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EDITOR'S PICK

Public Health: The good stuff

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As Chicken Little once said, and continues to cluck, “The sky is falling.”

Human brains are hardwired to fixate on negative experiences and ruminate on unpleasant or scary things. It’s ancient and biological.

“OMG, Sharon, run! There is a tiger behind you!”

“Larry, don’t eat that mushroom or you’ll die!”



Amber Johnson

Photo provided

This cognitive habit has been dubbed “the negativity bias,” also known as the “negativity effect.” Media, politics, health care, economics, relationships – so much of our world runs on bad news, breakups and disasters.

In public health, we are always on the lookout for disease trends and outbreaks, constantly scanning our environment for physical and social ills that threaten the community with death, injury and illness. That’s our job. Most of the greatest public health victories in human history are born out of catastrophe.

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Often, however, because of our bias toward the negative, we fail to recognize and celebrate and remember the good stuff. Victories, be they small or large, are quickly forgotten in lieu of the next tragedy or disaster.

And our collective mental and social health is paying a high price.

Truth be told, the world at large could use a big spoonful of optimism, thankfulness and perspective. But when you can't pay rent or put food on the table, the last thing you want to do is put on a happy face and start a gratitude journal. Especially when it seems that everyone you like or follow on Facebook or Instagram is doing just fine, especially compared to you. Fatalism seems a whole lot easier to digest in the moment.

And yet. How do we live without hope?

Hope is the sober belief that things can get better; that it won't always be like this. Hope is the inner power that crawls forward on bloody hands and knees, refusing to capitulate to the darkness. Hope is the decision we make to assume the best about another person – especially a person that doesn't look or speak or love or believe like us.

Hope is the life force we need to be our best selves, to take responsibility for our lives instead of shifting the blame to a convenient scapegoat or villain.

So, Lewis and Clark County residents, here is some good news. And I hope that it gives you an extra dose of superhuman hope today.

Data from our recent door-to-door CASPER Survey (Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response) is in. Eighty percent of surveyed residents rated their health as "good" or "excellent." Ninety-four percent of respondents feel generally safe within their community. Ninety-one percent believe their community is a good place to raise children. And 88% think our community is a good place to grow old.

That's the good stuff.

And that good stuff did not happen by accident. Government, businesses, nonprofits – local organizations staffed by hard working professionals that make our community a wonderful place to be a kid and to grow old. That's all of us working together for the betterment of Lewis and Clark County.

True, there is bad stuff too. And no amount of toxic positivity can make it go away without concerted effort. We cannot wish it away. But as a community, I think we are up to the challenge.

Because look at us. Most of us feel safe in our community. Many of us feel generally healthy. Collectively, we have the strength and resources to tackle the challenges and concerns in our community.

We got this.

For more information about the results of the CASPER Survey, please visit the Lewis and Clark Public Health website at **<https://bit.ly/2024CasperSurvey>**.

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