

Creating Resilience Circles

Sarah Byrnes

Everyone faces challenges in their lives, such as becoming sick or losing a loved one. When we face these bumps in the road, we try to learn from the experience and hopefully come out stronger. This helps us develop “resilience.”

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For example, many of us attend schools that do not effectively help us learn or graduate. When we become sick, many of us face huge medical bills and have to file for bankruptcy. Many

of us are willing to work hard, but we still cannot find a job that pays a living wage.

If things were different, people would have an easier time accomplishing their goals. They would still face difficulties, but they would have an easier time getting an education and making ends meet. They wouldn’t need to be as resilient.

Some people who struggle in the current economy have joined small groups of 10 to 25 people called “Resilience Circles.”

These Circles help people become more resilient so they can cope with less money and new challenges. They find that the key to coping is having a supportive community. For example, Wednee Crofoot, an unemployed member of a Resilience Circle in California, says, “My group reminds me that I am a valuable member of society, even if

I’m not employed right now. That encouragement has really been huge during this time.”

Community connections also help us learn

new skills. People learn from each other how to save money on groceries, for example. They share cars with each other, or learn how to sew or grow food in their gardens. Community connections

can also help people find new employment or motivate them to start a small business.

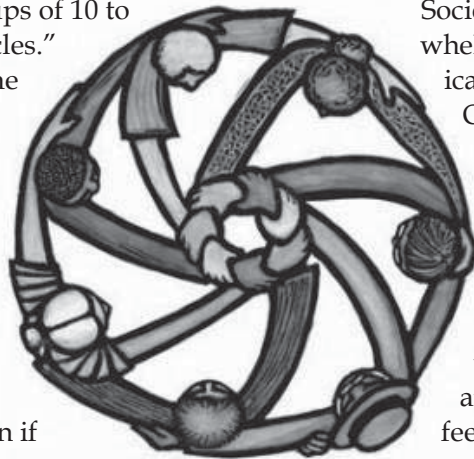
As people become more resilient, they become less embarrassed and ashamed about their “failings,” such as losing a job. They realize that they are not alone and also that society has “failed” many of us. Society does not provide enough jobs with good wages. It does not provide quality education for everyone or affordable health care. As a result, we live in a world where we experience unnecessary challenges.

People are realizing that society could be different and that we have the power to change it.

Society’s problems may seem overwhelming if you are alone. In America today, people are very isolated. One in four people does not have anyone to talk to about their troubles. In the 1980s, only half as many people were so isolated. This is a problem that is getting worse.

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a better world. But with a group of others, you can become more resilient. You may be motivated to take action to change things.

Think of the changes people have made throughout our history. They have fought for

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women’s right to vote, to end racial segregation, and to allow same-sex marriage in some states. All of these changes happened because regular people got together and took action.

Across the country, people are still doing this. They are fighting to protect public spaces like libraries and parks, create better schools, and end racial profiling. They are fighting so that immigrants can have a fair path to citizenship and workers can have respect on the job.

There are many ways to take action. You can join a neighborhood group working to fight foreclosures or improve your schools. You can attend

a protest or rally. You can call an elected official or submit a letter to the editor of your local paper. You can talk to neighbors, attend meetings, and speak out at public hearings. There are lots of ways to work for change!

Even in a perfect world, we will face heartache, sickness, and loss. We will always need to be resilient to face these things and learn from them. But we can create a society that is less draining and more fair. Society should do much more to reward people who work hard and play by the rules. We *can* create this society – we just have to work together and take action to make it happen.



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Sources: <www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/06/22/AR2006062201763.html>; <<http://localcircles.org>>.

Developing Resilience to Unavoidable Pain	
Unavoidable Pain	Possible Responses
A loved one dies of natural causes	Get closer to friends and family for comfort and support
Occasional illness	Try to learn from it and grow stronger

Developing Resilience to Society-Made Pain	
Pain Created by the Way our Society Works	Possible Responses
Unemployment	Join with others to share resources; organize for more jobs
Huge medical bills	Organize with others for a better health care system

The author says some kinds of pain are unavoidable, and others are created by the way society works. The two charts above list some of the things she mentions. What would you add?

Watch Sarah Byrnes in this short video about Resilience Circles <<http://vimeo.com/39721438>>.