

Our only job

by Norah Kennedy, Executive Director, Family Transition Place (FTP)

There is a reason why “Hope” is one of the three operational pillars of Family Transition Place (FTP). Current research shows that hope is one of the most critical elements to a healthy and happy life. At FTP, we didn’t need the research. We have long believed and known that.

There is a tendency to believe that one is either inherently a hopeful person or one is not. However, Anthony Scioli, Ph.D., from Keene State College in New Hampshire, shows through some of his research “that hope is a skill you can acquire. It is active—you can cultivate and nourish it.” (*Palmer, L.D. Growing Hope, 2019*). Which means, despite what one might consider one’s predisposition, one can learn to be hopeful. And research is showing that doing that may be a very good thing.

Some studies are showing that being hopeful helps people to age well and perform better. Hopeful people are reported as having more self-esteem, are able to look after themselves better and can even tolerate more pain.

“Hope sustains our intimate bonds, gives life purpose and meaning, and determines our prospects for survival and health.” (*Anthony Scioli, Ph.D., Keene State College*)

So is it any wonder, then, that FTP places such importance on hope?

For the people who seek help from one of FTP’s other two pillars—safety and support—hope may at first seem elusive. Seeking refuge in a shelter or going for counselling may feel like a “last resort,” but in essence, it is an act of hopefulness; a physical demonstration that one believes that by taking this step, life can be better. No one person can physically provide another person with hope, but now we know that we can help to foster and nurture it. And in doing so, provide a person with the opportunity to find new purpose and meaning in their lives.

FTP has long believed that we can effect change by helping to generate hope. This is the principle behind our school programming. We help children and youth learn to respect themselves and others. We give them tools by which they can interact and communicate effectively. We teach them that they are worthy of positive healthy relationships throughout their lives. By doing this, we are helping them develop hope for happy, healthy futures for themselves. We are also generating a broader hope, for ourselves and our community,

that one day a new generation will reach adulthood, having learned to be compassionate and respectful of one another, in relationships without violence.

I read a quote in a human resource blog recently that said something like *our only job is to leave people better than we found them*. If this were the goal of every person—to leave each individual they met a little better than they were before their encounter, wouldn’t we all feel more hopeful? “Hopeful people provide “social benefit,” because they use a “me—we” way of thinking and help others succeed.” (*Palmer, L.D. Growing Hope, 2019*). If we are creating relationships that foster more hope, then we are also helping to make the world a better place for all of us.

Outlining the results of one study in which depressed elderly people were taught to think hopefully, Snyder said, “As they became more hopeful, they became more grateful ... and more likely to experience joy.” (*Snyder, C.S., The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get There from Here.*) When we are hopeful, it is easier to feel grateful. I believe that when we feel grateful, we value things more profoundly, meaning we take more care of things like each other.

Just for fun, while writing this, I took two separate hopefulness assessments—one result labelled me as a “the superb realist” and the other placed me in the “high hopefulness” category. I wondered for a moment if these

were contradictory ratings, but then I remembered a conversation I had with a colleague a number of years ago. We both agreed that I was an optimist, while she was a pessimist. We both thought we were realists.

I feel completely vindicated! And so, a hopeful realist I remain.

Addendum: in researching this article I found this scene shared from the 1992 film The Shawshank Redemption. The following exchange takes place between the two main characters, who are being held prisoner:

Andy says to Red, “You need it so you don’t forget there are things in this world not carved out of gray stone. There is something inside that they can’t get to—they can’t touch—it’s yours.”

Red asks, “What are you talking about?”

Andy replies, “Hope”.

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