



Kindness: Holding back the ravens of our modern times

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Definitions of the word “kindness” are fairly consistent across the usual dictionary sources. A simple mash-up easily yields the following nouns: (1) the quality of being generous, helpful, and caring about other people ... contributing to the happiness of others, supplying their wants, or alleviating their distresses or (2) any act showing this quality, exercised cheerfully, and without expecting praise or reward in return.

Any one of you who applies your usual consummate dedication to any of the disciplines of community safety and well-being (CSWB) will readily recognize yourself and your collaborators in those definitions of kindness. In fact, your photographs could easily and moreover should, in my view, accompany any such definition. You are the kindness. And, your kindness is needed and valued more and more every day. It deserves respect, and it merits protection.

Seek out the antonym, and with some surprise, you may chance upon the odd classifying label “*an unkindness of ravens*.” Typical of many such arcane names for groups of animals – think “*school of fish*” or a “*lounge of lizards*” – explanations also vary for this one. A strong argument can be made, however, that this particular origin derives from deep within mythology. According to Charles Dickens and Edgar Allan Poe, among other notable writers and philosophers, ravens are shadowy characters and unkind tricksters.

It is not too much of a stretch to say that these days, most attempts to attribute any of the countless examples of inadequate, flawed, ideological, and even corrupt public policy decisions will too often lead to circular arguments, to harsh polarity, to absurdly misinformed fallacies. It may be a fool’s errand to even try to affix accountability, let alone to fix the damage, reflected more and more every day and everywhere, in the most urgent problems that confound health care, housing, policing, mental health, and other CSWB disciplines. It is the nature of complex political systems and bureaucracies that the real opponents to your own missions of kindness might always remain anonymous, elusive, or obfuscated, whether naïve or even deceitful. Many may not even recognize themselves as parties to the most intractable of problems. We might better understand them as the unwitting members of a collective *unkindness of ravens*.

Shadowy, maybe. Tricky, indeed.

Through whatever motives we may care or dare to imagine, what is inescapable to me is a seemingly unstoppable

slide toward simply accepting that we all must perform our work in a new context shaped by this resulting unkindness. It is a sleight of hand, misdirecting us to just accept and toil away under empirically bad public policy. Bad, because it detaches itself from science; because it further polarizes an absurdly fortunate few from a marginalized and growing many; because it demonizes investments in the public good. Bad, because it increasingly trades in and legitimizes the worst tropes of divide, conquer, and blame the other.

Are you seeing what I am seeing? Is there nothing we can do about it? Should we not at least talk about it?

LOOKING BACK

Over the past 2 years, our themed calls for papers have placed considerable emphasis on the challenges and triumphs of interdisciplinary collaboration. Through a very generous response from our global community of authors, our journal put a double-edged lens on collaboration ... what stops it from happening with consistency ... and how it might be challenged by the diversity of workplace cultures that shape interdisciplinary work. We are confident that the rich pattern of research studies and narratives that have emerged will continue to populate many future issues of this journal.

As we close out this most recent targeted focus, our year-ending issue once more showcases some of the most interesting thought pieces and ongoing research efforts in this regard. In addition to several features of research and commentary contributed by speakers and panels at the Seventh International Law Enforcement Public Health (LEPH) 2025 conference held this past summer in Ottawa, Canada, and one derived from the first-ever LEPH Africa event late last year, these collaboration themes are also reflected strongly in additional papers featured in this issue, from Canada, Wales, England, and the United States. Our thanks to all who contributed.

LOOKING AHEAD

Now, returning to my questions above – what might we do about *this unkindness of ravens*? Permit me to stimulate, maybe to inspire, perhaps even to annoy some of you into

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To cite: Taylor, N. E. (2025). Kindness: Holding back the ravens of our modern times. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 10(4), 177–178. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.522>

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some bold new submissions for the coming year and years ahead. You see, my bet is that you too have encountered these dark birds.

Perhaps you have merely felt their presence on your most frustrating days as a service provider, as a first responder, as a caring problem solver, as you have asked or even screamed aloud, “who is making this so damn difficult, and why?” Maybe after too many such moments, an image has even formed in your mind’s eye, as it has in mine, an image resembling that ominous jungle gym scene in Hitchcock’s *The Birds*.

Among all the subjects and sub-disciplines we have probed and explored in our 10-year history as a publication, our journal is and will remain uniquely tied to cross-sector collaborative solutions, almost always with a glass-half-full optimism.

But this subject is undeniably one we have all avoided the most and thus illuminated the least: who, or what, or by what conspiratorial forces does our glass keep running empty?

How is that sound for a themed call for papers?

Maybe more important than our own concerns as providers, let us also critically examine how the most marginalized members of our respective societies can count on us to stay the course and continue to try our best to deliver and sustain evidence-informed and effective solutions in the face of increasingly cruel, unkind, and misinformed currents that threaten human security, overtly and covertly, at home and abroad?

As we enter 2026, we have already been fortunate enough to seed the pot with some truly interesting and thought-provoking submissions that will help to initiate and inform this theme in our March issue. I believe you will find that this conversation is already underway. We invite you to join. We

are not out to fix blame, to name names, nor to choose sides. We simply must deconstruct the phenomenon.

In the meantime, let us acknowledge that for positive-minded CSWB professionals, taking on a critical analysis of negative forces is undoubtedly treading into foreign ground. Your published works consistently reflect hope and determination. For me, now into my eighth decade of life experience, I steadfastly adhere to what past centuries have shown us ... that ultimately, only kindness can and will win out. It is in our human DNA to pursue and protect health, well-being, and inclusion for everyone in the village. There are, however, times in history when kindness alone has needed a helping hand.

Indeed, there have been times that have urgently called for *all-kind-hands-on-deck*. Such times have ignited periods of remarkable courage, compassion, and collective creativity, enough to end world wars, to contain the spread of disease and hunger, to steer us away from the destructive dark clouds of ill-conceived progress.

To those who today might be contemplating paths that will take us forward, or backward, into much darker times, be that silently or aggressively, selfishly or misguidedly, we might simply quoth the raven itself ... nevermore.

Let us turn our minds fully to that. Jump in anywhere, please.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES

The author has continuing business interests that include providing advisory services to communities, police services and related human service agencies.

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