purpose of ensuring that your body is as equipped as possible for the fight-flight-freeze response that it anticipates.

The Parasympathetic system, or "Cool" system, is the one that most people are in, most of the time. This system promotes digestion and circulation. It maintains heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature within a normal range.



Pop quiz

What is one of the most common chronic illnesses in the poverty community?

Answer: Diabetes

As you can see in chart below, the Hot System inhibits insulin production, to maximize fuel availability, in preparation for that fight-flight-freeze physical response that the body anticipates.

AUTONOMIC NERVOUS SYSTEM

Sympathetic (Hot) System

- ▶ Accelerates heart rate
- ▶ Constricts blood vessels
- ▶ Raises blood pressure, muscle tension, physical sensations amplified
- ▶ Inhibition of insulin production, to maximize fuel availability
- ▶ Cold hands and feet
- ▶ Headaches

Parasympathetic (Cool) System

- ▶ Promotes digestion
- ▶ Intestinal motility
- ▶ Fuel storage (increases insulin activity)
- ▶ Resistance to infection
- ▶ Circulation to non-vital organs
- ▶ Releases endorphins
- ▶ Decreases heart rate, blood pressure, and body temperature

The central nervous system learns from its environment through experiences. Physiological arousal affects how the nervous system regulates thoughts, emotions, and physiology. When the balance of these two systems is dysregulated, the body responds with survival strategies at the expense of intentionality, deliberateness, and integrity.

The Sympathetic Nervous System is perfectly designed to send the body into Survival Mode. It is excellent at its job... unless one's lifestyle is that of frequent chaos, like that of many of the clients we see.

Neurobiology of Trauma

When the brain receives the notification from the Sympathetic system that danger is imminent, the brain moves into action – releasing hormones and chemicals which communicates with the various parts of the body, causing the physical responses listed above.

This cocktail acts as a signal to the rest of the body to shut down non-emergency systems and shift all attention to survival.

These hormones and chemicals take about 18-24 hours to be reabsorbed into the body after it is released. When the body releases this emergency cocktail, it is always the same dosage.



According to Dr. Louis Cozolino (2011), these chemicals are catabolic, which means that they break down protein and stop protein synthesis.

In an emergency situation, this would be considered acceptable loss of function. Just like when you are trying to escape quickly from a dangerous situation, your stomach doesn't need to worry about adequate digestion, your brain doesn't need to continue processing new information. It needs only to help you escape. All other processes can be resumed later, once emergency has passed.

Imagine, however, that your life is such that you are constantly bombarded with emergency messages. You are homeless or in an abusive situation. Everywhere you turn, you are met with crisis after crisis. If your body consistently releases dose after dose of this emergency cocktail, the very chemicals that are designed to help you shut down non-emergency begin to damage the brain, sometimes beyond repair.

Trauma-Controlled Maladaptive Behaviors

If you think of the Autonomic Nervous System as the engine of a car, with the Sympathetic system as “on” and the Parasympathetic as “off”, it's easier to understand its relationship to the (often frustrating) behaviors that your clients will exhibit. Think of these behaviors as the exhaust put off by the car being left running for too long.

Here are some signs that your client is likely in a state of hot system dominance:

- ▶ Low or no capacity for:
 - ▶ Self-awareness
 - ▶ Self-evaluation
 - ▶ Self-regulation
 - ▶ Establishing goals and acting consistently to obtain them
- ▶ More likely to react rather than being intentional
- ▶ Self-centered and Narcissistic
- ▶ Difficulty with initiation
- ▶ Reduced processing capacity (how much the brain can handle and process at one time)
- ▶ Working memory is generally short term and easily erased on the mind's chalkboard.
- ▶ Verbal memory impaired (difficult to retain information verbally...like instructions)
- ▶ Generalizing ability reduced (difficulty carrying learning in one situation to another)
- ▶ Inability to evaluate consequences of action/behavior
- ▶ Reduced ability to self-monitor and respond to social cues
- ▶ Difficulty transitioning from situation to situation
- ▶ Reduced ability to inhibit behavior, or stop one's self
- ▶ Reduced ability to focus or follow through
- ▶ Use sentences with few words...generally 7-10 max

Chances are, your biggest client-behavior frustrations are actually their hot system protecting them!

Behaviors you can expect:

- Impatience/Impulsivity
- A more limited range of behavioral responses
- Gaps in politeness or social graces
- Inappropriate emotional responses
- Less empathy for others' misfortunes
- Short-term memory
- Forgetting what to do next
- "I don't need anybody's help" attitude

Addressing Hot System Dominance

So now you are probably asking yourself, “How can I better serve these “least of these” that Jesus loves so deeply? How can I understand and accept...while modifying these problem behaviors and pushing them towards success?”

Here are some great ways to help your clients learn to regulate their systems and “cool” off!

- ▶ Where possible, ignore exhaust (behavior) and focus on turning off ignition
- ▶ Build connection and trust through relationship
- ▶ Yoga and meditation really do help
- ▶ Calm activities like coloring, reading, drawing
- ▶ Calm, listening demeanor
- ▶ Sometimes, letting exhaust run its course will diffuse
- ▶ Time and patience
- ▶ Relationship-building is key

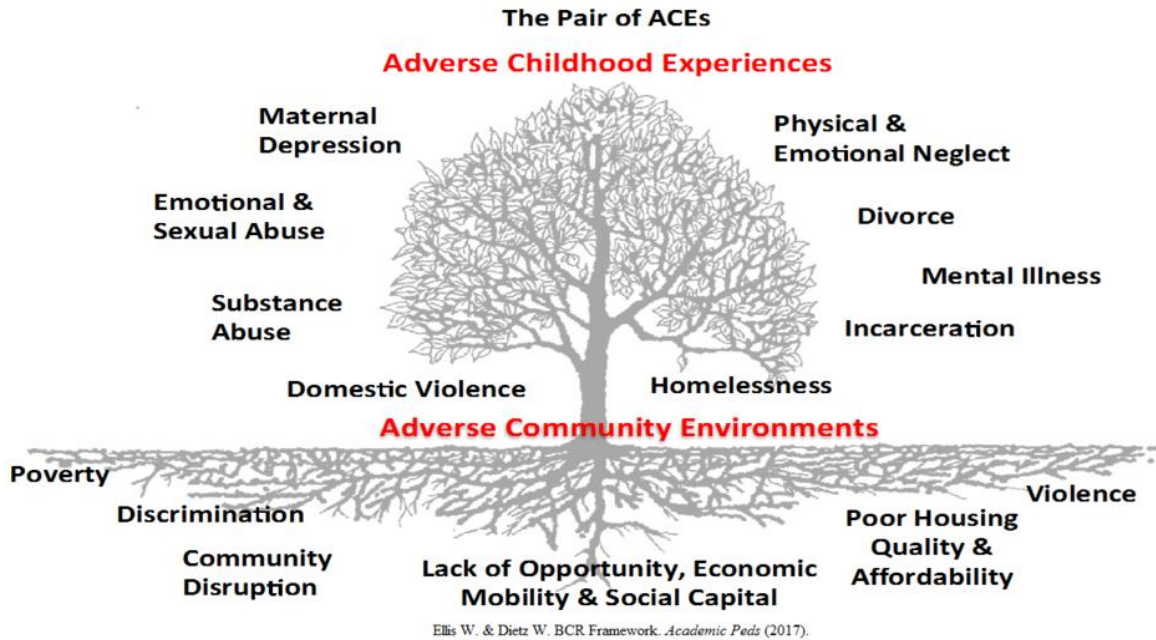
Now switch gears with me and think about the childhood that many of your clients likely experienced. Think about a child experiencing these traumatic situations over and over. Think of the destructive nature of these chemicals and hormones in the developing brain.

This gives you a bit of an insight into the lasting impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is an assessment tool, developed by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Kaiser Permanente, which examines an individual’s personal history, looking for instances of adverse experiences.

The prevalence of ACEs is strongly correlated to the development and prevalence of a wide range of health problems throughout a person’s lifespan. ACEs include: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical or emotional neglect, intimate partner violence, seeing mother treated violently by partner, household



mental illness, parental separation or divorce, and incarceration of household member.

On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being highest, the higher the number of ACEs in an individual, the greater the likelihood for substance use disorders, behavioral problems, and an increase in chronic health problems.

In the general population, only about 25% of individuals have experienced 4 or more ACEs, however in impoverished areas, that number is often far higher. Some studies have shown it to be closer to 80% in many inner cities. Extreme poverty in rural communities is also an indicator of higher than normal ACE scores.

ACES can have lasting effects on....



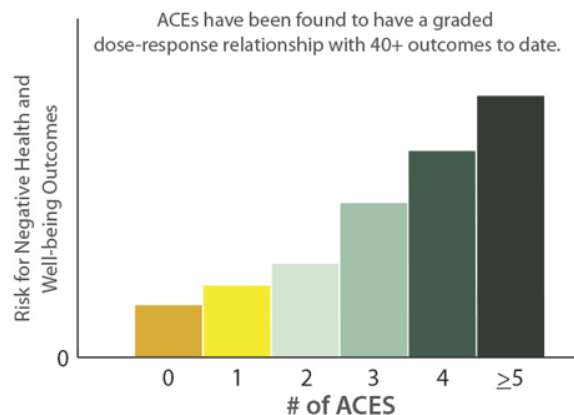
Health (obesity, diabetes, depression, suicide attempts, STDs, heart disease, cancer, stroke, COPD, broken bones)



Behaviors (smoking, alcoholism, drug use)



Life Potential (graduation rates, academic achievement, lost time from work)



*This pattern holds for the 40+ outcomes, but the exact risk values vary depending on the outcome.

When these children grow up, they are more likely to act out their trauma in dangerous lifestyles such as addiction, criminal activity, incarceration, and gang violence. They are more likely to be both abusers and victims of abuse, as well.

Going Forward

This information can often prompt people to feel that it is hopeless. They will never be able to truly help someone else get out of the pit they are trapped in because too much lasting damage has occurred.

*“For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief”
Ecclesiastes 1:18*

But nothing is impossible with God!

The Lord built our bodies with this amazing Autonomic Nervous System. He has also allowed us to pass through traumatic situations which triggered it. He is more than a conqueror and more than capable of restoring the years the locusts have eaten.

Above all things, trust Him with your clients and with your response.

But don't underestimate God's ability to tell you what you need to know. At the end of this book is a list of resources that can help you better understand the impact of chronic trauma and chronic poverty (which we didn't have time to cover) on the brain.

It is fascinating!

I want to offer you an opportunity to have your entire staff and board trained in these concepts. BeCharityWise was created to equip other nonprofits, churches, and para-church ministries to better understand the challenges of working with individuals from chronic trauma and chronic poverty backgrounds. We want to help you learn tools and resources so that you can better meet the needs of your clients and your community!

Email me today at suzanne@becharitywise.com for more information about bringing this training to your team!

Chapter 2 – Poverty Mindset

Lazy hands make for poverty, but diligent hands bring wealth.

Proverbs 10:4

The Lord sends poverty and wealth; He humbles and He exalts.

1 Samuel 2:7

Whoever disregards discipline comes to poverty and shame,
but whoever heeds correction is honored.

Proverbs 13:18

You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always
have Me.

John 12:8

Caleb and Tina* are members of your church and came to you a couple of weeks ago with a worried plea for financial assistance paying their rent. You consulted with your deacons/benevolence team and agreed to give them \$650 to pay this month's rent. Today, Caleb arrived at church proudly showing off the first phase of his new full-back tattoo...

Understandably, your deacons feel mis-used and hurt. How do you remedy this situation, and also prevent it from happening again?

Primary Concepts:

One of the “hidden rules¹” of the poverty class is that money is to be spent, not saved. The idea of “saving for a rainy day” is a purely middle-class concept. In poverty, people know that money disappears far too quickly, so it might as well be enjoyed in the moment.

If rent has been paid, then whatever else comes in can be used for pleasure. (Also, if not enough money comes in to cover rent or whatever bill is due, what *did* arrive can be used for pleasure too. *If rent can't be paid in full, then what difference does it make*, is the philosophy of poverty-mindset.)

¹ (Ehlig & Payne, 2013)

Another hidden rule is the power of relationships and outward displays of love and connection. This particular tattoo was a drawing by one of Caleb's sons, honoring Caleb's late father. A beautiful pen-and-ink drawing of a cross rising out of the clouds, featuring rays of sunlight, it will be spectacular when it is complete. So, for Caleb, this tattoo is a direct link to both his father and his son and therefore worth every penny and every ounce of pain.

Also, the tattoo artist offers payment plans. Caleb only paid \$50 (a month for the next two years) to complete the artwork.

Possible Helping Scenario #1

Worst case scenario is that one of your deacons loudly and publicly chastises Caleb about the unnecessary cost of the tattoo and the expense that the church had covered for them earlier in the month.

While the deacon might not be saying anything inaccurate or untrue, a public confrontation could very likely result in Caleb and Tina's permanent departure from your congregation. They may express their hurt and embarrassment publicly as well, and you may find a very divided congregation – some siding with the church and some siding with the couple.

A public confrontation would also violate their right to privacy. No one else in the congregation (outside of the deciding individual or group) should know that they have received any assistance. (If you do not already have a confidentiality agreement that you require to be signed by each of your deacons or benevolence team members, I strongly encourage you to get one in place.)

Another aspect of this public embarrassment is that it would probably cause Caleb to dig in his heels and resist any attempt to persuade him to see the church committee's perspective. He would likely become angry and stubbornly refuse to acknowledge any other conflicting point of view. This is not just a poverty mindset issue, but is a common reaction of men, in general, to embarrassment. Poverty tends to exacerbate a man's need to be seen as strong and in control. Public humiliation, valid or not, would make the situation worse, not better.

Possible Helping Scenario #2

A private conversation with Caleb might be your preferred response to the situation but could still create a wall of resentment between you and Caleb. Private embarrassment is still embarrassment.

Asking questions of Caleb, expressing your interest in the meaning behind the tattoo could help you understand his reasoning, without hurting him. Because there is always a reason that makes logical sense to the other person (regardless of whether or not *you* think it's logical!).

Another possible solution is to create a system where people who have requested benevolence support are provided classes, mentoring, or other targeted assistance. A local CPA or other financially-minded person in your congregation might be willing to offer some mentoring, or you might consider doing one of the many excellent Bible studies on money and personal finances.

A community contract could be helpful too, where recipients would sign a contract stating they understand these funds are to be used for x purpose and that any other money they receive should be returned to the church so that it can be “paid forward” to someone else in need. This could effectively create a micro-loan program for your congregation.

Actual Outcome

This congregation had a simple system for benevolent support. Each member of the congregation was permitted one emergency request of up to \$500 to cover any necessary living expenses, which they defined as household bills or medical expenses. The church benevolence team would review each request and, depending on cash available, would make checks out to the debt-holder rather than the church member.

After that, no other money would be given to that person or family until they had completed a 5-week financial literacy mentorship program, offered by the church treasurer, a CPA.

Non-members of the church were referred to other agencies, which the church supported financially, for targeted assistance.

So, in this case, the new tattoo may have raised a few eyebrows but didn't cause any lasting damage to either the congregation or to the couple.

The ultimate goal of any benevolence program should be to help families and individuals learn to surrender their wants, needs and desires to the authority of Jesus and allow Him to guide every aspect of their lives-including their financial decisions.

Lesson(s) Learned

- Create a plan for assistance ahead of time, including rules and responsibilities of both church and recipient. For example, will money be given directly to the recipient or will a check be made out to the debt-holder? What type of documentation, if any, will you require from the recipient before funds are released, i.e. a copy of bill or past-due notice? What types of bills will you pay? Mortgage, utilities? Will you pay credit cards or car loans? How often can folks ask for help? Is there a top dollar amount that you won't go over? Is it subjective, based on what you have available, or is it written down in policies and procedures, so that no one can be hurt or offended by your decisions?
- Create a plan for follow up. What opportunities can you offer so that people can learn how to avoid these situations in the future?
- Be mindful of the poverty mindset and remember that there is always a reason, which makes logical sense to them, for what they do. Sometimes you can speak into faulty logic and help them see a bigger picture and other times, you have to accept that they cannot hear you, no matter what you say. These are times when you have to trust that the Holy Spirit is speaking to them in His own timing.

April* is 7 months pregnant and has been attending your church since she was released from jail on drug-related charges. She has recently become a Christian, thanks to your dedicated jail-ministry team, and is finding a home among your people. Unfortunately, April is out on bond and has multiple court appearances coming up. She is living in a camper trailer in someone's backyard, with no heat or running water. She has a car and a job as a waitress, but no significant means of supporting herself or her child, when it is born.

She is full of fear about an upcoming trial (she is now a key witness to her ex-boyfriend, the father of her child, in exchange for a reduced sentence). She owes over \$1200 in fines and fees, which she must pay before she can have her driver's license restored. She is currently driving with no license and no car insurance. She also owes money to her bondsman and to her probation officer.

Her family lives in the area but will have nothing to do with her because of her years of addiction and drug-related theft and connection to gang-violence. She points out a particular house where she was once shot at. She can tell you which areas are safe to drive through and which house drug dealers.

She is avidly memorizing Scripture and has not missed a church service since she began three months ago.

She needs a wide variety of support and assistance to help her get on her feet and make good on her desire to live a different life for the Lord.

Where to even begin? How do you enter into this situation without putting yourself or your church family at risk? Is she in hiding from anyone? (If she has "ratted" on her former boyfriend and his business, she, and anyone around her, could be subject to retaliation, especially if gang-related violence is common in your area.)

Possible Helping Scenario #1

There are usually one or more shelters that you might refer April to. Maternity homes (like ours) or homeless shelters would be the most likely environments.

Of course, there isn't always a maternity home in every local area and sometimes the women can't or don't want to relocate too far away. (Check with the [National Maternity Housing Coalition](#) to find a home close to you!)

As for homeless shelters, these can be dangerous places for a single woman, especially in an even more vulnerable position of late pregnancy. She won't qualify for rehab facilities, because she isn't actively using drugs. A local domestic violence shelter may take her in but, depending on their capacity, they may not have space available.

Possible Helping Scenario #2

There may be a family who would be willing to let April live with them temporarily. This gives her a sense of family support while also encouraging her toward independence and stability. This scenario can also become a HUGE problem, for so many different reasons. (I've learned the hard way!)

Or perhaps your church could take up an offering to help her get into an apartment, helping pay the initial rent and utility expenses. Everything has risks but at least she's not living in a tent in some guy's back yard anymore!

Actual Outcome

This church had no official policies in place, preferring to be led by the Spirit.

They took up a love offering on two separate occasions – once to pay off her \$1200 debt to get her driver's license re-instated, and again when her car's transmission went out. A generous church member provided the labor for free and the church purchased the parts, to a tune of \$950.

Another generous church member offered to let April and her baby live with them for a few months, rent-free, so that she could save up enough money to move into her own apartment.

About a year after April began attending the church, she again needed financial assistance – the family she had been living with was asking her to leave and she needed money for first and last month's rent for an apartment of her own.

She had been working most of the time (except for a few weeks after she had her daughter) and had not paid anything toward rent or utilities. She had also paid very little toward babysitting because another family had volunteered to care for her daughter several nights a week while she worked.

The church and both families were frustrated that she had made so little progress toward her financial independence, but no specific goals or timelines had ever been established.

Lesson(s) Learned

- Manipulation is an important survival mechanism in poverty-class folks². This is not a conscious decision to abuse good-hearted folks. This is a fundamental survival tool. April managed to find generous people to help her but, because there were no goals or boundaries established, April was able to use her sweet personality to manipulate the situation and avoid making progress – until patience wore thin and then April was surprised by the unexpected response of the people she had considered her family.
 - Setting policies and timelines in place ahead of time can alleviate these kinds of misunderstandings and protect the generosity of your people.
- Planning of any kind is a foreign concept to those in generational poverty³ (two or more generations of families living in poverty), especially financial planning. People who have not been planners do not just wake up one morning and create an Excel spreadsheet of their monthly budget, or spontaneously use an envelope system for money management. They need careful training and support as they learn new ways of managing their funds. They need specific goals, small- and medium-sized, that are achievable and help build a sense of self-confidence in their abilities to manage their money and achieve their dreams.

² (Jensen, 2009)

³ (Payne, 2006)

Chapter 3 – Trauma’s Impact

Our fathers sinned and are no more; it is we who have borne their iniquities.

Lamentations 5:7

I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

Psalms 34:4

Who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays the iniquities of fathers into the bosom of their children after them, O great and mighty God the LORD of hosts is His Name;

Jeremiah 32:18

Kaya has arrived at your program with her 8-month old daughter. She had been with a local domestic violence shelter. When their program ends after 8 weeks, Kaya needs somewhere else to live. She is on the run from her boyfriend, the baby’s father, and his greater Chicago-area gang members, and doesn’t know anyone in your area, at all.

A beautiful African American woman, Kaya is 24 but doesn’t have a high school diploma or GED. She has spent the majority of the last couple of years prostituting for the gang.

While Kaya is friendly and personable when she wants to be, she quickly becomes angry and combative when plans changes suddenly or when she feels uncertain or frustrated.

Possible Helping Scenario #1

You could opt to put her and her baby into a pay-by-the-week motel room. This would give Kaya and her daughter some much-needed rest and peace. However, it is expensive in the long run. Your ladies may volunteer to take meals and snacks to her. (Most of those rooms only have a refrigerator and microwave; some don’t even have that!)

She doesn’t have a car so you will also be responsible for taking her everywhere she needs to go. She needs to get a job but finding affordable childcare will be challenging, especially given that the job she is likely to find will be low-paying and most of her shifts will be nights and weekends, at least to start.

Kaya is going to need long-term support, in a variety of ways, for several years.

But... you and your church family have an amazing opportunity to pour into her in a way that NO ONE ever has – not even (especially) her own mother!

Possible Helping Scenario #2

Honestly, most churches will either do Scenario #1, become overwhelmed by the great need, and quit; or they will not take her on at all. They will allow fear to hold them back from helping Kaya and her baby.

Actual Outcome

The church chose option #1, quickly became overwhelmed, but continued to persevere. Kaya had a pleasant personality and made it easy to work with her – until her traumatic past began to rear its ugly head! Once Kaya began to feel safe, her trauma began creeping up to the surface.

The smallest changes to a planned schedule would cause Kaya to erupt in anger. Or, a seemingly minor inconvenience would bring on a dark depression. The church was at a loss as to how to effectively help her. Kaya adamantly refused to see a counselor.

As the saying goes, “the children most in need of love will ask for it in the most unloving ways.” Kaya desperately needed the love and stable relationships that this church group offered her. But she feared it would all be taken away from her, too. She was afraid to trust them and afraid they would reject her. So, she lashed out in anger or withdrew into depression.

Lesson(s) Learned

- Working with individuals with a significant trauma history can be intimidating. When Kaya began to feel fearful or anxious, her fear response would be to fight. You’ve probably heard of the “fight, flight, freeze” fear response options. We are all pre-programmed to use one of these more frequently⁴, although we all can use any of the three, depending on circumstances. Learn to expect one of these fear responses and don’t be surprised (or intimidated) when it appears suddenly.
- When you find yourself in over your head, working with someone who needs a lot of help, make sure and spread out the help as much as you can. Bringing in others to help will alleviate some of the burden from you. Although, you do

⁴ (Leaf, 2013)

need to be considerate of the person you are helping – remember to let them know ahead of time that you want to have someone else join you to work on a specific aspect of the need.

- For example, say you line up a babysitter for a couple hours. Make sure and introduce them to the mom ahead of time, giving her comfort and familiarity. Many of these women have been traumatized by threats of people taking their children, and you don't want to inadvertently cause panic and heartache in the mama.

Karen arrives at your church, with her two school-aged children, and she seems to be exactly what you have been praying for – hardworking, dedicated, passionate about serving in the children’s department... Until that Wednesday night when she arrives with a black eye and a broken arm.

As Karen begins to open up about her situation, you learn that she has been married twice before, both times to abusive men, and the man she is living with now is also an abuser and an alcoholic.

First question you’ll want to ask: is she ready to leave him?

Possible Helping Scenario #1

One of the most frequent responses to a situation like Karen’s is to rush in, “guns blazing” (hopefully metaphorically speaking only!), and pull her and her children out of their home. You may opt to confront the boyfriend, or you may try to move everything out before he comes home. Sometimes, the police are called to help facilitate these types of rescues.

As most police officers will tell you, this is a dangerous scenario to be caught up in. Emotions can run very hot at this point, and this is often where police or bystanders are injured or killed. Often, victims of abuse will become staunch defenders of the abuser once the police get involved.⁵ It can be a very frustrating pattern for people who are trying to help a victim of domestic violence.

Possible Helping Scenario #2

There are often a variety of shelters available, in most areas, for women and children. Some are specifically for victims of domestic violence while others more generically serve those who are homeless. Ideally, you want her to be placed in an environment where she can receive the physical, emotional, mental, and legal assistance that she needs.

Actual Outcome

Karen was not yet ready to leave her boyfriend, her abuser. Unfortunately, the boyfriend’s next target was Karen’s 9-year-old son. When he was hospitalized for “mysterious” injuries, the Department of Children’s Services got involved and Karen

⁵ (Lawson, 2013)

had to make a choice between maintaining her relationship with this man and maintaining custody of her two children. Some women choose the relative security of “the devil they know” over the safety of their children. In Karen’s case, this was the final straw and she found the courage to leave him permanently.

She has a lot of healing that is still in progress, as well as her children, but she is attending regular counseling sessions and participating in Bible studies, making friends in the ladies’ ministry. She and her children are doing much better now that they are removed from the toxic environment.

Lesson(s) Learned

- First and foremost, know when you are in over your head. When the police become involved in a situation, chances are good that you should step back and let the professionals work. Your role is prayer support and long-term relationship-building but unless you are a licensed therapist or police officer, you need to know your limitations.
- Also, know the laws in your state for mandatory reporting.
 - “All states designate certain professionals as **mandated reporters** – some states require all citizens to **report**. A **mandated reporter** is one who is required by law to **report** reasonable suspicions of abuse. ... Regardless of the specific **mandated reporter** law, all adults should **report** suspected abuse to protect children”⁶.

⁶ (https://www.d2l.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Mandated_Reporting_07.07.15.pdf)

Chapter 4 – Addiction

They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it.

1 Peter 3:11

“I have the right to do anything,” – you say – but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything” – but I will not be mastered by anything.

1 Corinthians 6:12

Crystal & Allen* are a young, married couple who are related to several members of your church family. Crystal’s mom is raising their two young children, ages 13 months and 3 ½ years. They are both heavily addicted to pills and street drugs, whatever they can afford. They have repeatedly lied and stolen from their family. Now, the family is in your office because Crystal and Allen have, again, promised to “straighten up and fly right” and the family wants you to make sure they do it this time.

Possible Helping Scenario #1

One common way churches try to help folks like Crystal and Allen is to dive in, full steam ahead, and end up in over their heads, in more ways than one!!

You could offer to let the couple sleep in one of the adult Sunday school classrooms during the week, cleaning it up in time for services on Sunday. You could even set up a rotation so that someone from the church stayed there each night with the couple, making sure they aren’t using drugs again or stealing or damaging your property.

Possible Helping Scenario #2

A generous couple in your church might instead offer to let the couple stay in their basement apartment.

Without someone watching them, ensuring that they stay clean and providing a protective buffer to help them battle their cravings, you run the risk of doing more harm than good. And you could even be putting this couple from your church in danger, depending on the bigger picture that Crystal and Allen are dealing with.

Actual Outcome

A much better, and likely longer-lasting, way to help is to get them into a detox and rehab program. Depending on insurance, it may be challenging to find a placement for both of them.

(Side note: They need to go to DIFFERENT programs so that they can focus on their own reasons for using, instead of focusing their attention on each other. Most rehab facilities will refuse to take them both.)

Crystal and Allen lucked out and found a ministry that helps recovering addicts find long-term treatment programs. Their case manager helped her find a program that would accept her insurance and a different program that would take Allen, because he doesn't have insurance. Each program is yearlong.

In order to feel comfortable with going away for such a long period of time, they agreed to scrap their vehicle for \$250 so they could pay off their drug dealer. This way, they didn't have to worry about him threatening their families and kids while they were gone. Yes, really.

Lesson(s) Learned

- This church family prayed for years for Crystal and her children. So, this opportunity to see their lives transform through detox, sobriety, and healing was transformational for the entire congregation. It also showed just how long and challenging a process it is to help someone all the way through a problem. Most addicts relapse up to 7 times before finally permanently overcoming the addiction – or giving up on sobriety completely. This process can take an average of 10 years.
- Depending on the drug of choice, as well as length of usage, there may be some lasting cognitive problems that will need to be overcome. Even the children may have been affected, whether because of drug use while they were in the womb or residual contact from their parent's usage. Doctors and therapists can help mitigate these obstacles, but it will take time and attention to get it done.

About the Author



Suzanne Burns is Founder and Executive Director of Foundation House Ministries, a faith-based maternity home and training program for pregnant and parenting women in critical situations. They operate a job-training program, which provides hands-on job experience through the production and sale of natural skin care products.

Suzanne has a Master of Science in Marriage and Family Studies from Lee University, Cleveland, TN and is a Certified Family Trauma Professional. She serves as a member of the Leadership Council of the National Maternity Housing Coalition.

Suzanne regularly speaks regionally and nationally on the multi-faceted topics of chronic trauma, chronic poverty, addiction and the women that Foundation House serves. She provides executive coaching and training on these and other topics through her speaker's website, at becharitywise.com

Suzanne and her husband, Tim, reside in Cleveland, TN, with their younger son, Ethan. Their older son, Suzanne's own crisis pregnancy, is a US Marine, serving stateside with his wife.

Get Connected

Let Suzanne and her team equip you to start a ministry in your own community. Suzanne offers a wide variety of books, trainings (online or in person), as well as individualized coaching and consulting.

[Schedule your complimentary coaching call](#) and see how she can help you transform your dream into reality!

Learn more at <http://becharitywise.com>

Other Resources by Suzanne D Burns

Other books and videos available on Amazon.com and my website

BeCharityWise.com

Ministry Startup

[*How I Started a Maternity Home in 10 Days*](#)

5 Ways to Start or Strengthen Your Nonprofit Ministry

Trauma Informed Training

[Understanding and Overcoming Poverty Mindset](#)

[Comprehensive Volunteer Training](#)

The Accidental Social Worker

Fiction

[*Journey to Brighthaven – Brighthaven Chronicles, Book I*](#)

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