

Kindness Across Borders

██████████, kindness rarely looks dramatic. For me, it looked like walking slowly through the grocery store with newly arrived young adults from Algeria and Morocco, explaining price differences, converting grams to ounces, showing them which brands were worth the money, and translating ingredients they had never seen before. I did not start this with a plan, a program, or a school assignment. Almost three years ago, when I arrived in ██████████ through the Diversity Visa Lottery, I decided I would not allow anyone to feel lost the way I once did.

This project became part of my daily life. Sometimes I met newcomers inside Walmart. Other times, we connected inside small local Arabian and Mediterranean grocery shops where spices felt familiar, but the system still did not. I translate Arabic, French, and Berber into English. My mother focuses on welcoming the young women who arrive, comforting them, listening to their shock, and inviting them into our home for tea and conversations about how to adapt slowly. My father helps the young men with forms, basic banking, transportation, and explaining how workplaces function here. We never called this volunteering or community service. This is simply human responsibility. We remembered what it felt like to not understand things everyone else understood.

This project is ongoing. There is no set ending date. Every month there is always someone new arriving and confused by the same things. According to the United Nations, about 281 million people live outside their birth country today, facing new systems, new languages, new rules, and careers built from zero (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2023). I know that number is not just statistics. It represents real human hearts. It represents families who left everything, carrying both hope and fear. “When I see

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newly arrived families confused in the aisles, I remember exactly how we were the first month,” my mother often says. That sentence became the emotional center of this project.

Small acts started turning into big ripples. When I explained the money system, sale tags, or why one brand was cheaper or healthier, I noticed the newcomers slowly felt less embarrassed. One young Algerian man told me, “I stopped feeling stupid when someone explained things without judging.” That sentence changed me. I realized kindness is not only about helping someone physically. It is about protecting their dignity. And when someone protects your dignity, you naturally want to protect it for someone else, too.

And this did happen. Some of the North African young adults I helped during their first months are now helping others. One young man I guided last year recently contacted me to say he was taking a new Moroccan newcomer shopping and explaining everything, just like I did for him. The ripple spread not because anyone forced it, but because kindness taught us how to lift someone else instead of surviving alone.

But the ripple did not just transform the newcomers. It transformed me. It made me see my languages as tools of change. It made me see belonging as something humans create for each other. It made me understand that kindness is not a weakness — it is power. It shapes the emotional foundation people stand on. It also made me more certain about my future in nursing. I learned that healing is not only medical. Healing happens the moment someone feels understood, safe, not belittled, and not alone. Many new immigrants carry stress in their chest long before they ever step into a clinic. They carry pressure to succeed fast, pressure to adapt, pressure not to take “too long” learning English. I know that supporting emotional stability is also a form of health care.

I chose this project because I still remember the way I felt in my own first months. I remember reading forms five times and still not understanding them. I remember crying from

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frustration because every step felt like a thousand steps. I promised myself that one day, when I felt stable, I would become someone's soft landing. This project became my way of making sure no one walked those confusing aisles alone again.

“Kindness Across Borders” is not just about helping others adapt. It is redefining borders as bridges. It shows that people can carry their identity proudly while learning how to live in a new environment. It proves that compassion is universal, stronger than language differences, and stronger than fear. This project made real social change in the quietest way possible: one immigrant at a time.

Works Cited

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. International Migration 2023 Highlights, UN, 2023.

The Dot Spot

As a female who has always been taught to persevere in a male-dominated world, I have often questioned how one person can improve the lives of other women, making a ripple in our world.

When I was asked what changes I could make to our school, the first thing that came to mind was creating a period pantry. [REDACTED] attempts to fulfill our feminine product needs did not meet the standards for most girls at our school. Our options were limited to merely three dispensers throughout our [REDACTED] school. The products given to us were only meant to be "intermediate" products, to last around 2 hours. Hearing the people around me constantly upset over our situation, it inspired me to do something about it. From April 2024 to present, I have worked to earn a grant to create my organization, The Dot Spot, created four functioning pantries, partnered with Giving Hope and Help, and I am currently working with the woodworking class to build 4 more pantries.

The Dot Spot is stored in 6 lockers around the school and two cabinets where there are no lockers. Each pantry is stored adjacent to the women's bathroom, and is stocked full of feminine pads and tampons of each size. Along with this, they each have feminine wipes and a folder full of resources for students to access women's healthcare and to learn how to use the products. We have also stored take-home bags, from Giving Hope and Help, to last someone for the week or even multiple periods. The lockers are unlocked and available for anyone to use during school hours. Lockers are checked and restocked once a week by a club called Women in Leadership, which is willing to help me maintain them. Along with this, our school's post-high program contributes to restocking when they can. As for future plans, I hope to move into all of the other

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Shawnee Mission High Schools, as well as possibly North Kansas City schools. There are upcoming meetings about my program moving forward!

This organization has provided me with both a better understanding of myself and the people around me. I heard many stories of women and how inaccessible feminine products have been for most. Not only is it hard to experience it myself, but it's hard to hear the worst situations other menstruators have been through, such as having zero access to quality products their whole lives. There have been countless times when people have not been able to afford products because of the extreme prices on these necessities. Because I am the person who purchases the products for the lockers, I have a much better understanding of how much these products cost and how it makes it difficult for some families to have to choose between food and feminine pads. This experience has given me insight into others' struggles and a true reality check.

Along with how it has affected me, I have also been able to see how my project has made a ripple in our school and community. Not only has my program worked to help benefit low-income students, but it has also helped students in a rush. Lots of students seem to find themselves rushing to find a pad or tampon, and from what I've heard, The Dot Spot has been there to help them out. I've also had many community members reach out to help donate. This project has always been so fun for me to do because of the interaction I get to have with our community members. All of them have had a positive reaction, which inspired them to continue to spread to other parents and people within the Shawnee Mission School District. I believe The Dot Spot has created a connection within the community, bringing both students, teachers, and adults together.

In addition, I'd like to mention that my project has also brought awareness to the menstrual cycle. As mentioned earlier, I provide informational packets in each locker to show

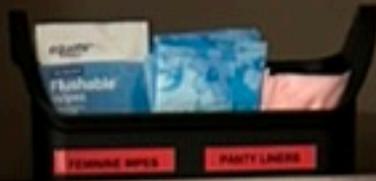
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students how to use products properly. By openly providing this information, it brings more comfort to discussing this topic with others. There should not be a stigma surrounding periods, because, like a lot of things, they are natural. At first, it was difficult to get used to talking about periods so often, but as I got more comfortable, I was able to talk about them in any social situation, prompting others to talk about them too. I've overheard multiple conversations amongst female students about how beneficial this program is, and it makes me happy to see that they aren't ashamed to talk about it. Not only have female students become more comfortable, but male students have become accustomed to it as well. At first, I saw that mostly boys were not receptive to female products in the hallways, typically tearing apart period products, but as time has passed, vandalism has dwindled, and they seem to have gotten used to it. By simply talking more about the menstrual cycle, we were able to create a more receptive community in our school. I hope that with the continuing expansion of my program, other schools will destigmatize periods as well.

Along with all of this, it has also given me some good business experience and has connected me with some truly amazing people and organizations. When working to manage my grant money, provided by the Next Great Idea (SMSD), I have learned how to search for the best deals and opportunities to buy. I have also learned how to save my money and spend wisely. Along with this, it has taught me how to properly present and market myself when partnering with others and working to get things done.

I could go on and on about the things I have learned and how this has helped others, but ultimately, I have learned how the world works. From business to personal experiences to managing money to destigmatizing periods, The Dot Spot has created a ripple in my life and in the community.

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YANA

Growing up in the teenage covid era life was very difficult. I always found myself questioning if I was good enough, and if I would be able to make it in the so-called “real world.” I often wished there was a place where I could express how I felt, and hoped I wasn’t alone in this world of confusion, stress and low self esteem. YANA: You Are Not Alone is the website I created to help teens and tweens realize they are not alone. What began as a platform for promoting body positivity has evolved into a broader movement centered on self-love, emotional support, and the reminder that no one is ever truly alone in their struggles.

The site has many tabs. One of the site’s most beloved features is the Daily Prompts tab. This section is designed to gently guide users towards daily self-affirmations. Each day the user can answer new prompts to encourage mindful self-connection. Questions like “What’s one thing you like about your body today?” or “How do you practice self-care when you’re feeling down?” create moments of reflection that foster a deeper, more loving relationship with oneself.

These prompts are simple but powerful. They remind the users that taking a moment to think kindly about themselves even if it’s just one small thing can be the beginning of loving oneself.

Another feature is some self love articles. In the Articles tab, users will find short, thoughtful paragraphs aimed at reinforcing the importance of self-kindness. These aren’t long essays or therapeutic advice ; they are more like heartfelt notes from a peer written to reassure, uplift, and validate the emotional ups and downs that come with being a teenager in the life we live in.

Topics might include learning to forgive yourself for not being perfect, navigating negative mental health days, or reminders that healing takes time. These paragraphs are intended to be relatable, and easy to read.

The Resources tab is like a toolkit for teens striving to feel better about themselves. It includes tips and tricks for self-love, such as taking breaks from social media to reduce comparison and anxiety, understanding that bodies naturally change as we grow and age, learning to set healthy boundaries and using daily affirmations and mindfulness practices. This section also highlights recommended books for young adults dealing with body image and self-esteem issues. Reading about others' experiences (even if it is in a fictional mindset) can be incredibly healing. It reminds users that their struggles are not unique, and more importantly, that they are not alone.

One of the most unique and impactful features of YANA is the Community tab. Here, users can anonymously share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences, creating a supportive environment. Whether someone is struggling with their body image, feeling overwhelmed with school or work, or just needs someone to listen, this space is open for them.

Other users can respond with advice, encouragement, and shared experiences, creating a virtual circle of compassion. Importantly, all posts are carefully moderated to ensure that only constructive, kind, and helpful feedback is shared. As the site’s creator, I take the time to

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personally check submissions and remove any negative or harmful content before it's visible to the community.

This feature helps build trust, which is essential for anyone who's sharing deeply personal thoughts. Knowing that they're safe from judgment and cruelty allows users to be honest, which is the first step toward healing.

YANA's final tab is the Flower Game, a playful and interactive tool designed to visually represent personal growth. Here's how it works: users choose a color for their virtual flower, type in a positive statement about themselves, then press submit. As they watch their flower begin to grow, they're reminded that positivity, like a plant, thrives with care, time, and intention.

This game offers a gentle metaphor for self-love. Each positive thought is like water to the flower. It's especially impactful for visual learners and younger users, as it transforms abstract concepts like affirmation and self-esteem into something they can see and interact with.

There are countless websites out there for fitness, fashion, and even therapy, but YANA stands out because of its heart-centered, accessible, and inclusive approach specifically for a teenage audience. It doesn't promise quick fixes or perfection. Instead, it encourages young adults to slow down, check in with themselves, and remember that they are enough as they are.

Whether you're looking for daily motivation, gentle advice, community support, or just a space to breathe and be yourself, YANA is a reminder that healing is possible and that self-love is not a destination, but a lifelong practice.

Everything you feel is valid. Life is hard and at times it feels like it is oneself against the world, even though that is so far from the truth. So, if you come across negative self thoughts, or questioning your self-worth and belonging, just remember YANA.



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Choose your flower's color:



Share something positive about yourself to help your flower grow! Water it as many times as you want.

I love that I...



and share your thoughts anonymously. Think of this as your private journal for exploring body image and self-acceptance.

Prompts

Search prompts...



What's one thing you appreciate about your body today?



How do you practice self-care when you're feeling down?



Share a moment when you felt truly confident.



What would you tell your younger self about body image?



How do you handle negative self-talk?



YANA - You Are Not Alone

My Story

My name is Mia, and as a high schooler, I see people struggle with their body image every day. We all have our struggles and I want everyone to know that they are not alone, and we are all beautiful in our own way.

Self-Reflection Prompts

Join Community

 ouarenotalone.com 



The Power of Giving: My Kindness Project

Twenty thousand is the number of hygiene products I have sorted. Eighteen thousand is the number of hygiene products I boxed. Six thousand is the number of hygiene donations I collected. Fifty is the number of hours I have dedicated to helping people in need in my community. But behind each of those numbers are families, children, and individuals who now have the dignity of having soap, toothpaste, toilet paper, and other hygiene basics many of us take for granted.

My kindness project is volunteering at a nonprofit called Giving the Basics. This nonprofit provides hygiene products to people who cannot afford them. For three summers, I have worked at Giving the Basics' warehouse, sorting and packaging hygiene products to be distributed across the Kansas City area. Giving the Basics supplies over 239 pantries and homeless shelters, and over 770+ schools in the Kansas City Metro Area. Beyond volunteering, I organized and ran four donation drives at my school, collecting products like body wash, feminine hygiene products, and diapers that were later distributed to schools, shelters, and families in need. It began as a small but meaningful passion project, but it quickly evolved into a project that shaped how I see kindness and service.

At first, I thought I was just helping a local nonprofit. I needed a passion project for my middle school student council. I organized my first Dignity Drive as a 13-year-old. It was something that I knew I felt was important, but I didn't fully realize the impact hygiene products could have. To me, soap is just something found in my bathroom cabinet; however, to the people we serve, these products create one less barrier for someone trying to go to school without embarrassment, apply for a job without judgment, or simply feel confident in their day-to-day life. This led me to continue hosting Dignity Drives in my school community for the next several

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years, as well as volunteering for three summers in their warehouse. This is where products are sorted and packaged for distribution to the many food pantries and schools across Kansas City.

The impact of this project has been far-reaching in my community. On the surface, the effect is the thousands of products sorted and distributed. But it goes deeper than this. The real impact is on the lives touched by these products. I have heard firsthand from teachers how access to hygiene products can change a student's attendance and self-esteem. One teacher even told me that when her students had access to deodorant and toothpaste, attendance improved, and students who had been withdrawn in class began to participate again. It reminded me that something as small as a bar of soap could impact a student's education, confidence, and even their future.

This project also goes beyond the people receiving these products. My friends and family who donated during the drives told me they had never realized the need for hygiene products. They didn't know that government assistance programs don't cover hygiene products and how not having access to these products can make life much harder. One of my classmates told me that she had never thought about what it would be like to not be able to come to school clean and how it would be hard to focus or learn if your basic needs are not met. Eventually, I even got my family and a few friends to help volunteer at community nights at Giving the Basics, where we helped sort hygiene products. The kindness spread far beyond myself; it grew through the people around me.

On a personal level, the impact has been just as big. I learned how to lead donation drives, how to reach out to my community for support, and how to persevere even when it was difficult. Most importantly, I learned the importance of compassion. Volunteering at Giving the Basics has made me more aware of struggles that often go unnoticed and has made me realize

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that dignity is something every human deserves. The lessons I have learned have changed how I approach challenges in school, leadership, and in life.

I began hosting donation drives five years ago, and began volunteering three summers ago, and every summer since, I have returned to Giving the Basics. Consistency matters to me; it shows that kindness isn't a one-time act. Kindness is about showing up again and again, even when no one is watching.

I chose this project because it connected two things that matter deeply to me, service and impact. Giving the Basics explains their mission as “providing dignity through hygiene products, so people can succeed at school, work, and in life” (Providing products for Human Dignity - Kansas City non-profit 2025). That mission inspired me because hygiene may seem small, but it represents dignity, confidence, and opportunity. By dedicating my time to this project, I knew I was helping to address a real and present need in my community.

Giving the Basics, and this project means so much to me because it has shaped the kind of person I am and want to continue to be. I want to be someone who shows kindness through their actions. Someone who notices needs and works to meet them, someone who believes that small actions can ripple into big changes. My summers at Giving the Basics have not only helped others, but they have also given me a vision of the kind of impact I want to continue making in college and throughout my life.

When I sorted and boxed soap, toothpaste, and deodorant, I was creating an impact and giving others the dignity they deserve. When I organized drives and inspired my community to give, I was creating awareness. And when I grew in leadership and compassion, I was creating an improved version of myself that I want to carry forward.

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Twenty thousand products, eighteen thousand boxes, six thousand donations, fifty hours.

Those numbers will always matter to me, but what matters even more is the unseen impact behind them. The lives touched, the dignity restored, and the kindness spread. That is why this project is my kindness project.

<https://sevendays.org/wp-content/uploads/wpforms/669-a015b4ef5ecdf8d337d92686f111d52b/my-kindness-project-1-d02032bb22dda7d4f8789b9aae653cd.mp4>

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A Helping Hand

When we think about kindness, we often picture big gestures, fundraisers, donations, or someone saving lives. But I've come to learn that sometimes, the smallest acts can have the biggest impact. For my kindness project, I started something called Project Helping Hand, a community service initiative focused on collecting and distributing basic necessities like gloves, hats, socks, and hygiene items to people experiencing homelessness in the nearby areas of Kansas City. This project became more than just a hobby for me, it became something personal, meaningful, and life-changing.

It all started when I noticed how often we walk past people living on the streets without even making eye contact. We're always in a rush, looking at our phones, or just pretending not to see them. But they're people, real people with stories, struggles, and hopes. That realization hit me hard, and I knew I wanted to do something about it. I talked to a few friends and some members of my school's Cats for Christ Club, and we came up with the idea to start collecting winter essentials for the upcoming winters, and more to come. Our goal was simple: make sure people who are homeless feel seen, supported, and warm, especially during the colder months.

We started by setting up donation bins at our school, local churches, and a few small businesses that agreed to partner with us. Every weekend, my friends and I would collect the donations, sort them into kits, or boxes, and deliver them to local shelters, or sometimes hand them out directly to people on the streets, always with an adult supervising. The first weekend, we only handed out about 10 kits. But as word spread, more people started donating, and more students wanted to help. Pretty soon, we were handing out over 100 kits a month. What began as a small idea between a few friends turned into a community effort.

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Helping people experiencing homelessness has always been something I care deeply about. One of the biggest reasons is because of someone I have read about, Ted Williams, and I am not a big fan of reading. Ted was once homeless, living on the streets and wrapped in nothing but a thin cloth. He wore the same old clothes the days I saw him, and used a trash bag full of his belongings as a pillow. But what made his story different was what happened after. Ted eventually became known as “the man with the golden voice” after a video of him went viral. He was given a second chance, but he never forgot where he came from. He used his experience to speak up for others who didn’t have a voice, and he always made sure people knew that homelessness doesn’t make you less of a person, doesn't make you hopeless, and it doesn't mean you're alone. Watching his journey inspired me. It taught me that life can change in an instant, and that anyone, even someone we know, can end up needing help.

Because of Mr. Williams, I see people on the streets differently. I don’t just see someone who’s dirty or asking for money. I see someone who’s strong, who’s been through more than most of us could imagine, and who still wakes up and keeps going. At first, only a small group of us were involved, just me and a couple friends sorting through bags of donations and doing our best to help however we could. The more people saw what we were doing, the more they wanted to join in. Even Scooter’s Coffee, a local coffee shop chain, stepped up to help by offering free hot drinks to the people we helped. I started to notice how this one small act of kindness was inspiring others. People who had never really thought about homelessness before were now asking questions, learning, and caring. That’s when I realized the power of a ripple. One act leads to another, until it becomes a wave.

One moment that really stayed with me happened while I was in New York City. I saw a woman lying on the subway platform. She looked exhausted, her clothes were dirty, and she had

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a sign asking for food. I had seen her before, digging through trash cans, searching for anything to eat or drink. That day, I had a cookie with me and gave it to her. She looked me in the eyes and said, “Thank you. You made me feel like I matter.” That sentence hit me so hard, and I’ll never forget it. It reminded me why this journey is so important. A lot of people don’t realize how serious the problem of homelessness is. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s 2024-25 report, over 653,100 people experienced homelessness on a single night in January 2024. That was a 12% increase from the year before. In my own city, shelters are often full, and more than 30% of homeless individuals have no shelter at all. They’re sleeping outside, parks, abandoned buildings, or in other unsafe structures.

These numbers aren’t just statistics. They represent real people... Parents, veterans, kids, people who don’t have a job, people with health issues, or people who just ran out of luck. And that’s why this project matters. It’s not about charity. It’s about dignity. It’s about making sure people feel seen. This project has changed me in ways I didn’t know was possible. I don’t cross the street to avoid someone holding a sign anymore. I look them in the eyes and say, “*Hi. How are you doing today?*” I’ve learned that you don’t need to have everything to give something. Even the smallest gesture, like handing someone a pair of gloves or just smiling, or saying hello can make their day. I’ve also learned that showing up for those who are alone matters. Even when the problem feels too big to fix, being present and consistent is powerful. Project Helping Hand is still ongoing, and I plan to continue it throughout the school year and beyond. I want to expand it into something even bigger, maybe one day turning it into a nonprofit that focuses not just on winter kits, but job support, hygiene, and awareness education.

“You don’t need to have everything to give something.”

— Anonymous recipient of a winter kit

This is how **we turn ripples into waves**. One helping hand at a time. Pictures below:



A Helping Hand

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On September 20, 2025, we hosted Mind Matters at our school. Even though it only lasted one day, that single day created a big change. The project was led by me and my classmates, and together we planned activities that would help spread positivity and awareness.

We set up a few tables in the main hallway and covered them with sticky notes, pens, and posters that said things like “You Matter,” “Take Care of Your Mind,” and “Keep Going.” Students were invited to write uplifting messages and stick them on our “Wall of Hope.” By the end of the day, the wall was filled with colorful notes all written by students who wanted to encourage someone else.

We also handed out cards that said “It’s okay not to be okay” with hotline numbers and our school counselor’s contact info. During the morning announcements, one of my friends read short motivational quotes to start the day off right. During advisory, we played soft music and opened the floor for anyone who wanted to share their thoughts or experiences.

I chose to do this project because I’ve seen people close to me deal with anxiety, depression, and burnout. I’ve felt it too, trying to juggle school, dance, and other responsibilities. I wanted to remind people that taking care of your mental health isn’t something to be ashamed of. Everyone deserves a safe place to express themselves. When we first started, I honestly didn’t know how people would react. But by lunchtime, students were crowding around the Wall of Hope. Some were reading messages quietly, while others were adding their own. A few even stayed longer just to write more than one note.

One student came up to me and said, “I didn’t think people cared this much until today.” That hit me hard because that was the exact reason we wanted to do this to show that people do care. Another student said, “This made me feel like it’s okay to talk about how I feel.” Hearing that made all the planning worth it.

Our school counselors and teachers were also moved by what they saw. One counselor told me, “You reminded us that kindness doesn’t just come from adults it starts with students too.” They even mentioned possibly turning Mind Matters into an annual event. That moment made me realize that even something that lasts one day can start a long-lasting change.

Later that week, we posted pictures of the Wall of Hope on our school’s Instagram page. Students from other schools commented saying they wanted to do something similar. That’s when I understood what a ripple really means one act of kindness inspiring another, spreading further than we ever thought it would. This project changed me in ways I didn’t expect. Before Mind Matters, I thought making a difference meant doing something huge. But now I know that small things a smile, a message, a listening ear can truly touch someone’s heart.

I also learned how powerful it is to speak up about mental health. During our event, students who never said much before started sharing their stories. It made me realize that everyone is carrying something, even if you can’t see it. That day reminded me that showing kindness doesn’t take much, but it can mean everything to someone who needs it.

For me personally, this experience helped me grow as a leader. It taught me how to organize, communicate, and be understanding toward others. It also made me want to keep helping people even after high school. I now hope to study psychology or education in college so I can keep raising awareness and helping young people find their voice.

Even though Mind Matters was only one day, the message still sticks with us that being kind and checking in on others can truly make a difference. Since then, I've made it a habit to ask my friends how they're really doing and remind them it's okay to take a break when things get hard. The Mind Matters project showed me that one simple act of kindness can turn into something much bigger. We didn't change the whole world, but we changed how people in our school see mental health. That's a start.

Sometimes kindness isn't about grand gestures it's about taking time to care, to listen, and to remind others that they're not alone. Even though our event only lasted one day, the kindness it sparked is still spreading. I truly believe that's how the world changes one ripple at a time.

Kindness Action Scholarship Essay

Offering a veteran a tube of toothpaste before realizing that they do not need it, because they have no teeth. Not accepting the \$5 that a disabled veteran offers after I helped carry around their 20-lb duffel bag full of toiletries, shoes, and a sleeping bag. Watching the smile spread across a veteran's face as he lifts a mirror to see his new haircut, the first one in months.

These are experiences I gathered when attending my first Stand Down, an annual event providing supplies and services to veterans in need. As a first grader, I understood that I was very fortunate to have a warm meal and a roof over my head. However, the Stand Down was my first time talking to veterans who did not have access to health care, a warm meal, or a stable place to sleep. I learned the *real* impact of service on our veterans.

At my first Stand Down, ten years ago, there were only three small bins of toiletries to serve 400 veterans. I spent hours digging through the bins, searching for the biggest bottles of soap and shampoo to give out. After that first Stand Down, I decided to use my resources to do something about the lack of supplies. So I started a toiletries collection at my elementary school. The first year hardly anyone brought in donations. But, every year the collection grew, and soon every classroom's camouflage paper-wrapped donation box was overflowing with toothpaste, bar soap, shampoo, and deodorant. Every year Prairie Elementary School brought in thousands of toiletries to be distributed at the Stand Down. As the effort grew, my family and I established [Kids4Vets](#), a non-profit that works with other charities to fulfill the Foundation's goals of education, charitable giving, and outreach.

Now-senior Grace O'Donnell's first memory of volunteering for Kids4Vets was in third grade. She remembers navigating her way through a gym floor flooded with toiletry donations

from the drive that year at Prairie. She has attended every single Kids4Vets volunteer event since then, making connections with hundreds of veterans along the way.

“[Kids4Vets] provides resources and just a hope and belief that people my age are invested and wanting to help,” Grace said. “I feel like a lot of times, it comes off that [veterans] do not need much help from us because we are the younger generation. But [Kids4Vets shows] that we can provide help, we want to listen, and we care.”

Through Kids4Vets I have also been able to share my dedication to supporting our veterans with more and more kids and other young adults. In my sixth-grade year, we loaded a group of 13 girls and 5 boys into a van to volunteer at the Stand Down. Now, more than ten years after my first Stand Down, the majority of volunteers attending Kids4Vets opportunities are still young people. Kids4Vets volunteers and I are often the only kids and young adults hauling around bags of supplies for veterans and passing out supplies.

Kids4Vets was built on this understanding. As a second grader, I wasn't thinking about collecting volunteer hours to slap on a resume or college application. I saw a need, and with the help of my parents, family, and friends, I helped to fill that need. Beyond volunteering directly for veterans, Kids4Vets also takes the time to educate young people about why it is important to support veterans. Both of my grandfathers served in the military — one in the army and one in the navy — but I never understood the sacrifices they made for our country. That is, until I went to the Stand Down. Now, Kids4Vets helps to educate young kids, typically under 7 years old, by running a booth at the annual Daniel Tiger Be My Neighbor Day with patriotic crafts.

Senior Bella Broce began volunteering with Kids4Vets just last year when our organization became a part of SHARE, my high school's volunteer organization. “When you go to volunteer [at the Stand Down] and walk with them, I still remember the names of the people

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who I walked with,” Bella said. “And I just loved talking to them and being with them because the thing is they are humans, just like the rest of us, and I think it is such a disgrace, it is so disappointing that the rest of society keeps building up this stereotype of unhoused people.”

This is why it’s important to educate young kids about the reasons for veteran homelessness and what we, as a society, can do to help. The project that started as an idea from a small bin of travel shampoos has grown to a 501c3 that has touched the lives of thousands of veterans and taught hundreds of young kids about those who have served our country. It reaches across state borders and age groups. While Kids4Vets is not going to end veteran homelessness, it has allowed my peers and me the opportunity to do our part in helping a community that has sacrificed so much for our country. A veteran will have toiletry supplies to last a few months; a young kid will ask his grandfather about his military service; one of my peers will say “thank you for your service” to a Vietnam War veteran they see in the grocery store. We will do our part in giving back to the veteran community, supporting veterans for the sake of helping people. This dedication to veterans has been, and will continue to be, an integral part of me.

Video submission: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJLxkJT1j0Y>



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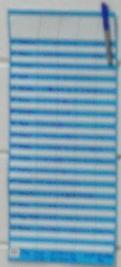
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