

# ACTS OF KINDNESS TEAM

Leadership Maine Damariscotta Class

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Andi Summers  
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# PROJECT BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION

**Project Title:** Greater Portland Acts of Kindness Initiative

**Sponsor Organization:** Acts of Kindness Maine (AOK Maine)

**Liaison:** Jeff Edelstein



**Goal:** The Acts of Kindness (AOK) Campaign is designed to address the epidemic of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection increasingly felt in modern society, regardless of issues of toxic polarization.

**Target:** The AOK will take place in the Portland region, focusing on the city of Portland itself, as well as a strong presence in the adjoining communities of South Portland, Westbrook, Scarborough, and Falmouth.

# AOK PROJECT TEAM CHARTER

## Group members:

- Lisa Archer, Mike O'Connor, Gina Quinn-Skillings, Andi Weisman Summers, and Ethan Tremblay

## Group Agreements:

- We will hear from everyone and get to deliberative consensus / or a willingness to support any decisions
- We will each do what we agree to do and if it's not possible, we will proactively and openly share that
- We will aim to communicate openly and with candor and have respectful but difficult conversations if needed
- We will recognize that we process differently and give each other space

## Logistics:

- We'll primarily meet via Zoom
- Group texts are OK for logistics or checking in, but substantial issues will happen via Zoom or email
- Meetings during the workday, with advance notice, are OK. Mondays and Fridays may work best



# OUR TEAM PROCESS

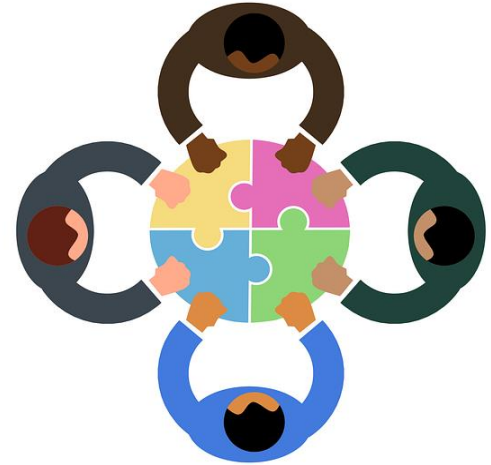
- First Priority: understand our scope and role
- Review reference and resource materials
  - Divided up responsibilities
  - Discussed our initial findings
- Sponsor needs



*“The goal is really to foster the full range of human values: courage, compassion, honesty, dignity, trust, service, and the like. ‘Kindness’ can be thought of as encompassing all these values, since the kindest thing one can do for the world is to develop all of these human values.”*

# OUR TEAM PROCESS

- Challenges
  - Ambiguity
  - Potential for discord
- Solutions
  - Stayed focused on principles outlined in charter
  - Clear communication
  - Respect and candor
  - Active listening, to each other and our sponsor
  - Deliberative consensus
- Refocusing
  - Pivoted to kindness exercise
  - Sought feedback from our cohort





# RESEARCH AND KINDNESS

## Data Dilemma

- Studies show kindness positively impacts health and wellbeing
- These effects are found for both givers and receivers
  - One study found a 44% decrease in likelihood of early death
- We assumed data and an evaluation plan would be part of this project, but ultimately that wasn't the case

# We Looked at Kindness Curricula and Models for Schools



DEPARTMENT OF  
KINDNESS

The text 'DEPARTMENT OF' is in a light beige, sans-serif font. Below it, the word 'KINDNESS' is written in large, colorful, rounded letters: 'K' is red, 'I' is green, 'N' is pink, 'D' is blue, 'N' is yellow, 'E' is green, and 'S' is blue.



# Cleveland, OH Community Wide Model

*Kindland*<sup>TM</sup>

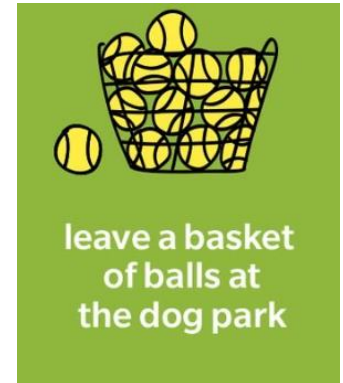


# Cleveland is the National Leader in the Work

- Started community wide, with hundreds of organizations signing on, billboards, an app, press to rebrand Cleveland as “Kindland”
- Launched in 2020 with a goal of documenting 1 million acts of kindness per year - have logged over 37 million
- Moving the work to the schools was a second phase



**Greater Cleveland  
Food Bank**  
MEMBER OF FEEDING AMERICA



# DATA FROM THE CLEVELAND SCHOOLS

- Andi spoke with Eric Gordon, CEO of Cleveland Public Schools and Stuart Musynski of Values in Action
- They are deeply committed, in partnership with teachers union, to using a Kindland curriculum (key piece of district social emotional learning work) as well as providing staffing and Tier II interventions and a suite of other strategies
- In their pilot school that focused intensively on kindness:
  - Suspensions declined 70%
  - Graduation rates climbed from 50% to 95%
  - Student perceptions of school culture increased 15% on a student climate survey

# Akron, OH School Model

a direct spinoff from Cleveland's work



**Be Kind 330** is a grassroots campaign to encourage individuals to bring more positivity and kindness to their communities.

# AKRON'S EARLY FINDINGS

- Andi spoke with Joanne Isaac, a communications specialist in the Akron Schools, who is leading Be Kind 330, based on the work in Cleveland
- They are taking a softer approach, starting with administration, then building leaders modeling kindness. “Our process is gentle and kind - no requirements.”
- They have a full communication strategy, with branding, a range of messages, etc.
- Fundamentally, their purpose is not to measure impact, it's just to put more positivity out into their community



# OUR CONCLUSIONS FROM RESEARCH

No question that random acts of kindness benefit both givers and receivers

Evidence that instituting random acts of kindness programs in schools improves school culture, but difficult to prove causality

Not much evidence to support the notion that kindness programs will improve systemic ills of communities/society—and a difficult question to study

Why do we have to “prove” that more kindness is good? What if we did our own experiment?



# CASE STUDY: Leadership Maine Class

The AOK team gave out cookies and an individualized note of kindness to all Leadership Maine member.

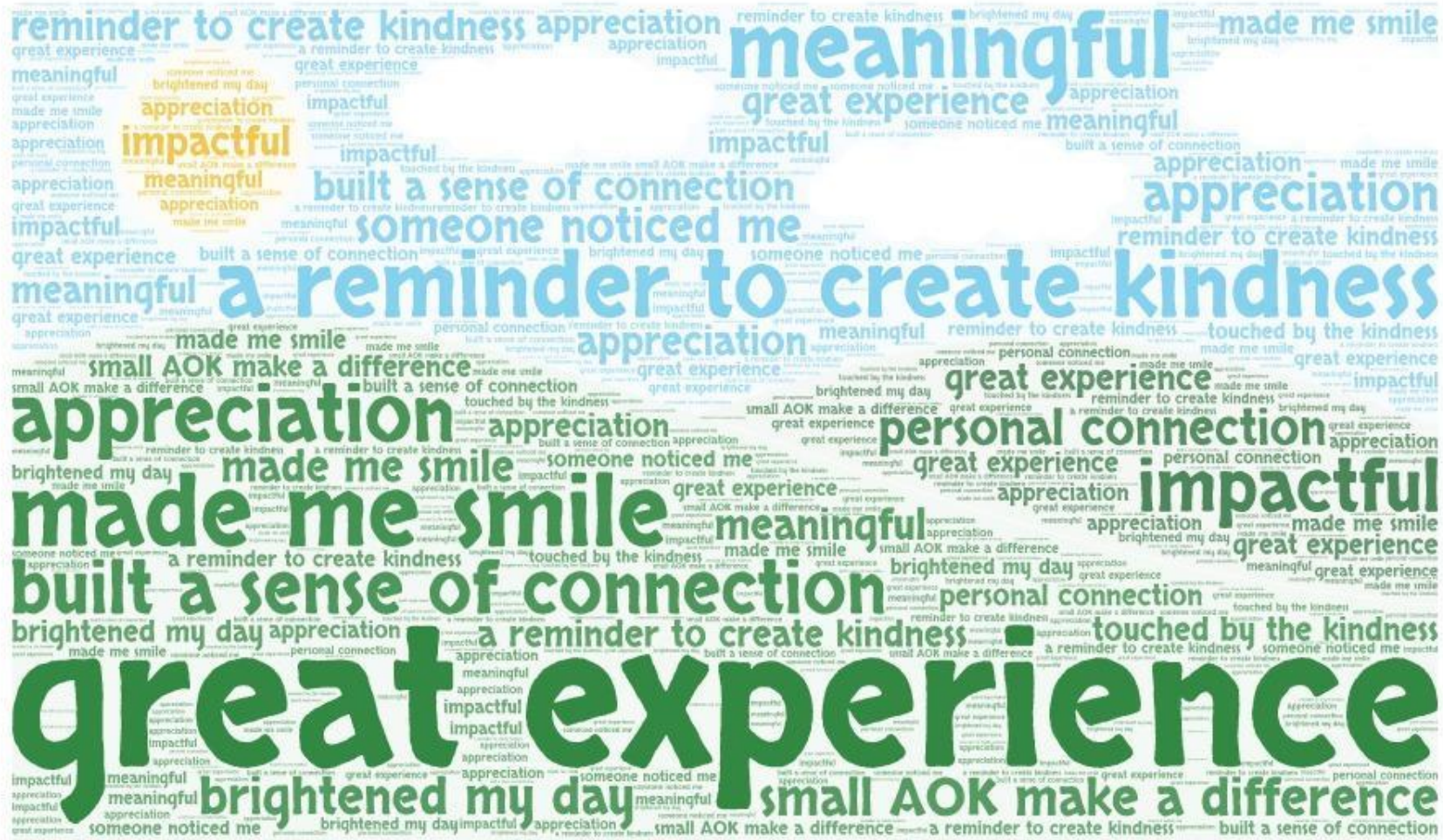
Our goal was to: make a personal connection and foster kindness moving forward.

We asked Leadership Maine's members FIVE questions about their personal experience our act of kindness.





# How did this experience resonate with you?



**By experiencing a Act  
of Kindness -  
Did it change anything  
for you?**

**more aware of how I can do AOK daily at work**

*reminder that a simple recognition of someone's good qualities can help with their challenges*

**Reinforced for me how simple things can go a long way**

**made me reflect on all the good that exists in the world**

**appreciated even more the relationships built through Leadership Maine**

**reinforced for me that taking the time to write it down and share it is worth it**

**Keeps it in front of my mind that there are good people out there**

**aware how I can do kind things**

**reminder to try to fit small AOK into my day**



**Did the experience inspire you to perform an Act of Kindness?**

“Yes...it's a reminder to take the time to create positive experiences for people.”

“That small moment of reflection carried over into the rest of the day, and I made sure to connect with my kids and partner when I got home.”

“I have thought about this AOK daily since then, and have been working into my day small AOKs giving to others.”

“Absolutely. When you are a recipient of acts of kindness it makes you want to go out and do something nice for someone else to pay it forward.”

“I truly thought about it for a long time! In a few situations that might ordinarily be frustrating for me I slowed down and gave others the benefit of the doubt and a smile.”

## What is the kindest thing anyone has ever done for you?

**Anonymous scholarship to a music camp** that I never could have afforded on my own. It was one of the best experiences of my youth. It turns out that one of my former teachers was the benefactor.

In high school a mentor of mine at the job I was working in after school took time to talk to me about my career and offer guidance about bettering myself by not engaging with certain groups of people and thinking more long term about where I hope to go in my life. This **candid feedback really impacted the trajectory of my life** and left me feeling so appreciative that this person I respected so much cared enough to have this difficult conversation with me.

Nearly 20 years ago I had my driver's license suspended for a short period of time...Miraculously, **through Craig's List, I found a regular ride to and from work each day.** He was flexible with commuting times so I could be at work and at home when needed. **He was just a kind human and inspired me on so many levels.** I mean who scans Craig's List to find people they can give rides to?

**A recent example of an  
Act of Kindness you  
have done or  
experienced.....**

**a colleague gave me a ladder toss game  
a rental car person was kind to me**

**a stranger bought my children ice cream when I forgot my wallet**

**I cut a neighbors tree after a windstorm**

**my family provided housing for an asylum-seeking family**

**my sister supports me endlessly**

**I gave a bouquet of flowers to an elderly neighbor**

# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUR PROJECT SPONSOR

- Develop strategic plan with identified priorities and goals to attract support/funding
- Continue focus on public schools
- Continue sharing your enthusiasm about the power of kindness



# CONCLUSION



Crucial to well define your mission / goals early in the process

Acts of Kindness have a positive impact - very difficult to measure (which acts work best and to what degree the results may spread)

Positive impact on both those performing the acts as well as recipients

Focus on the younger generation for most lasting results on society as a whole

Reflecting on kindness seems to deepen the experience