



HOPE

January is the start of a new year, but is also the darkest time of year. How do you cope with January blues? It is easy to feel down, lonely, or isolated at this time of year. Days are short and weather often keeps us from doing things we enjoy. I find myself already feeling deep despair as I write in early December. The Paris attacks are fresh in our minds, the Climate Summit predicts dramatic global environmental changes, refugees desperately seek better lives free from war, and more innocent people are shot in the streets and social service agencies. Every news hour seems to bring more horror. How can we tolerate a mass shooting every day of the year? What are we doing?

And then the lyric “it takes hope in a hopeless world” starts running through my head and I have to ask “where do we find hope?” Most of us have felt the darkness at some time in our lives, whether because the days are short or we have experienced a difficult time. What has helped you find hope in those times? Probably each of us has a different answer. Maybe you find it in the eyes of your grandchildren. Maybe you volunteer at a soup kitchen or homeless shelter. Read with a child. Call or write a friend or your congress person. Go to a climate change or gun control rally. Maybe you’re a daily call volunteer from your home. One answer for me lies in the consultations I do with families and individuals here, when I know I have helped someone find the answer to a question or figure out the next step on their journey.

I think our deepest despair comes when we believe there is nothing we can do to make a difference. Finding hope requires fighting individual despair and joining with others who have hope. Sometimes what you do alone will have no apparent effect. Sometimes it only affects one person (such as the student who applies for college because you helped her believe she could be first in the family to attend.)

I believe in the butterfly effect: one small, individual act gains momentum, draws others in, and grows into something that changes the world as we know it. There are many examples of people whose lives have been changed just by taking a first step - one small action. So, as we enter the dark days of January and begin a new year, what will you do to find hope? There are many opportunities for each of us to make a difference.

Another part of the new year is new beginnings. Please help us welcome new staff members, introduced later in this and upcoming newsletters

Happy New Year!

Susan W. Hoskins, LCSW