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Eye On Health

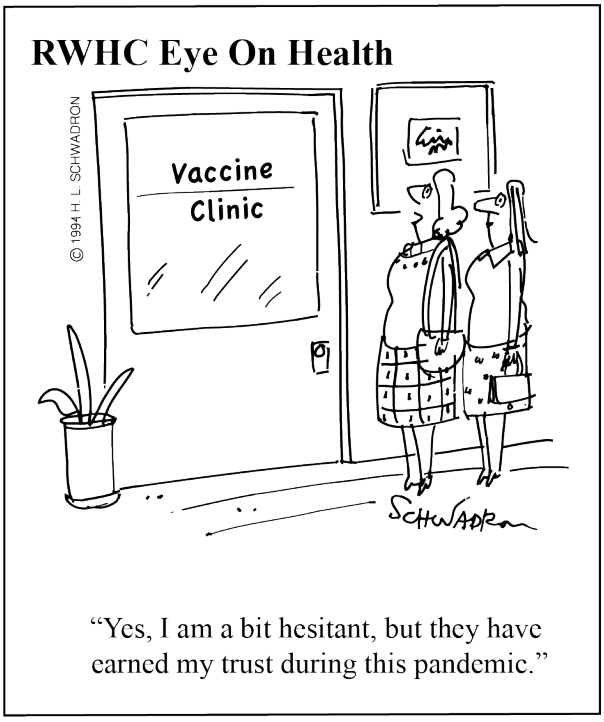
Review & Commentary on Health Policy Issues for a Rural Perspective – January 1, 2021

"Why I Trust the COVID Vaccines"

From "A Public health nurse explains why she trusts the COVID vaccines," by Jenna Mermer for *The Baltimore Sun*, 12/7/20:

"There are currently three COVID-19 vaccines awaiting approval by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. FDA approval will trigger millions of vaccine doses to be distributed across the U.S. and administered to the first 'tier' of recipients, likely consisting of health care workers and congregant living residents."

"What was only a thought experiment this summer–'would I be willing to get a COVID vaccine developed in the timeframe of less than a year?'–has become a question I answered in reality last week as my health department began planning its tier one vaccine supply request, of which I am a part since I am a public health nurse there. I have had my own concerns related to the vaccine, which I have reconciled for myself; my hope is that sharing my thought process may help you as well."



"Yes, I am a bit hesitant, but they have earned my trust during this pandemic."

"First, I admit that I do not fully understand the mRNA vaccine–but there are plenty of things about science and medicine that I don't fully understand, yet accept as fact. Since I am not an immunologist or vaccine expert, I have to trust that the community of professionals has been as honest and thorough in their assessments of these vaccines as they have been with all other vaccines before them. The electrical wiring in my house is best tended to by an electrician; I try to be an informed electricity consumer, but I mostly leave it up to the professionals. I choose the same approach here."

("For those not comfortable with an mRNA vaccine, the AstraZeneca vaccine is another option, though its trials are currently showing 70-90% efficacy as opposed to the mRNA vaccine's 95%.")

"Second: I, too, have concerns about long-term vaccine safety. Truly, only time can tell about any long-lasting effects of the vaccine, but we must first survive the pandemic in order to be affected by long-lasting effects–survival that is made more likely by receiving the vaccine. **More than a quarter-million people have died in the U.S. from COVID-19, and the University of Washington Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation projects that number to nearly double over the next four months**. The more time we spend on research and development and getting comfortable with the idea of the vaccine, the more people who will get sick and possibly die."

"These vaccines have been developed quickly as a result of safety trials, efficacy trials, manufacturing and distribution planning happening concurrently

rather than sequentially as they have in the past. No part of the process has been skipped–instead, it is all being done at the same time and must all be completed satisfactorily before any vaccine is approved by the FDA and offered to the general public. This saved time is a gift, and I accept it gladly."

"Third, some of my colleagues are concerned about being treated as 'guinea pigs.' I am happy to report that my friends and colleagues who participated in the clinical trials took that role on for us and have reported only minor complaints of the flu-like symptoms common following vaccine receipt. No amount of tweaking will make any vaccine 100% safe for every person, but the side effects appear minor and definitely not as big or bad as the virus' effects on our bodies and communities."

"I know that my opinion as a white woman may be of little comfort to communities of color that historically have been exploited in medical research. I am buoyed by the fact that the trials have enrolled a proportion of Latinx individuals exceeding their proportion of the U.S. population and that Moderna fell just 3% short of Black Americans' proportion of the U.S. population. I am also heartened by the Black Coalition Against COVID-19's encouragement of Black Americans to get the COVID vaccine, which was signed by the presidents of four HBCU Colleges of Medicine, the National Medical Association and the National Black Nurses Association."

"I, and many of my friends, family and colleagues have lingering concerns, including the need for transparent data regarding safety, children and pregnant persons, as well as more experts expressing faith in the vaccine's safety and efficacy, and difference between these trials and historical trials. Personally, my biggest fear is that the vaccine will not be as effective under real-life circumstances as it has been in the controlled setting of a clinical trial–but if that is the worst-case scenario, then I am OK with giving it a shot."

Jenna Mermer is a public health nurse at the Howard County Health Department in Maryland.

Wisconsin is facing a COVID-19 crisis and our state MUST come together to help stop community spread. Rates of COVID-19 infection are continuing to rise at an alarming pace in America, and additional public awareness is urgently needed about the seriousness of the pandemic and the critical need for preventative measures.

www.wha.org/stopthecovidspread

A Rural Vision for the Post COVID Era

From "Reimagining Rural Policy" by Tony Pipa and Natalie Geismar, *Brookings*, November, 2020:

"A recovery from COVID-19 that strengthens America's economic resilience and prosperity, reduces its social vulnerabilities, and addresses longstanding inequities will require policies that enable more diverse *places*–as well as *people*–to thrive. This must include rural areas."

"Rural America boasts a rich diversity of identity, employment, culture, and experiences. People of color comprise 21 percent of the rural population; rural areas have higher self-employment rates than urban counterparts; and rural assets will be central to modernization and transition underway in several of the nation's key industries. Yet rural people and places

Eye On Health is the monthly newsletter of the Rural Wisconsin Health Cooperative. Begun in 1979, RWHC has as its **Mission** that rural Wisconsin communities will be the healthiest in America. Our **Vision** is that... RWHC is a strong and innovative cooperative of diversified rural hospitals... it is the "rural advocate of choice" for its Members... it develops and manages a variety of products and services... it assists Members to offer high quality, cost-effective healthcare… assists Members in partnerships to make their communities healthier… generates additional revenue by services to non-Members… ongoing use of strategic alliances in pursuit of its Vision. Tim Size <**timsize@rwhc.com**>, Editor, 880 Independence Lane, Sauk City, WI 53583

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also face unique vulnerabilities: Their recovery from the 2008 recession was incomplete before COVID-19 hit, and they lag other areas on indicators of poverty, health, and education."

"As rural communities adapt to 21st-century shifts in the national and global economy, demographics, and climate, the fallout from COVID-19 and the attention to racial injustice adds new urgency to their situation. In a nation where long-term poverty and economic distress concentrate disproportionately among people of color in rural areas, it is impossible to disentangle rural development from efforts to promote economic and racial justice. It is time to consider geographic equity as a key element of a long-term equity agenda."

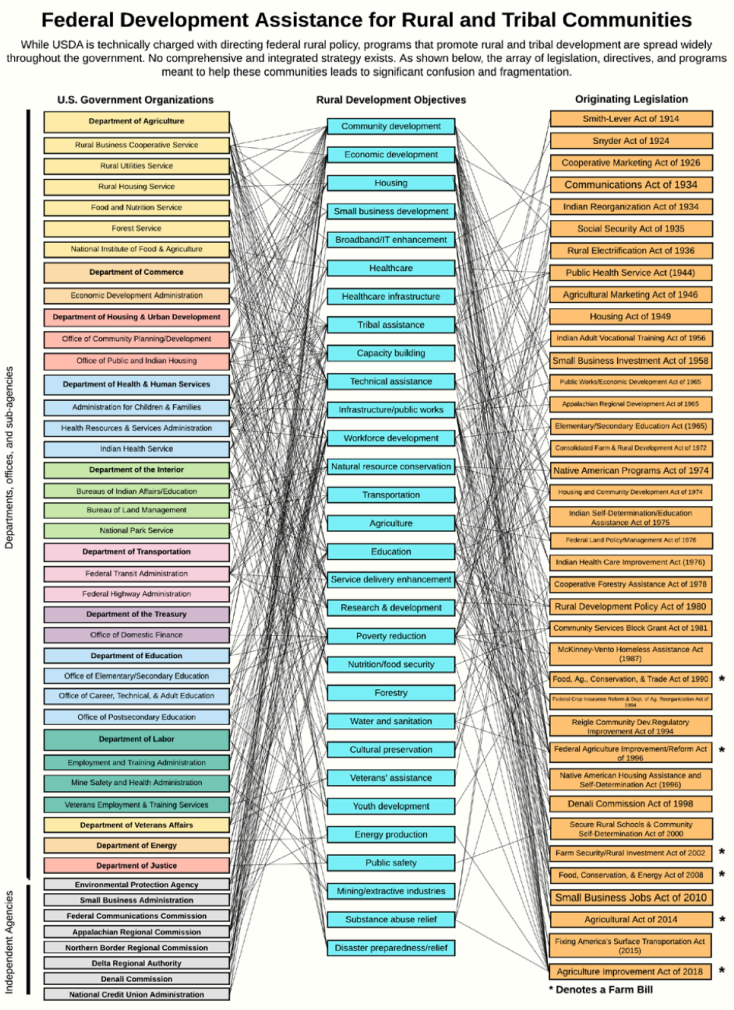
"Federal assistance for rural development is outdated, fragmented, and confusing."

"The federal programs and tools available today to help generate social and economic development in rural communities serve as a reminder of active and broad federal involvement in the 20th century, and the possibilities for federal leadership to help rural communities meet the current moment. Yet they are outdated, fragmented, and incoherent."

"We identified over 400 programs open to rural communities for economic and community development, spanning 13 departments, 10 independent agencies, and over 50 offices and sub-agencies. A total of 14 legislative committees have jurisdiction over the authorizing legislation for rural-eligible development programs. While the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is charged with directing and coordinating federal rural policy, these programs go far beyond its authority–and given today's diversity of rural communities, rural policy must go far beyond agricultural policy. For programs open to many different sized communities, rural communities must often deal with spending formulas or eligibility requirements that are particularly disadvantageous to them."

"We also tracked FY2019 funding flows for 93 of these programs which exclusively target rural communities. They administered $2.58 billion in grants (just 0.2 percent of federal discretionary spending) versus $38 billion in loan authority."

"The urgency of challenges facing rural communities makes a strong case for ambitious federal leadership to support economic and community development in the rural U.S. To maximize the return on federal investment, our recommendations include:



Launch a domestic development corporation, modernizing technical capabilities and financing tools.

A new corporation would competitively award large, flexible block grants that invest in local vision, accompanied by cutting edge technical assistance, rigorous analysis and measurement of results, and support to strengthen local leadership and civic capacity. It would integrate and expand the breadth of domestic development financing tools, bringing strategy and improved impact to the set of narrowly defined and siloed tools that currently exist. The U.S. government has done this successfully

for its international development investments by creating the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the International Development Finance Corporation; it should apply this experience to the development challenges facing rural communities in the U.S..

Create a national rural strategy and undertake associated reforms to improve coherence, regional integration, and transparency

A national rural strategy will strengthen coordination by providing clear policy direction to the agencies and stakeholders involved in rural development. To be successful, it must embrace diverse rural perspectives while breaking down urban-rural divides to facilitate regional integration.

Coherent strategy requires a rigorous focus on transparency and results. To increase transparency, we recommend an easy-to-use web tool that tracks federal funding flows to rural people and places. We also recommend a congressional commitment to mandate and provide 5 percent of program funding for evaluation.

To ensure that strategy implementation responds to rural realities, we recommend elevating White House leadership by (1) establishing high-ranking positions responsible for rural and tribal development and (2) creating an office to facilitate interagency coordination and provide consistency and convening power across presidential administrations.

Appoint a bipartisan congressional Commission to undertake a top-to-bottom review and build bipartisan momentum for improving the effectiveness of federal rural policy

We recommend a bipartisan, congressionally appointed commission to undertake a top-to-bottom review of the effectiveness of federal assistance for rural community and economic development. The Office of Management and Budget is well-positioned to analyze the extent to which existing policies and regulations disadvantage rural communities."

RWHC Seeks Director of Community Economic Development (CED)

The position will manage RWHC's new initiative to (1) increase rural hospital engagement with local multi-sector CED, (2) increase the effectiveness of rural hospital engagement with CED, (3) bring a rural health perspective into statewide CED and (4) bring a statewide CED perspective into rural health.

Details at: **https://lnkd.in/e7AwhKW**

Post Pandemic Challenges AND Opportunities

From 'Limited Workforce, Housing and Broadband Coverage Create Challenges for Rural Wisconsin: But Experts Say Trends from COVID-19 Pandemic Could Actually Benefit Rural Areas' by Danielle Kaeding, *Wisconsin Public Radio*, 12/3/20:

"A limited workforce, gaps in rural broadband coverage and a lack of housing are among leading challenges facing rural Wisconsin, according to a new report from an affiliate of the state's largest business group."

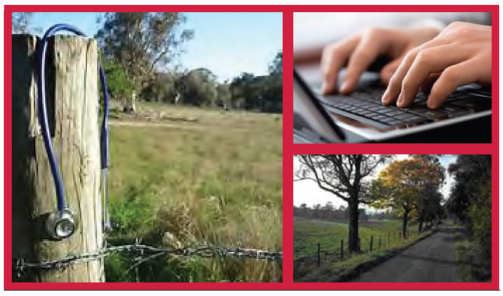
"**While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought severe challenges, the report released by the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC) Foundation says rural Wisconsin may benefit from changes accelerated by the public health crisis**."

"The WMC Foundation hired an economic research firm and developed the report with input from around 145 leaders in the private, academic and government sectors. The report outlines five challenges facing rural Wisconsin that include a limited workforce, gaps in rural broadband coverage, lack of housing, access to affordable health care and stresses on manufacturing industries."

"The report recommends stepping up efforts to attract, retain and train workers. It also suggests expanding rural broadband, lowering the tax burden on businesses, encouraging new housing developments and attracting medical professionals to strengthen rural healthcare."

"Wade Goodsell, executive director of the WMC Foundation, said many of the challenges are interconnected. Goodsell identified a limited available workforce as rural Wisconsin's leading challenge, highlighting that the national population grew at its slowest rate last year since World War I."

“ ‘Unfortunately, the experts are not predicting that COVID is going to lead to a baby boom. They’re predicting that COVID and the pandemic could further reduce population growth,’ said Goodsell. ‘This is a national trend that has been hard. It’s one that’s been hard on Wisconsin. It’s been amplified even further in rural parts of the state.’ ”



29th Annual $2,500 Monato Essay Prize
Best Rural Health Paper by a
University of Wisconsin Student
or recent graduate. Submit by June 1st.
www.rwhc.com/Awards.aspx

“In Wisconsin, two-thirds of the state’s rural counties lost population between 2010 and 2018, according to data from the research firm Forward Analytics. Wisconsin’s rural population growth has lagged behind both the state and country.”

“Despite that, Goodsell and others say the pandemic may provide an opportunity for rural Wisconsin as the COVID-19 crisis has accelerated a trend of people moving away from large urban areas.”

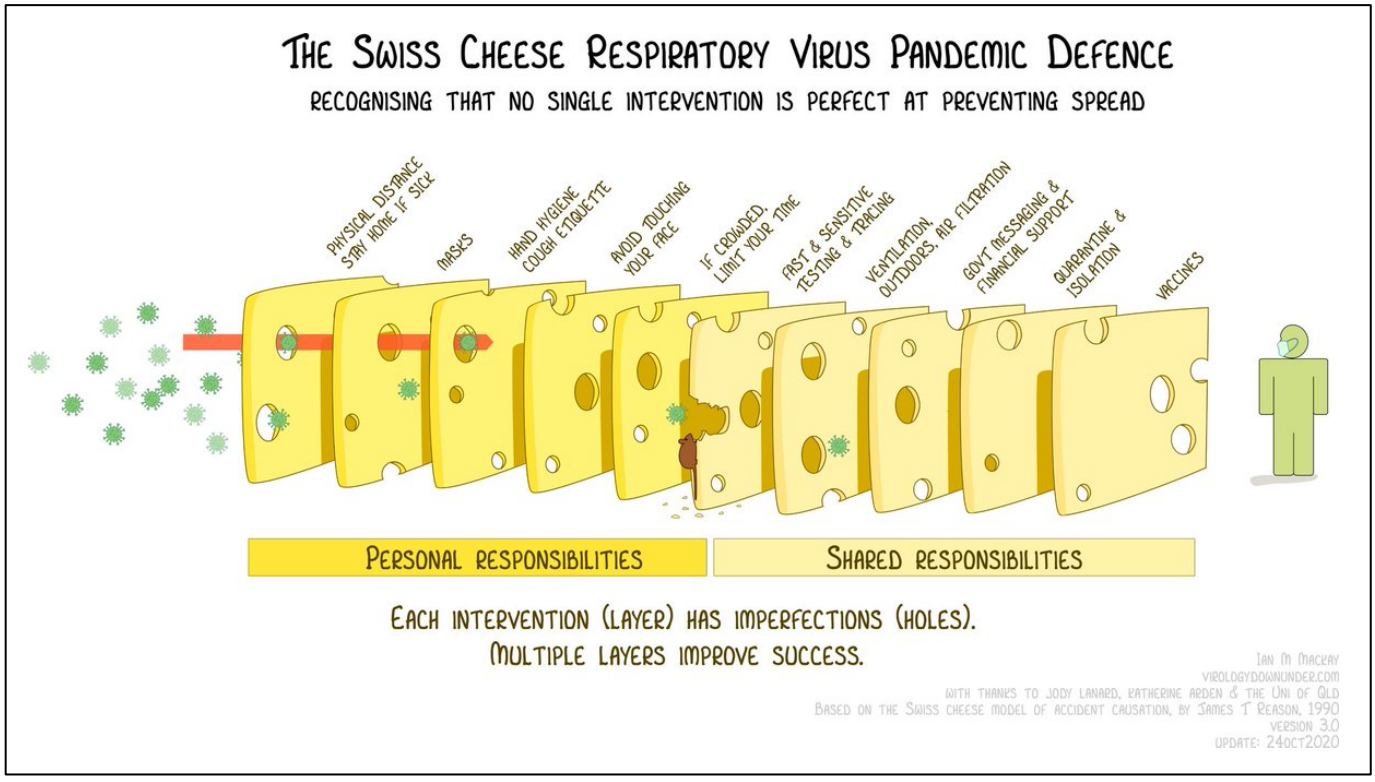
“ ‘As people leave major metropolitan areas, we think there’s an opportunity for folks to call more rural parts of the country and more rural parts of Wisconsin home,’ said Goodsell.”

“Steven Deller, a professor of agricultural and applied economics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, agreed the COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity for rural Wisconsin. ‘That opportunity is telecommuting, but to do it, you’ve got to have broadband,’ said Deller.”

“He said a growing number of companies may encourage their workers to continue working from home after they were forced out of offices by the pandemic earlier this year. One study by Harvard Business School found 1 in 6 workers will continue working remotely after the pandemic.”

“While high-speed internet access is improving, nearly 398,000 residents, in rural Wisconsin lacked broadband coverage in 2018, according to the most recent data from the Federal Communications Commission.”

“The pandemic has highlighted the need for strong broadband coverage to facilitate telecommuting, remote learning and telemedicine, according to Chris Reader, WMC’s senior director of workforce and em-



ployment policy. The group hopes the Legislature and Gov. Tony Evers will continue to support funding for broadband expansion grants through the state Public Service Commission."

"The Wisconsin Broadband Office has made $24 million available, part of $48 million in funding provided under Evers' first biennial budget. 'That's something that we hope will continue in a bipartisan fashion,' said Reader."

"The challenges outlined by WMC Foundation are similar to those identified by Wisconsin Rural Partners, the state's nonpartisan rural development council. Sandy Decker, the group's president, said the digital divide, housing, health care and child care are common concerns among rural communities. She noted many communities have struggled to retain employees without child care and available housing. 'The tax incentives aren't right for the development of housing in some small communities,' said Decker."

"Deller agreed that the cost of materials is often too high for developers to justify building homes that for young professionals and families while retirees remain in their homes due to a lack of alternatives."

"The report comes as a commission created by Evers has been working to identify strategies to support rural communities. The commission is expected to report its findings and plan to the governor by the end of the year."

The National Rural Health Association's Foundation believes raising up a new generation of young leaders is critical to the future of rural health and rural communities. We believe leaders are made, not born and that leadership development is a necessary investment.

Can you help?

www.ruralhealthweb.org/donationform

"**How We Can Reconcile With Each Other When Our Politics Are So Polarized**" by Elizabeth Bernstein in *The Wall Street Journal*, 11/24/20:

"Here is some advice from William Doherty, a marriage and family therapist and co-founder of Braver Angels, a nonprofit that works to depolarize Americans:

Be humble and accept responsibility. 'Meaningful progress occurs when both sides see that they have contributed to the problem,' Dr. Doherty says.

Stop trying to change the other person. It rarely works and leads to endless arguing. Remember: We can only change ourselves.

Seek to understand. This means we need to talk less and listen more–a lot more. Stop explaining your point of view and try to understand why the other person sees the world as they do.

Try the LAPP Technique: **L**isten to understand, not reload. **A**cknowledge what you heard. **P**ivot by assessing whether it is OK to offer your views. Offer your **P**erspective if the person has signaled a willingness to hear it.

Use 'I' statements instead of dogmatic ones. 'This is how I see it' instead of "How can you not see this?"

Depolarize your language. Avoid labels, such as 'bigoted' or 'unpatriotic.' If someone offers their opinion and you put a label on it you are never going to have a meaningful conversation or mend the relationship."

Leadership Insights: "Mr. Rogers' Leaders"

The *Leadership Insights* series is by Jo Anne Preston, RWHC Workforce & Organizational Development Senior Manager. Back issues at **www.RWHC.com**.

"When Mr. Rogers came onto the PBS airwaves, I was just a little too old to watch it, and just old enough to be in the cool crowd if I mocked him. Now, watching the movie and documentary about his work, I am spellbound by his wisdom and the courage he had to carry out his purpose. Proof of his timelessness is that while the world shifts under our feet, the truth in his words does not need to be altered to fit today. ***Leaders, Mr. Rogers can help you right now***."

"**Mr. R said 'It is all about love, or the lack of it.'** Love is the foundation for connection, and connected teams commit to do their best work. It takes courage to show love, but it is worthy to call on your courage

because love is a retention strategy. *How do you show love at work?*"

- "Attend to giving people time and attention. Mr. R asked, 'How are you?' and actually listened to the answer."

- "**LOVE IS THE SECRET SAUCE FOR SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL MEETINGS**. When you exude love–*caring, concern, empathy, vulnerability*-your virtual meeting will actually be worth attending. A tactical improvement: look at your camera when you speak. It's a way to show virtual eye contact and it makes a difference."

- "Tell people what you appreciate about them."

- "Say, 'I understand,' and really try to. You'll influence more with love than force."

- "Believe that caring matters."

Stigma is gone. "It took a pandemic to be the tipping point for overturning much mental health stigma. We are finding lots of company now with people talking openly about depression and anxiety. This is big. Mr. R worked to normalize *all* emotions, talking with kids about how we all feel sad sometimes, it's ok to feel however you feel, and talking can help, even for those more cerebral. *How do you manage the mental health concerns people bring to you?*"

- "Don't try to be a therapist. Do know your resources and offer them: employee assistance programs, mental health providers, tele-psychiatry options available."

- "Celebrate the fact that we can safely talk about these things, *and* help people focus in on actions they can take to have the best day they can have right now with the circumstances they are in."

- "Be kind. say, 'I know these are challenging times. What support can I give right now to help you get through what you need to accomplish today?' "

It's ok to feel good. "Happiness is also a permitted emotion. If you are having a good day, there is no need to feel guilty about the fact that others may be suffering. We do all get a turn. *How do you encourage positivity?*"

- "Allow and enjoy the moments that are fun, funny, tender, easy, energized."

- "Seek joy. Ask people to share stories of joyful moments. Positivity is as infectious as COVID-19."

Mr. Rogers wasn't a saint. You aren't either. "According to Mrs. Rogers, her husband was human and had to manage his anger when stressed. **Recognize when you are low on reserves**. You snapped, and maybe that's not like you. A disagreement that in other times would not be a big deal now hits you in the gut. It can throw off a whole day or longer because that extra energy, empathy or patience may not be available. *How do you sensitize yourself to, and manage, low internal levels of reserve?*"

- Reflect on the things that 'fill your tank,' make you more resilient. Measure yourself against your 'tank level.' Mr. R credited daily swimming for helping him keep his perspective."

Wisconsin Shares could help! Wisconsin Shares helps income-eligible families pay for child care so they can work, go to school, or participate in approved work training programs.

To find out if you are eligible and to get application information you can go online to **www.access.wisconsin.gov** and click "Am I Eligible. Our rural communities are stronger when families thrive, and children are happy, safe, and well cared for.

- "Check in regularly with someone you trust. After a friend told me some difficult things that were going on in her life, she said, 'I guess it makes sense that I am a little sensitive right now.' Owning the reality minimizes the power of emotions to take over."

- "Remember, 'We're not usually upset for the reason we think.' Ask yourself what need is not being met in emotionally charged moments."

Find a distant focal point. "Mr. R worked to help fearful children feel safe about the future. We all need a future focal point to manage the pain of the present, much like in Lamaze, where one is taught to focus on a visual cue to ease labor pain. *How do you help teams keep their eye on a better future?*"

- "Share reminders that the pandemic will end. Ask your team to explore how they would like to describe their work team relationships when that time comes, and what are the daily contributions they can make to ensure they get there."

- "Look further out. In five years, what strengths do you want to be able to claim? This is different from goals you want to achieve as it focuses on how the growing pains today build muscles of tomorrow."

"Try another Mr. Rogers' technique: stop what you are doing and take 60 silent seconds to think about someone who made a difference in your life. Invite your team to do this. It brings us back full circle, to love."

Contact Jo Anne Preston for individual or group coaching at ***jpreston@RWHC.com*** *or 608-644-3261. For info re the RWHC Leadership Series go to* **www.RWHC.com/Services.aspx** *or contact Carrie Ballweg at* ***cballweg@RWHC.com*** *or 608-643-2343.*

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2/19 - Walk the Talk: Leadership Accountability
2/25-26 - Preceptor Training Program (2-day workshop)
3/11 - Motivational Interviewing

Non-Members Welcome. Register & other events at:
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