

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

INFORMED COMMUNICATIONS NEEDED AS TRAUMA SURGES

Soon, the onslaught of “year in review” assessments will begin. We’ll see lists of the best (and worst) movies, the best books and the best music, to name a few. We already have a word of the year, according to Merriam-Webster: “authentic,” which was looked up more often than most of the dictionary’s 500,000 entries.

Given that artificial intelligence has been in our faces all year long, it’s no wonder Americans are searching for authenticity — or at least, what the word means.

At the National Conflict Resolution Center, we aren’t in the habit of year-end list making or word naming. But organizations are turning to us (as never before) in search of trauma-informed communication training to better work with and serve their clients. Trauma, it seems, is as prevalent as authenticity is scarce.

The word “trauma” is aptly used a lot these days. Many of us have been profoundly affected by the continuing war in Israel and Gaza. We feel the undercurrent of polarization and tension on college campuses, at workplaces and

in communities across the country. And we read about incidents of hate — directed at people on both sides of the conflict — on a daily basis.

But trauma is more deeply rooted. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) says that trauma “results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically harmful or life threatening.” Trauma can have a lasting impact on a person’s mental, physical, social, emotional and/or spiritual well-being.

The prevalence of trauma in society today is troubling. According to SAMHSA, there are numerous causes, including physical, sexual or emotional abuse (experienced or observed); childhood neglect; serious accidents, illnesses or injuries; or having a family member with mental health or substance use problems. Trauma has also been linked to external factors, such as poverty, systemic discrimination and natural disasters.

One tool that is used to assess

trauma is the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) Quiz, which looks specifically at traumatic events that occur in childhood (before age 18). The quiz has 10 questions in three categories: abuse, neglect and household dysfunction.

About two-thirds of adults reported they had experienced at least one type of ACE, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; nearly 1 in 6 reported experiencing four or more. ACEs can have lasting, negative effects on a person’s physical and mental wellbeing and stunt opportunities — like education and employment — well into adulthood. They can cause behavioral challenges, making it difficult to manage stress and emotions or form healthy relationships.

Most of us don’t know our own ACE score, nor would we ever think to ask others for theirs. But there are other ways to recognize that a person has experienced trauma. They might seem detached or numb, doing their best to avoid interactions or even eye contact. They might have diffi-

culty concentrating. Or they might be irritable and prone to outbursts. Trauma is unique, including its presentation.

We are wired as humans to have a bias toward neurotypical people, who speak and act in a “regular” or “normal” way. It means we need to be more mindful — trauma-informed — when we interact with neurodivergent people, whose brains function differently. (Trauma is one, but not the only cause, of neurodivergency).

In trauma-informed communications, the focus shifts from asking, “what’s wrong with you” to asking, “what happened to you?” Other tenets of sound communication hold: for example, the use of active listening skills to identify the person’s underlying needs and drivers of their behavior; and responding respectfully, to demonstrate understanding and acknowledge the impact of what happened and their feelings about it. All of this contributes to creating the safe environment that is necessary for a trusting relationship to begin.

A trauma-informed communi-

cator will also have de-escalation skills. While anyone has the potential to get angry and confrontational, trauma can lead to physiological changes that increase the likelihood that emotions will be triggered and a situation will get out of hand.

While we want to consider the unique needs of someone who has experienced trauma, it’s important not to think of them as victims. There are people with high ACE scores who do remarkably well in life, rising from what psychologist and author Dr. Glenn Schiraldi has called “the ashes of childhood brutality.” Through caring relationships, they learn to take a long view of suffering, unwilling to trade the lessons gained.

If there was a list of the most admired personal characteristics, that resilience would have to be at the top.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC’s programming, visit ncronline.com.

SMOLENS

FROM B1

The bureau’s study was conducted by researchers from the University of Chicago and the University of Oxford. The paper noted that “within the homeless population, employment, higher incomes, and more extensive observed family connections are associated with lower mortality.”

Homeless people are more likely to be male — especially compared with the housed poor — are more likely to be Black, and are more concentrated in the Northeast and West, which the study says reflects the large homeless populations in New York and California.

The study points out that while Black people have a higher mortality risk than White people among the housed population, it’s the reverse within the homeless population. The study found in part that pattern is connected to “a lower prevalence of substance abuse and behavioral health conditions among Black homeless individuals...”

The study looked at 140,000 people between the ages of 18 and 54 who were homeless during the 2010 census and tracked them with Social Security Administration records through 2022.

The authors added some cautionary notes about their research. While the subjects of the study were homeless in 2010, the researchers could not determine their living situations at other points in time, and suggested many people likely transitioned between sheltered and unsheltered homelessness.

Further, the researchers pointed to other studies that showed that unsheltered people had a higher risk of dying than sheltered people. But their study showed mortality appeared to be similar between sheltered and unsheltered people in 2010.

The mortality risk for homeless people was fairly consistent among all states with one exception: New York, where the study found



ALEJANDRO TAMAYO U-T

Preliminary data shows 550 homeless people have died in San Diego County since January.

the mortality risk was about 13.4 percent lower.

The researchers said New York’s lower risk can’t be attributed to differences in demographics, income or type of homelessness because the study took into account such variables. Nor does it reflect differences in disability status or involvement in safety net programs.

It may be a matter of more resources.

“One possible explanation lies in the generosity of homelessness services in New York, where a court-mandated ‘right to shelter’ policy has increased the availability and quality of shelter beds,” the authors wrote. “... Better services could improve the health of people experiencing homelessness.”

California voters strongly support a right to housing, according to a 2021 poll conducted by the Los Angeles Business Council Institute and the Los Angeles Times. Seventy-two percent said they support such a right, while a slim majority — 51 percent — said they would back new taxes for permanent homeless initiatives.

In 2020, Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed a bill that would have guaranteed a right to housing, expressing concern about its estimated cost of more than \$10 billion a year.

Homeless people have different needs but there’s broad agreement it’s most essential to provide them with permanent housing, or at least temporary shelter.

In commenting on the mortality study, Dr. Margot Kushel, a UC San Francisco professor who specializes in

the impacts of homelessness on health, told the San Francisco Chronicle that’s the bedrock issue.

Treatments like medication for substance abuse are important but they’re harder to provide when the patient is experiencing homelessness, she said.

A separate study authored by Kushel found older homeless adults in Oakland have a substantial likelihood of dying earlier than housed people in the same age group.

“We’re letting people die because we’re not fixing the underlying crisis,” Kushel said.

For months on end in San Diego, more people have become homeless than homeless people have obtained housing. The Union-Tribune’s Nelson noted health care experts said that means more people on the street with untreated and exacerbated conditions.

“Everyone should be grieving the loss of these neighbors,” Megan Parth, Father Joe’s Villages’ chief health officer told Nelson.

“Until there is enough housing in our community for all of us to thrive, our belief is that this tragedy will continue.”

What they said

Jason Carter, during his eulogy at the tribute service for his grandmother, Rosalynn Carter, which was attended by every living first lady.

“Secretary Clinton and Dr. Biden, we also welcome your lovely husbands.”

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KREITZER

FROM B1

Bridge was dedicated in his honor in 2009.

He also received the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy’s Lifetime Appreciation Award in 2012 for his three decades of volunteerism to preserve the region’s open spaces.

Kreitzer’s son, Gary, said his father died following a brief illness.

Trish Boaz, who retired as the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy’s executive director in 2021, said she admired Kreitzer’s preservation efforts long before working with him at the conservancy.

“He was such an amazing person,” Boaz said. “He always knew what he was talking about and thoroughly cared. He took a lot of pride in his work and I had the utmost respect for him long before we met (40 years ago).”

“He was such a family man and he treated the community as his family,” Boaz said. “His efforts made the community a better place to live because he contributed so much.”

Boaz said Kreitzer was instrumental in making sure nature was preserved in North County during the 1980s and 1990s as Rancho Peñasquitos, Carmel Mountain Ranch, Sabre Springs and Miramar Ranch North were developed.

“Dave recognized the need for housing, but also preserving the beautiful nature in San Diego,” Boaz said.

Expanding the river park required government grants and matching donations to purchase the land. Boaz said Kreitzer was instrumental in getting private donations, which increased the 92,000-acre park’s land by hundreds of acres. In addition, his efforts contributed to the expansion of its trail system from Del Mar to Volcan Mountain in Julian.

Kreitzer was born on Oct. 18, 1929, in Dayton, Ohio. He worked part time for the forestry department while attending the University of

Montana in Missoula, graduating in 1952 with a bachelor’s degree in botany. He was also in the university’s ROTC program and commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Air Force upon graduation.

While stationed in France, Kreitzer met his wife, Georgette. The couple was married for 69 years. She survives him, as do their four children, five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

After his discharge from the military, Kreitzer taught high school science while working on his master’s degree in education. In 1958, he was hired by the college textbook publisher Harcourt Brace as a sales representative. In 1965, he transferred to its San Diego office and the family moved to Rancho Bernardo. He retired from Harcourt Brace in 1991.

The family belonged to San Rafael Catholic Parish, where Kreitzer was an usher for over two decades.

Gary Kreitzer said his father had a lifelong love of nature, going back to his work with the forestry department. As a young man, he considered becoming a forest ranger.

“When we moved to Rancho Bernardo in 1965, it was a young community, with only Seven Oaks and The Greens, where we lived,” Kreitzer said. “In the ‘70s, there was a lot of development in the area, not just Rancho Bernardo but later the I-15 corridor, which was still (Highway) 395 at the time. So the developments of Carmel Mountain Ranch, Rancho Peñasquitos and Mira Mesa seemed to be, in his mind, being poorly planned. There was excessive development, and he did not want that to happen in Rancho Bernardo.”

At the time, Bernardo Heights, High Country West and homes in the Battle Mountain area were being planned, he said. Westwood homes were being built, but Westwood Valley did not yet exist. His father wanted a say in how these areas would be developed, which is why he got on the community

council and planning board, he said. The latter David Kreitzer chaired from 1979 to 1980.

“He wanted to ensure there were community parks in R.B. and open spaces there. That’s what motivated him,” his son said.

Gary Kreitzer said his father’s example led to him also volunteering for the Rancho Bernardo boards.

As for Proposition A, Gary Kreitzer said there was talk of a university and other development going into the area that is now 4S Ranch and Black Mountain Ranch. The traffic would have had a direct impact on Rancho Bernardo.

“It would have become more like what we have now in the UTC area,” Gary Kreitzer said.

Richard Belzer, who lived in Rancho Bernardo from 1974 to 2021, was on the planning board and involved in some of these preservation efforts.

“Dave’s personality was focused on doing what was right as an early resident of Rancho Bernardo... he was a great person,” Belzer said. “He was a kind, really thoughtful, caring person who was very concerned about his community.”

“A lot talk the talk, but Dave walked the walk,” Belzer said.

Vicki Touchstone, a long-time Rancho Bernardo Planning Board member, said she worked with Kreitzer on issues related to the San Dieguito River Park.

“I will remember Dave for his kindness, his many contributions to the Rancho Bernardo community and his passion for the successful conservation of the San Dieguito River Valley,” Touchstone said.

A funeral Mass will be held at 11 a.m. Tuesday at San Rafael Catholic Parish, 17252 Bernardo Center Drive, Rancho Bernardo, with a reception after in the parish hall. Kreitzer will be buried at Miramar National Cemetery.

Himchak writes for the U-T Community Press.

FIFTH

FROM B1

additional funds would be expected to last through March.

But the board will also consider whether to reallocate \$8 million in ARPA funds to housing unsheltered people being treated for substance-use disorders. It voted unanimously last month to create a pilot program to find housing for about 100 people enrolled in county-funded outpatient treatment, focusing initially on North County. Under the new proposal, the ARPA funds would fund housing through the program for two years, Desmond’s motion says.

And the board will consider whether to delay implementing a new state law, set to take effect Jan. 1, that dramatically expands the criteria for involuntary mental health holds.

Local hospitals worry it could result in so large a surge of such holds, especially among homeless San Diegans, it could swamp already overburdened emergency rooms.

Democratic majority revived

The nearly 700,000 residents of the heavily Democratic District 4, which stretches from Clairemont to Spring Valley, have not had a supervisor since Nathan Fletcher resigned in May amid allegations of sexual misconduct.

Fletcher’s election five years ago represented a major turning point for the board, long dominated by Republicans. The former Republican had become the first Democrat elected to it in years when he de-

feated former District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis for the open seat in 2018.

Mesa College political science professor Carl Luna previously told The San Diego Union-Tribune he doesn’t expect Montgomery Steppe’s election to have a huge partisan impact on the board — but does expect her to bring a more progressive tone and social justice orientation, as well as a voice of her current City Council constituency, especially those in southeastern San Diego.

Thad Kousser, a professor of political science at UC San Diego, noted that Montgomery Steppe will be representing nearly five times as many people as she did as a City Council member — which will mean “more communities with different interests, who want different things.”

Balancing those competing interests could be both Montgomery Steppe’s biggest challenge and key to achieving her policy goals, he said.

And at the county, she’ll face a very different partisan reality than on the all-Democratic City Council.

“Democrats can’t fragment into different coalitions,” Kousser said. “They all have to stick together, all three of them, if they want to get something done.”

That will be particularly true, he said, heading into next year’s election, as Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer, a Democrat, is challenged by Republican former Mayor Kevin Faulconer.

Soon, Montgomery Steppe will be asked to weigh in on other county business that has been on

hold since May, such as its long-paused search for a new chief administrative officer.

The county’s top executive oversees a budget of more than \$7 billion and workforce of about 20,000 — executing board policy, negotiating labor agreements and negotiations and directing operation of county departments spanning health, land use, finance and more.

The board may also soon revisit other measures that they deadlocked on earlier this year, including a package of gun-safety measures and more recent efforts by Supervisor Terra Lawson-Remer to crack down on anti-abortion crisis pregnancy centers and to back a proposed constitutional amendment on gun control.

All three votes deadlocked along party lines.

‘Voice of the community’

Montgomery Steppe will become not only the first Black woman ever to serve on the county Board of Supervisors but also the first Black person elected to the body in over four decades — since Leon Williams became the first in 1982.

Williams, now 101, told the Union-Tribune Friday he’s pleased his successor in that regard is someone he says will advocate for social justice. “I think there’s still a lot of work to do to create better human relations and a fair and just society — and she’s capable of working on that,” he said.

Montgomery Steppe was selected in 2021 to represent San Diego on a statewide task force exploring the idea of reparations for



NELVIN C. CEPEDA U-T FILE

With Monica Montgomery Steppe joining the Board of Supervisors, the Democratic majority is restored.

African Americans in California.

After over two years of research and public hearings, the panel issued its final report in June, recommending compensation to eligible Black people of California for the harms of slavery.

Assemblymember Reginald Jones-Sawyer, D-Los Angeles, a fellow task force member, said Montgomery Steppe always came prepared and kept the body on task. “There were times where we would get bogged down on some issues, and she could go back to the actual report and almost quote verbatim what was in it, which was very helpful,” he said.

He said she excelled not only at condensing information but at articulating it to help both her col-

leagues and constituents understand.

California Secretary of State Shirley Weber, the task force’s architect, called Montgomery Steppe “really the voice of the community,” pointing to her work on the council steering city resources to traditionally underserved communities.

“Coming from the community, she can help build a bridge when it comes to education,” said Francine Maxwell, chairwoman of Black Men and Women United San Diego, a grassroots group that meets weekly to discuss issues affecting Black people. “They’ve never had an elected official that would take the time to sit with them... to educate them on how they make policy.”

Barry Pollard, whose outreach program the Urban Collaborative Project has pushed to expand health services in the city’s southeast, shares those hopes.

Pollard said he has hit roadblock after roadblock trying to secure support for opening an after-hours urgent care in the area. “I don’t see the sense of urgency (at the county),” Pollard said. “It is like business as usual.”

He and Maxwell both say the county has neglected its responsibility on behavioral health and regional health disparities.

“My hope is that Monica will shine a spotlight on this,” Pollard said. “She’s very persuasive because she speaks authentically, she speaks from the heart and she doesn’t play these political games.”

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