

Enter the New Year With Hope

by Alyce Duckworth, LCSW

Supervisor, Prince St. Academy, Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network

December 24, 2008

The New Year is upon us, and typically, I would write about making successful New Year's Resolutions or becoming more organized over the months to come. This year, however, none of those "typical" topics felt quite right. We are, after all, in the midst of an economic crisis. Jobs are few and far between, the real estate market is floundering, and many of us need to rethink our plans for obtaining or maintaining financial stability. I may not even know the half of it, given my decision to avoid exposure to news programming as much as possible. I figure I'm exposed to enough negativity in everyday life that I don't need to be immersing myself in it on a regular daily basis in front of the television set.

All of this brings me to the challenge that I am extending to all of you in the New Year. It's pretty simple: remain hopeful. Whatever it is that you need to do in order to hold onto a semblance of hope and transfer it to others in your families, schools, communities, and jobs—do it. In my work in various communities and the organizations that serve them, I've noticed that just the barest glimmer of hopefulness can drive away fear, panic, and depression on a massive scale. Although the things that breed panic in us usually originate from elsewhere, they are perpetuated by us, at the grassroots level, as we spread negativity amongst ourselves. Each of us can choose, just as easily, to spread a belief that things will get better. I believe that hope can be just as contagious as fear and panic, but it's going to take a concerted large-scale effort since we've been sinking for awhile. Although I'm sure that each of you has at least one idea of how to make things a little more hopeful around you, I'm including some of my own ideas:

- Start a group in your neighborhood. The nature of the group isn't as important as the sense of community and camaraderie that results. Proactive investment groups, red hat societies, book clubs, journaling and hobby/craft groups all fit the bill.
- Avoid the news on television as much as possible. Research has shown that, the more senses that are involved in obtaining information, the more likelihood there is of having traumatic reactions. Even better, use the time you would have spent sitting in front of the television to connect with other people. If you are a television-news-addict, try tempering the news you watch with an equal amount of positive or humorous messages. I find that I

can become informed of the state of affairs in my world just as easily from a news show that has a humorous slant.

- Reach out to your neighbors. If you don't know them already, introduce yourself. Building a community starts with the person next door.
- Respect your elders. Many of them have been through a great deal of hardship in their lives, and have developed very positive outlooks that have gotten them through these times. Remember, you don't have to be related to an older person in order to connect with them. Many of our elders are relatively isolated in their homes or in assisted living environments.
- Get out. Enjoy the outdoors and the many activities it offers, or the city and its cultural opportunities. When you enjoy your surroundings, you also stimulate your own economy.
- Volunteer. When we give our time to causes we care about, it is practically impossible not to connect with something larger than ourselves, something that breeds hope.
- Focus on the positives. After all, what you choose to focus on colors your worldview.

May all of you experience a hopeful and abundant New Year!

###

© Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network, 2008

Arapahoe/Douglas Mental Health Network offers comprehensive behavioral health services for adults, seniors, families and children.

- | | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| • Counseling – Individual, Group, Family | • Substance Abuse Treatment | • Criminal Justice Services | Information, Initial Appointment 303 730 8858 |
| • Psychiatry | • Victim Services | • Clubhouse – Vocational/Social Rehab | Emergency & Crisis Intervention 303 730 3303 |
| • Case Management | • Adult Acute Treatment Unit | • Day Treatment Therapeutic School | Pharmacy 303 797 2500 |
| • Education & Wellness Programs | • Adult Supported & Residential Housing | • School-based Services | |