

Acts of Kindness (AOK) Maine – Summer 2023 Newsletter

UPCOMING

“The Power of Kindness” Adult Education Courses, Fall of 2023: AOK Maine will be offering courses through eleven adult learning programs this fall: Portland, Lewiston, Biddeford, Sanford, Sacopee Valley, Lake Region, Merrymeeting, Massabesic, Windham, Bonny Eagle and York. Participants will explore what kindness means to them, create personal kindness practices, put those practices into action between classes, and explore ways to support each other in **rising to their kindest selves**. Our goals are to directly make a difference in people’s lives, create a ripple effect, and continue learning how best to engage people around kindness. Example [here](#).

Community Kindness Committees: We are moving forward with piloting Community Kindness Committees in several communities, as well as one or more neighborhoods in Maine’s largest cities as a way to address isolation, separation and division. These committees will conduct activities such as mutual aid rosters; support for former inmates, shut-ins, individuals struggling with mental health issues, and others facing special challenges; book clubs; social events; student activities; and more. We aim to foster direct person-to-person support for social challenges, rather than solely relying on social service agencies and the like. We also aim to leverage the topic of kindness as a way to bring people together across differences to create the meaning that we all seek in our lives. Read more [here](#).

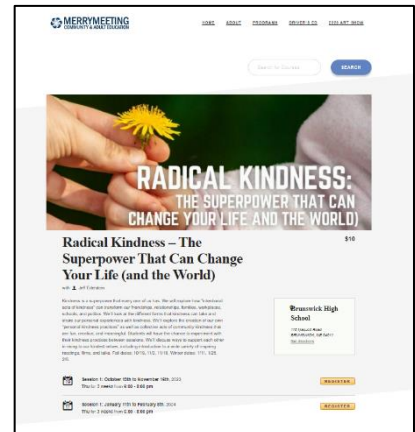
Kindness for the Holidays Workshops: We are planning a series of workshops to help people prepare for the Thanksgiving, Christmas and New Year’s holiday season, a time of year fraught with family tensions, loneliness, religious tensions, and rampant commercialism, as well as the cold and lack of sunshine of winter in Maine. Yet, it is also a season of gratitude, atonement, renewal, peace and joy. Workshop participants will have the chance to share about their struggles and aspirations for the season, and will be guided in the creation of kindness-based intentions, practices or resolutions based on participants’ individual aspirations for things like generosity, forgiveness, making amends, reconciliation, welcoming the stranger, and more. We are collaborating with the [Chaplaincy Institute of Maine](#) (ChIME) in this effort, including a joint workshop on November 11.

Kindness and Storytelling: We are pleased that Stacey Knight, a second-year ChIME student, will work with AOK Maine as an intern in 2023/2024 to create storytelling workshops in local communities and other related kindness activities. See Stacey’s Toastmasters talk on kindness [here](#).

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation Conference, October 2023: AOK Maine will be presenting a workshop at the [NCDD conference](#) in Atlanta on kindness as a tool for effective dialogue and community-building. We’re hoping to incorporate “kindness-informed” practices at the conference and to spark discussion within NCDD on the role of kindness in the field of dialogue and deliberation.

Kindness Day Bath, August 19: Check out [Kindness Day Bath](#) on August 19 from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. in downtown Bath! This will be the tenth annual Kindness Day celebration that the organizers have held in Bath!

Other activities: We are exploring longer-term activities in interfaith dialogue on kindness; workplace kindness teams; kindness in politics; and the role of kindness in restorative justice, criminal justice, policing, corrections reform and other areas of policymaking.



UPDATES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Leadership Maine Practicum Team Completes Work: From September 2022 through May 2023, a 5-person team from [Leadership Maine](#) worked with AOK Maine for their practicum requirement. In addition to valuable research, the team conducted an experiment in personalized Acts of Kindness with the full 35-person Leadership Maine cohort that showed the power of simple acts of kindness when done with heart. Their final report and slide show are [here](#). We are grateful for the hard work, creativity, and enthusiasm of the team of Andi Summers (Foundation for Portland Public Schools), Michael O'Connor (Bangor Savings Bank), Lisa Archer (New Ventures Maine), Gina Quinn-Skillings (MaineHealth), and Ethan Tremblay (Maine DEP).

Institute for Civic Leadership (ICL) Peer Consultation: In February, AOK Maine was invited to participate in a peer consultation session with the 24-person [Institute for Civic Leadership](#) (ICL) cohort. The process provided AOK Maine with valuable insights, questions and input about our challenges of a startup nonprofit, and it also helped build relationships with a number of ICL participants interested in helping advance our mission.

Partners and Collaborators: We've been meeting with many organizations in Maine whose work is aligned with kindness to explore collaboration and mutual support. Recent new connections are the [Maine Resilience Building Network](#), whose work on "[mattering](#)" is changing young people's lives; the [Right Question Institute](#) whose "[Microdemocracy](#)" program has synergy with our Community Kindness Committees; and [Spirit Corps Maine](#), bringing its innovative programming to thousands of students throughout Maine.

We continue to build our partnership with [Saint Joseph's College](#), a Sisters of Mercy-sponsored liberal arts college deeply devoted to kindness. AOK Maine founder Jeff Edelstein guest-taught two classes at "Saint Joe's" this past spring - communications and business ethics - weaving kindness into the classes. We're very excited about our growing partnership with the [Chaplaincy Institute of Maine](#) (CHIME), whose broad network of students and alumni serve throughout Maine as interfaith ministers and chaplains with a strong emphasis on "community ministry" that is in alignment with AOK Maine.

Other organizations we've been connecting with include the [Restorative Justice Institute of Maine](#), [Portland Center for Restorative Justice](#), [USM Center for Compassion](#), and nationally we are working with the [Charter for Compassion](#), which plays a pivotal role in catalyzing "[compassionate cities](#)."

Frontiers of Democracy Conference: AOK Maine played an active role at Tufts University's [Frontiers of Democracy](#) conference in July, whose theme was "Religious Pluralism and Robust Democracy in Multiracial Societies," particularly relevant to AOK Maine's use of kindness to bridge the gap between different faith communities and provide ways for people who have left organized religion to engage with each other around values of kindness, compassion and more.

In addition to conducting a session titled [Democracy: What's Kindness Got to Do With It? \(Everything\)](#), AOK Maine's Jeff Edelstein organized and facilitated a dinner with selected speakers and workshop leaders at the forefront of national interfaith activities.

