

# TASKFORCE GAZETTE



Worldwide, the outbreak of the coronavirus is claiming lives and livelihoods as health systems buckle, education is disrupted and families struggle to stay afloat. Communities across the globe are rising to the challenge, yet, even as the spread of the virus slows in some countries, its social toll has come fast and hard. And in many places, it comes at the expense of the most vulnerable children.

*Without effective action, this health crisis risks becoming a child-rights crisis.*

Disruptions to society have a heavy impact on children: on their safety, their well-being, their future. Only by working together can we keep millions of girls and boys healthy, safe and learning.

In this edition of the Taskforce Gazette, you will find several articles and updates about **vulnerable children**, with more about actions, programs and projects throughout the Dutch Caribbean islands.

Click here for a 1-hour video of [a special panel about protecting vulnerable children during COVID-19](#), organized by UNICEF in partnership with the World Innovation Summit for Health (WISH).



# Project Highlight

## BES(t)4KIDS

BES(t)4KIDS, is a partnership between the three public entities, Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba, and four ministries, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW), Ministry Education, Culture and Science (OCW), Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS), and Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations (BZK). BES(t)4KIDS was established in early 2019 to ensure that all children between 0-12 years old on the BES islands have equal opportunities for high-quality and safe day and after-school care.

Fleur Lagcher, who is BES(t)4KIDS' program manager, noted that "the program has strengthened the quality of childcare in the Caribbean Netherlands by creating childcare services for children, that are accessible to most parents."

During the design process for BES(t)4KIDS, careful consideration was given to the realities of vulnerable children, such as extreme poverty, abuse and parental neglect. One of BES(t)4KIDS' core goals is to ensure that such children benefit from holistic development programs that pay attention to the links between education and childcare. BES(t)4KIDS wants each child to attain a balance of emotional, social, and cognitive growth and to develop good motor skills.





BES(t)4KIDS has drafted a bill that aims to secure the long-term financing of childcare programs on the BES islands. If passed, the bill will go into effect in January 2023, which is the official deadline for the fulfillment of BES(t)4KIDS' objectives. The new law will make key childcare programs structurally sound and sustainable.

Ms. Lagcher noted that parents can choose not to send their child to a childcare facility, "but it must be possible. There should be no financial or other barriers for proper childcare. Sound parenting and credible childcare are needed for the appropriate development of children."

The current focus of the childcare centers is to improve the pedagogical climate by providing a wide-range of activities. To formulate the pedagogical vision for each island, sessions were organized between UNICEF Netherlands, the childcare centers and their partners such as schools, centers for youth and family, youth care and the public bodies. These sessions led to the development of distinct pedagogical visions for each island, which was subsequently translated by the childcare centers into the island's pedagogical policy plans.



BES(t)4KIDS has six program lines, one of which is aimed at offering an integrated care structure that seamlessly connects to the care structure in the school systems and prevention programs. The lines also include what is called 'inclusive care', which, according to Ms. Lagcher, "means that there is no specific organization for children who need extra support." Every childcare facility will be enabled to guide care children within its own organization, possibly with expertise that can be brought in from outside. However, there may be exceptional cases that require more expertise than what a childcare center can provide. Ms. Lagcher said that "a pilot is currently running on each island to investigate how to structure the support for the most vulnerable children. How to make a clear distinction between simple care for minor problems and the more specialist care for more serious problems. The public bodies informed regularly to see to what extent more can be done on prevention and primary pedagogical support. Additionally, there is collaboration in place on every island with the educational care expertise center. For example, the Expertisecenter Onderwijs en Zorg Bonaire (EOZ) can offer certain support and guidance itself to care children at the childcare centers, but can also help with soliciting specialist expertise if necessary."

The structures and protocols are still under development, and it has sometimes proven to be challenging for organizations to share information among each other, primarily because of minors' right to privacy. Ms. Lagcher said that "The organizations are working hard to develop the relationship with their partners. The pilots are helping each island find a way in the interest of the children. The regulations associated with the bill will also be designed with these challenges in mind, but the basic structures will remain the same for all 3 islands."



# In Conversation With...

## Curaçao Safety House

Curaçao Safety House (Veiligheidshuis Curaçao) is a network that brings together stakeholders from the criminal justice, care, education, and aid sectors to assist delinquent and at-risk youth aged 12-18 through social and criminal-law interventions. The key partners are the Public Prosecution Service (Openbaar Ministerie/OM), Gezinsvoogdij Instelling (GVI), Guardianship Council, Curaçao Police Force (Korps Politie Curaçao/KPC), Curaçao Ambulatory Juvenile Care Foundation (Stichting Ambulante Justitiële Jeugdzorg Curaçao/AJJC), Skuchami, Victim Support, and the Compulsory Education Unit of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (Ministerie van Onderwijs, Wetenschap, Cultuur en Sport/OWCS). Curaçao Safety House provides safety nets for vulnerable youth and others who have broken the law and has instituted several early intervention programs to mitigate potential challenges.

All partners work together, based on a personalized approach for each client, which together provides a wealth of information about each individual client and their environments. Some of the key areas they look at are about youth family situations and the challenges they faced in early years, as well as the wide-ranging impacts of those challenges such as mental illnesses and academic underachievement. This new approach allows for a combination of all kinds of youth sanctions.

The minors are divided into two categories:

- The Youth at Risk Consultation (Risico Jongeren Overleg/RJO) implements early intervention programs to prevent youth from falling into crime.
- The Judicial Case Consultation (Justitiële Casus Overleg/JCO) coordinates resolution measures with key partners to ensure that the assistance offered is in line with rules of conduct and procedures in the criminal justice system.

Mildred Francisca, director of the Curaçao Ambulatory Juvenile Care Foundation (AJJC) says that AJJC consists of three departments: Guia Prevencion i Supervishon (GPS)/HALT, the Youth Probation Department, and the Safety House Department. The Safety House does not supervise clients, but the organizations associated with it do. Cases are sent to the Safety House by various partners such as schools, YudaBoyu, Skuchami, or the police. These partners retain ownership of the cases.



During the consultations, the so-called 'tables', each case is assessed based on its own merit and decisions are taken on who will be responsible for specific cases and on how they will be addressed. When a youth is referred to the Youth at Risk Department of the AJJC, their youth worker draws up an action plan and guides him/her through a process of rehabilitation. In cases where youth have psychiatric problems, the Safety House refers them to Skuchami or Yudaboyu for treatment. During this process, the Safety House keeps in close contact with these organizations.

The GPS/HALT department at AJJC, which focuses on the prevention of juvenile crime, sometimes offers training courses to youth and their parents, including Triple P. Youth are also allowed to do their homework on computers at the AJJC office, but this has been temporarily halted due to the pandemic. "The youth who still come to the office are the ones who participate in training courses or who come for counseling," says Mildred.

The GPS/HALT department guides youth who exhibit risky behavior, but only those who have not had any contact with judicial authorities. These youth receive support for 6-12 months in all areas of life to prevent further decline. Sometimes youth enroll on their own initiative, and at other times through their parents, but most often the registrations are done by schools. GPS sometimes reopen cases of young people who appear to revert to the undesirable behavior and resume their guidance at partner organizations. GPS always communicates with Safety House on reopened cases.

According to Mildred, more than anything else, young people who are guided through AJJC crave attention. "Attention for the youth and their system (parents/caretakers, brothers and sisters). This requires more production hours from us but it is the most effective and sustainable approach."

**Bestrijding & Preventie  
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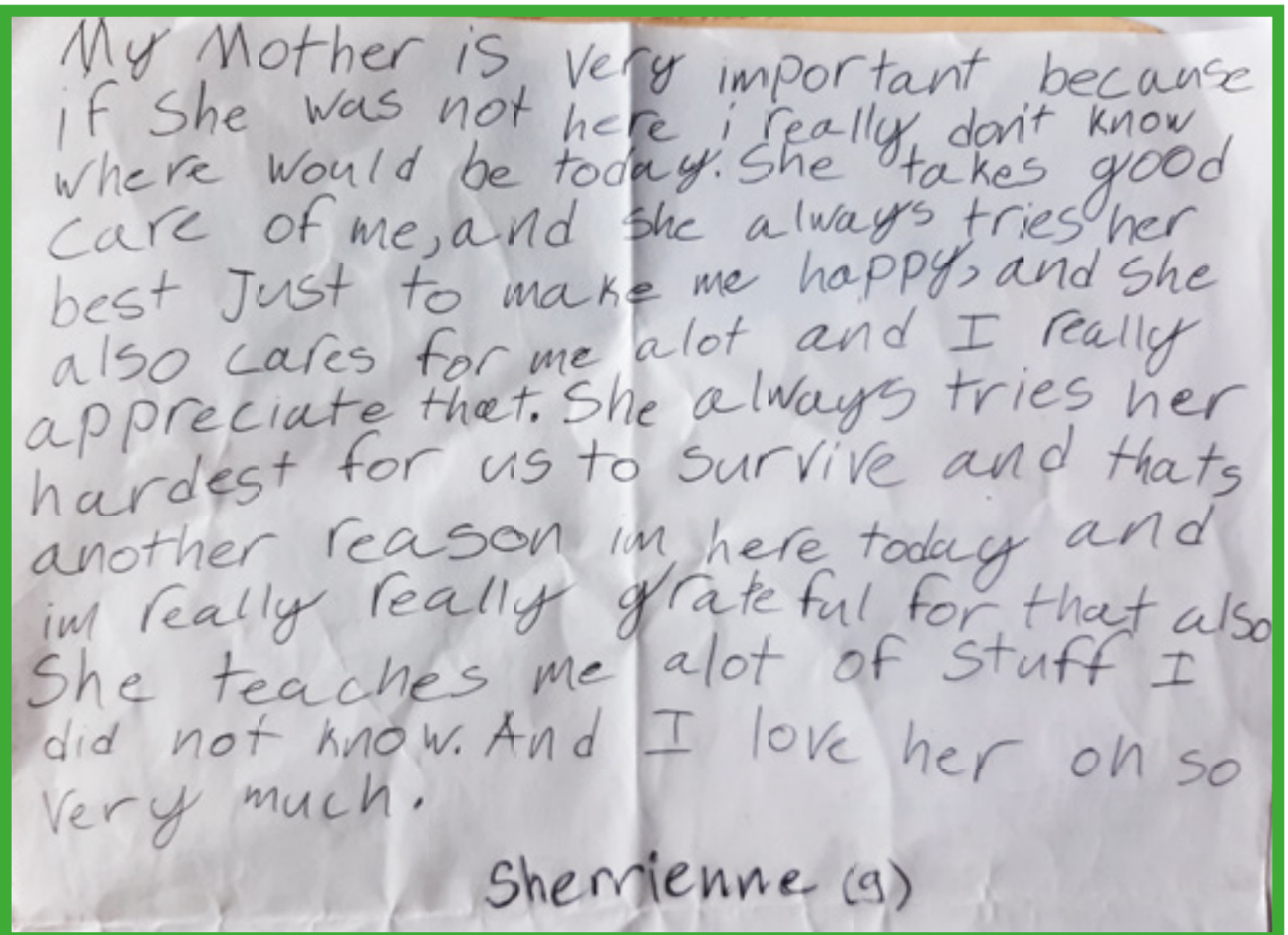
The Safety House is currently developing a number of additional 'tables'. A table will be set up for cases of criminal families, another will focus on cases involving relational violence and there will also be a table for neighborhood management. Regarding guidance of families with relational violence, training is currently being given to partners on how to assist offenders. In July 2022, the AJJC will merge with GVI, SSHC, and Guardianship Council, including the Child Abuse and Relational Violence Reporting Center, as well as the Safety House.

# Children and Youth Speak Up

## Sherrienne Speaks

My mother is very important because if she was not here I really don't know where I would be today. She takes good care of me, and she always tries her best just to make me happy, and she also cares for me a lot and I really appreciate that. She always tries her hardest for us to survive and that's another reason I'm here today and I'm really really grateful for that also. She teaches me a lot of stuff I did not know. And I love her oh so very much.

~ Sherrienne (9 years old)



# At a Glance

'At a Glance' is an overview of what is happening on the islands around the current theme of the Taskforce Gazette: vulnerable children.

## ARUBA

A center for people with multiple disabilities was recently opened in Aruba. The center, Centro di Cuido Ambiente Feliz, provides 24-hour intensive inpatient care. The project opened the first phase in early September 2021 with the first house, which has now received the first three underage clients. The location can provide intensive care to a total of twenty clients. Clients will receive intensive care, therapy and day care in one location. This project was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Country of Aruba, through the fund Sociaal Crisisplan, Samenwerkende Fondsen and CEDE Aruba. At the beginning of 2021, the house "Cas Blinchi" was also opened, where four minors with intellectual disabilities are provided with simple care.

## BONAIRE

Inclusive Childcare for Care Children is a pilot program in which the multidisciplinary team of the Center for Youth and Family has been reinforced with a remedial educationalist and childcare coaches. As a result, the regular childcare organizations are supported and supervised for the care of children with care. In addition, the new primary care structure is tested, in which the cooperation between the parents, primary and secondary care also plays an important role.

## CURAÇAO

As a result of the pandemic, more children have become vulnerable children in 2020. In addition to social vulnerability, there are also emotional vulnerabilities. Thanks to the pandemic, the government is now better informed about the number of undocumented children on the island. The government works closely with NGOs to better understand the needs of these children. This group will be particularly included in the new youth policy.



## **ST. MAARTEN**

All children with physical disabilities have access to public and subsidized schools in accordance with existing education regulations, but not all schools in St. Maarten are equipped for children with various physical disabilities. The government of St. Maarten is in the process of drawing up policies for special education to better respond to the needs of this target group. The special needs policy will include criteria for the concept of schools offering inclusive and special education. The drafting of the policy is expected to be completed in 2022, after which implementation can begin.

## **SABA**

In 2020, the local Lions Club began distributing food parcels to underprivileged families.

## **ST. EUSTATIUS**

There will be more support for parents in the form of short workshops from the Strong Roots program. There is also continuous attention for youth by offering support to out-of-school care and the Sport Foundation. In addition, much attention is paid to the positive aspects of compulsory education, by highlighting the cooperation with schools and youth.





# Diving Deeper

## Adverse Childhood Experiences in the Caribbean

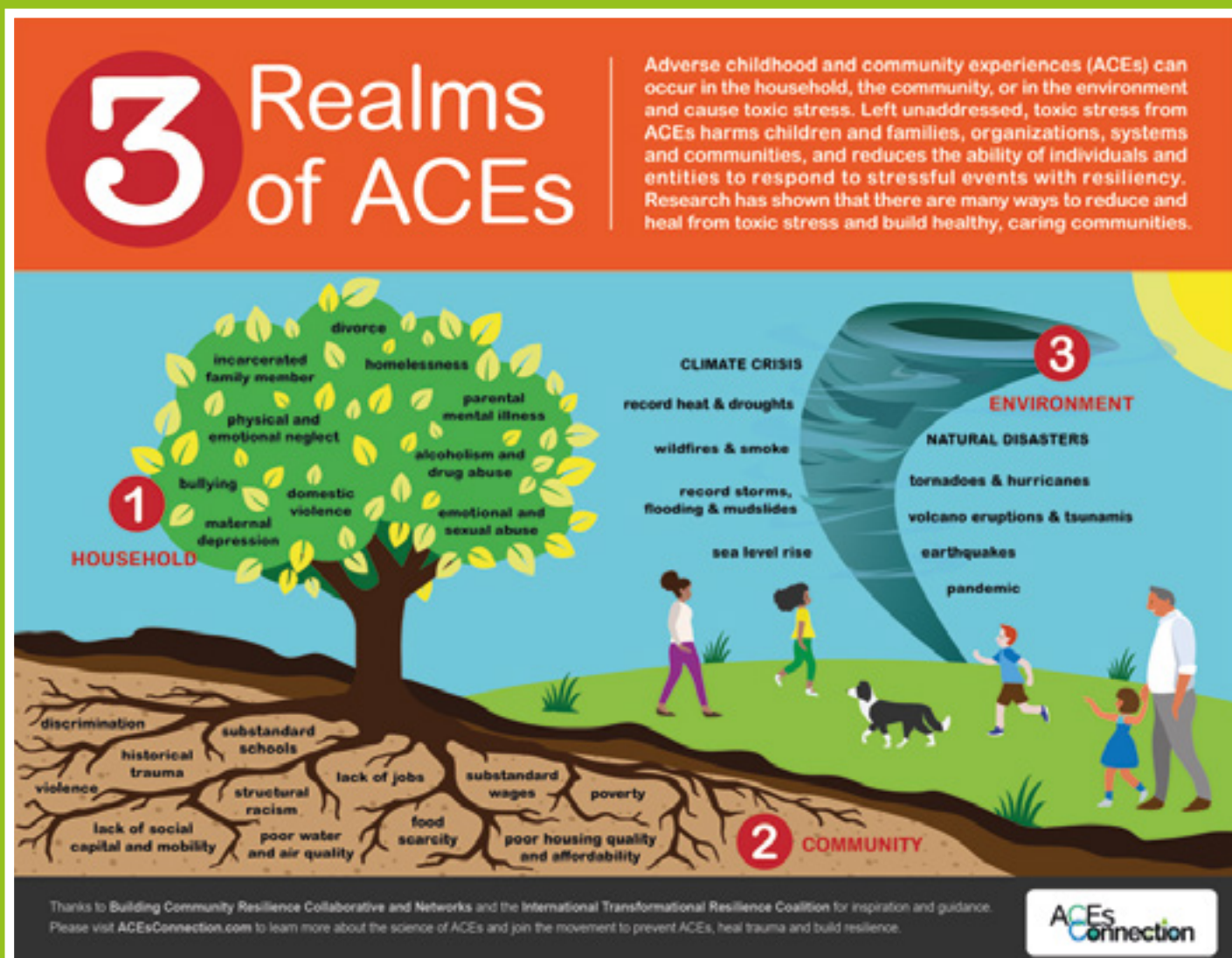
Juleus Ghunta was born and raised in Jamaica. He has had one of the most difficult childhoods one can imagine, enduring unspeakable abuse and neglect. He learned to read when he was 12; was forced by his family to live on his own from age 14 to 17; and spent much of his teenage and young adult years trying to overcome numerous physical and mental illnesses. His efforts to heal led him to several countries in the Eastern Caribbean, to Tottori in rural Japan, and to the University of Bradford in the UK where he earned a master's degree in Peace and Conflict Studies in 2018. At Bradford, he wrote his autoethnographic dissertation on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) which enabled him to examine his early years against the backdrop of the wider social context in Jamaica. The Taskforce Gazette spoke with him about his efforts to raise awareness of ACEs in the Caribbean.

ACEs refer to sources of intense stress that many children experience, including poverty, physical, emotional or sexual abuse, neglect, community violence, racism, and peer victimization. ACEs can have harmful effects on children's brain, immune system development, and overall wellbeing, even when they become adults. Extensive research on ACEs has helped childcare practitioners to gain a better understanding of the correlations between trauma, toxic stress, and a wide range of behavioral, educational and health challenges that children face.

One study, at Stanford University, which was led by Dr. Nadine Burke Harris, a leading advocate for ACEs awareness, showed that children who experience 4 or more ACEs are 32 times more likely to have behavioral and learning problems. Ghunta noted that one of the fascinating achievements of ACEs science "is that it is helping us to make clear connections between particular ACEs and certain behavioral and health outcomes in children and adults. This is a significant advancement in child development research."

The original ACEs study was conducted in 1988 by the US-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Kaiser Permanente. From 1995 to 1997, 17,333 patients completed a questionnaire that solicited responses to questions about ten categories of childhood adversity. CDC-Kaiser's ACEs were equally divided into two categories: child maltreatment (emotional, physical, sexual abuse + emotional and physical neglect) and household dysfunction (mother treated violently, substance abuse, mental illness, parental separation, criminal household member).

Ghunta noted that 70% of the participants in the original study were college-educated white Americans and as a result “many of the ACEs that people in Global South countries face, such as extreme poverty, child labor and homelessness, were not included on the list. Expanded lists now include various adverse climate and community experiences.”



Some of these experiences are routinely highlighted in UNICEF’s situation analyses of children across the Caribbean. Ghunta said that while these studies are critical, they do not use an ACEs framework which would help us to better understand the nature, scope, and impacts of ACEs and toxic stress. Ghunta noted that “less than ten peer-reviewed studies on ACEs have been done in the region. More studies are needed to uncover the links between specific ACEs and certain outcomes. We need these data to implement better prevention programs. In Jamaica, we have wasted trillions on programs that address the symptoms of problems rather than fixing the root issues.”

Ghunta acknowledged that people generally find it difficult to discuss trauma/child abuse. “Such discussions are harder for males, who are often discouraged from expressing their emotions. The ramifications of this are far-reaching and have implications for all aspects of Caribbean development. We need to raise awareness of these issues and adopt revolutionary approaches to fixing them. These necessary and uncomfortable conversations will hopefully lead to the creation of trauma-informed legislations and programs across the region.”

**Table 2. Items in Original and Revised ACE Scales**

<b>ACE Scale Adversities (Lifetime)</b>	
<b>Original</b>	<b>Revised</b>
Emotional abuse	Emotional abuse
Physical abuse	Physical abuse
Sexual abuse	Sexual abuse
Physical neglect	Physical neglect
Emotional neglect	Emotional neglect
Mother treated violently	Household mental illness
Household substance abuse	Property victimization
Household mental illness	(nonsibling)
	Peer victimization (nonsibling)
Incarcerated household member	Exposure to community violence
Parental separation or divorce	Socioeconomic status
	Someone close had a bad accident or illness
	Below-average grades
	Parents always arguing
	No good friends (at time of interview)

Abbreviation: ACE, Adverse Childhood Experiences.



Part of Ghunta’s advocacy focuses on encouraging people to discuss positive childhood experiences (PCEs). He said that a child can experience 10 ACEs and still excel in life if that child receives consistent support from caring adults. He quoted leading child development specialist Dr. Gabor Maté, who said that “children do not become traumatized because they get hurt, but because they are **alone** with the hurt.” Ghunta said that “children who have been dysregulated by trauma need to have experiences that viscerally oppose their sense of hopelessness. Stability, love, consistent support and care are the antidotes to many crippling mental and physical challenges.”

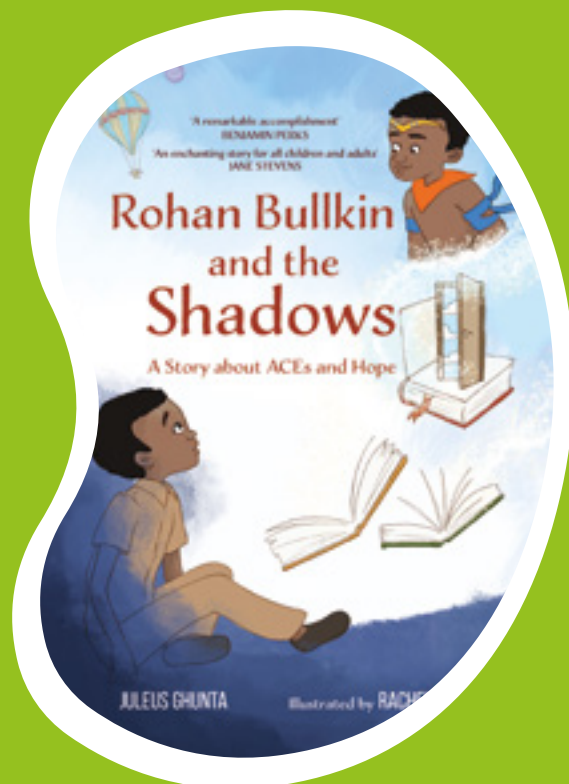
Critically, Ghunta argued that we should push back against claims that if we ‘fix’ our families our socioeconomic problems will magically subside. “That thinking is shortsighted and vacuous. Many ACEs—such as extreme poverty—are caused by structural violence which leads to all sorts of interconnected challenges in Caribbean States. ACEs need to be addressed jointly by governments, INGOs, civil society organizations, and others. Most of our core challenges—from high crime rates to NDCs, to poor educational outcomes—are caused to ACEs and toxic stress. Trauma-informed legislation should be a top priority for regional policymakers. The region’s ACEs movement can benefit greatly from the work that has already been done by organizations such as CDC, Dr. Burke-Harris’s Center for Youth Wellness, WHO, and PACEs Connection. Research and resources published by these organizations are available online to anyone who wishes to access them.”

Ghunta’s new book [Rohan Bullkin and the Shadows: A Story about ACEs and Hope](#) (illustrated by Rachel Moss) will be published by CaribbeanReads in December 2021. The book highlights connections between ACEs, toxic stress and many children’s academic weaknesses and disruptive behaviors. It shows how supportive environments and the ability to read well significantly improve children’s odds of overcoming trauma and becoming successful. In addition to providing a medium for children and adults to explore their ACEs, this book aims to help others develop a deeper understanding of the symptoms of toxic stress and ways in which they can be allies to those who need support.





[Juleus Ghunta](#) is a Chevening Scholar, children's writer, a member of Jamaica's National Taskforce on Character Education, and an advocate in the Caribbean's adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) movement. He holds an MA in Peace Studies from the University of Bradford, and a BA in Media from The University of the West Indies, Mona. His poems and essays on ACEs have appeared in 30+ journals across 15 countries. In 2020, he received a CATAPULT Caribbean Creative Online grant to further his work on ACEs. He was awarded the Catherine James Poetry Prize by Interviewing the Caribbean Journal in 2017 and was shortlisted for the Small Axe Poetry Prize in 2015 and 2016. His picture book *Tata and the Big Bad Bull* was published by CaribbeanReads in 2018 and he is the co-editor of the December 2019 and March 2020 issues of Interviewing the Caribbean (The UWI Press), which are focused on children's literature and ACEs in the Caribbean. He is also the co-editor of a special issue of PREE Magazine on childhood adversity in the Caribbean. You may contact him at [juleusghunta@gmail.com](mailto:juleusghunta@gmail.com)



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