



December 12, 2019

Dear community partners:

Hope is not an emotion. According to researcher C.R. Snyder, who dedicated his life to this topic, hope is a thought process that consists of three components: goals, pathways, and agency. Simply put, Snyder describes, we as human beings are capable of hope when we can set realistic goals; when we can figure out how to achieve those goals, including the means to surmount obstacles; and when can we believe in ourselves and know others believe in us.

Every day in America, citizens of all ages, races, identities, and socioeconomic backgrounds are disconnecting from that multilayered thought process Snyder highlights as so vital to having fruitful lives. In other words, many people today are hardwired for hopelessness.

Moffat County is no exception. As much as we want to think we can effectively steel ourselves from this epidemic of despair, we cannot. The list of issues seems endless, and we know too well its details. Deaths by completed suicide are now at a terrifying and unprecedented level. Local adults and youth are suffering from chronic mental illnesses, substance use disorder, and an overall scarcity of self-worth. In turn, anger and countless forms of interpersonal violence, including domestic violence and sexual abuse, are afflicting young and old residents alike. These issues are radiating outward through people's lives, impacting their families, friends, coworkers, and communities. Local law enforcement agencies are eager to help but low on staff and funds; the corollary is that officers often double up as stopgap suppliers of behavioral health and healthcare services with residents in crisis, a situation that further strains resources. I know we are all weary and struggling to maintain hope within our agencies' respective missions, which intersect to best protect our citizens.

In May 2018, Community Clinics at Memorial Regional Health (CCMRH), the nonprofit organization at Memorial Regional Health (MRH), stepped in to save what was then called Advocates-Crisis Support Services (ACSS) from financial ruin. Ultimately, CCMRH decided then that providing assistance to people in their darkest times was too important a service to risk losing. Basically, CCMRH strengthened us to continue empowering "victims" and help them become "survivors," with the ultimate goal of spurring social change and curtailing relationship violence. Moving forward, having relaunched as Open Heart Advocates in October 2018, we have strived at OHA to preserve Moffat County residents' health, wellness, safety, and support systems. Additionally, we have provided thorough, confident services to all victims of crime, domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of interpersonal violence. In 2019, with numbers finalized through November, OHA has had 2,674 client contacts related to these pervasive problems, including follow-up services, as well as 436 nights in the OHA Safe Shelter. This total represents about 20.3 percent of Moffat County's approximately 13,000 residents. In addition, we have led prevention services and training for youth and local organizations, upstream work that has allowed us to reach more residents with the overarching goal of promoting and protecting people's individuality in Moffat County.

Since our merger with CCMRH, OHA's unduplicated services have improved lives in many ways. As one of countless examples, OHA received a client referral in 2019 from another Moffat County agency. The client, a victim of domestic violence and sexual assault, entered the OHA Safe Shelter with no job, no permanent housing, and no financial support. She and her two daughters, both of whom stayed with her at the shelter, had experienced physical, mental, and emotional abuse from the perpetrator, who also had



substance abuse and anger issues. While the client and her daughters stayed at the shelter for approximately one month, OHA provided them with the following support: shelter, assistance with legal services, referrals to community organizations, finding therapy for both the client and her daughters, searching for permanent housing, and garnering long-term employment for the client. Today, the client lives with her daughters in her own apartment, has a full-time job, and is making other gains in her overall independence and quality of life. She has realistic goals and the abilities to achieve them; she believes in herself, and others believe in and depend on her. Such efforts of instilling hope in residents have produced many other positive results, with former clients who had previously experienced domestic violence or sexual assault then using their newfound hope and independence to volunteer at OHA. In turn, these volunteers have used their experiences and growth to assist other more recent survivors of interpersonal violence confront—and eventually overcome—similar major life challenges. Instead of letting dysfunction and emotional toil fester and spread in local communities, therefore, OHA has infused hope throughout Moffat County. However, without your assistance, this crucial mission may come to an end.

Today, we have gathered you in a final plea for help. Due to a multitude of reasons, MRH is now in the midst of its own financial emergency. As all service lines are under consideration for potential cuts, and OHA does not generate revenue as a free service, we are at risk of MRH having to discontinue our agency, which dates back to 1978. We currently have some grant sources to help support us, including from the Colorado 14th Judicial District Victim Assistance & Law Enforcement (VALE) and Colorado Domestic Violence Program (DVP). However, OHA's combined funding of \$76,886 from our two biggest funding sources is 16.2 percent of our total agency budget for 2019-2020. CCMRH has secured other smaller grants in the past year for OHA, with the awards ranging from \$750 to \$20,000. Still, we now need to cover approximately \$26,000 per month to reach a breakeven position for CCMRH. At this point, CCMRH has agreed to keep us going until March 1, 2020, after which time OHA will close our doors if we do not have the funding for a balanced budget.

The Colorado Office for Victims Programs (OVP), a unit of the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ), is preparing to release the 2021 & 2022 Crime Victim Services (CVS) Grant Program Funds on January 6, 2020. This grant, which is due on February 18, only comes out every two years, meaning CCMRH had not yet made the merger with OHA when the state made the 2018-2019 funds available. As this funding source has the potential to pay for OHA's staff salaries and fringe benefits, indirect costs, travel and training, and other essentials that will preserve the livelihood of the agency, we ask that your organizations help CCMRH keep OHA in operation during 2020. While the CVS Grant Program Funds can be robust enough to sustain a small agency such as OHA moving forward, the money will not be available until the project period will start on January 1, 2021. As such, your financial support is now paramount if we wish to save Open Heart Advocates. We are currently fully staffed and have positive strength in our internal structure. Our agency is now providing services to more clients than at any time in our 41-year history, with OHA projecting 1,600 total individual clients in 2020. In addition, we continue to strengthen our many community partnerships and project a positive standing in local communities. Please do what you can to help CCMRH maintain OHA and its message of hope for Moffat County.

Sincerely,

Meghan Francone, Executive Director
Open Heart Advocates