Dear Hope Community,

As our nation marks the 25th anniversary of September 11, the memory of that day continues to shape me through the powerful reminder of what people can do when they choose compassion and unity in the face of profound adversity.

In the days following 9/11, grief became a shared experience. Neighbors checked on one another. Strangers offered comfort. Communities opened their doors and their hearts. Across the country, people stood together in lines to donate blood, volunteer, pray, and simply be present. The moment in time was a significant reminder that our differences are small compared to the humanity we share. It showed us that even in the darkest moments, hope is carried forward by ordinary people choosing extraordinary kindness.

But the harder truth is this—kindness is easy to hold in times of crisis and far easier to lose in the everyday. As the urgency fades, so does the instinct to extend grace. The world grows noisy again. We become busy, distracted, divided. The tenderness we showed one another in the days after 9/11 became a memory instead of a practice.

We cannot afford to let go of kindness.

Kindness is not a soft response; it is a stabilizing force. Kindness helps create the stability and connection we all need. It builds trust, strengthens communities, and creates conditions where people feel safe enough to thrive. It is the antidote to isolation, fear, and the erosion of connection.

The legacy of 9/11 compels us to carry forward the compassion we witnessed and were a part of—not just in moments of crisis, but in the ordinary days that follow. It reminds us to:

- Offer patience when it would be easier to be sharp.
- Extend help before being asked.
- Listen with the intention to understand.
- Choose unity over division, even when we disagree.
- Remember that every person we meet is carrying something we cannot see.

Kindness is the thread that held us together after 9/11, and it is the thread that can hold us together now. The challenge—and the opportunity—is to practice it when the world feels broken and when life feels routine. If we honor the lessons of that day, we honor the people we lost. We honor the resilience of survivors. We honor the courage of first responders. And we honor the truth that emerged from the ashes: our greatest strength is found in how we treat one another. Kindness is not something we hold only in grief. It is something we must choose, again and again. That is what defines who we are as individuals and as a community.

As I honor this day, I am choosing to recommit to those lessons – to continue to strive to build communities where all people feel seen, valued, and safe. To choose compassion aligned with principle. And to work each day to be fiercely kind.

with kindness

Michele Girault, Executive Director