iMATTER: CHOICE, CHARACTER & CONVICTION IN 2016

Make "Random Acts of Kindness" Not So Random

"That best portion of a man's life are his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and love." ~William Wordsworth

Imagine a world…

Where people look out for each other.
Where we assume the best rather than the worst of each other.
Where kindness is the philosophy of life.
Where we all pay it forward.

The fact is, **YOU MATTER**, and you can make a vision like this closer to reality. Do you find yourself bogged down by all the negativity in the news? Are you frustrated by politics and the arguments that seem to ensue? Do you feel disheartened when you hear about all the pain and suffering out there? We all are. But, remember that there is a huge amount of good in this world - if we'd just take the time to notice it, share it, spread it, do more of it - things might change. **WHAT YOU DO MATTERS**. For all the negativity weighing our society down, imagine that kindness is the anecdote. And you have the CHOICE to distribute that anecdote to someone, a few people, or even throughout your entire community, with this year's 4-H conference project, "Make 'Random Acts of Kindness' Not So Random."

First things first…**what is a random act of kindness**? Simply put, it is a selfless action meant to cheer up or assist others. It could be as simple as letting someone go first while in line, raking your elderly neighbor's leaves, or sending a thoughtful note to thank someone who has made a difference in your life or your community. Often when people think of random acts of kindness, it involves some type of monetary contribution – paying for a coffee for the stranger behind you in line, buying a gift card & distributing it to a homeless person, making a donation of some sort, etc. These work, but there are also numerous ways to make a difference in the lives of others even if you don't have the finances. No matter your age, and with just a bit of creative thought and CONVICTION, you might turn someone's day around, you might turn 100 people's days around, or you might even change a life. You just never know.

"Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle."

So, **<u>your mission</u>** with "Make 'Random Acts of Kindness' Not So Random" is to do just that – plan and then implement a project that specifically results in random acts of kindness. Your project might just involve you implementing the idea, or it might involve you organizing a team of volunteers that you solicit. It might impact a few people, or it might impact a whole community. Ultimately, this project is what you make of it, and its impact will be determined by what and how much *you* put into it. Here are some sample projects to get you thinking:

- **Everyday Superhero's** - People all around us are putting their own "superpowers" to work to help their community, but many of their efforts go unnoticed or unappreciated. Solicit volunteers to create cards depicting someone who is doing awesome work in your community as a superhero. From teachers to firefighters to homeless shelter workers, show how their everyday superpowers make the world better. Include an inspirational message of gratitude. Sharing your card with that person, and other people in your community, will celebrate these super humans and show appreciation for their work.
- **Scrub-a-Dub Dogs** - About 7.6 million pets enter animal shelters every year, needing specific supplies to stay happy and healthy. Organize a dog wash, but instead of charging their owners, ask them to donate pet supplies for your local animal shelter. (Contact a shelter ahead of time to find out what specific items they are in need of. Shelters typically need supplies like blankets, towels, toys and unopened pet food.)
- **Petals with Purpose** - Collect recycled bottles, decorate them, and fill them with flowers (i.e., picked from your garden, or solicit donated leftovers from local florists and groceries) to be donated to local Senior Centers or other places where they might brighten someone's day. Each bouquet can also include a handmade card attached with an inspirational message.
- **Positively Positive** - Initiate a change in your school culture by organizing a club or committee of students to implement positive events and surprises, big or small. For example: Students from chorus show up in the lunch line and present the cafeteria workers with flowers while serenading them in thanks for their hard and often unappreciated work. Leave a basket of treats for the janitors that clean the school at night. Leave inspirational quotes in student lockers on a highly anxious day of state testing. Plan positive school events (i.e., "Buddy Up Against Bullying 5K" or a dance promoting an important cause.) The possibilities for making someone's day at school are endless!
- **Meaghan's Human Heaters Project** - Christy and Gary Gerringer started the Human Heaters Warming Hearts program in Alamance County, NC in honor of their daughter, Meaghan (a 4-H'er herself), who died in December, 2014 at the age of 17. They tie scarves, hats and gloves on light poles, benches, and bus stops. Each set of items comes with a tag that reads: "I AM NOT LOST! If you are cold, please take this [scarf, hat, gloves] to keep warm. Peace, Meaghan's Human Heaters." They do this to pay forward Meaghan's devotion to service that she exhibited in her life. Read more about this incredible project here. Is there someone you might like to honor with your project also? Think about it!

"If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else." ~Booker T. Washington

STEPS TO TAKE:

1. **Brainstorm ideas**. Who in or what area of your community could use a kindness infusion? What issues do you care about? What are some ways that you can make someone's day? And whose day really deserves to be made? Do you want to work alone, or do you want to solicit others to help you? Do you care about impacting just one person, a few people, or lots and lots of people?

2. **<u>Come up with a project idea.</u>** Decide what you want to do and how you are going to do it. The only requirement…someone's life must be touched by kindness after your project is done. Your final Random Acts of Kindness project can be simple. It might just be you doing something nice for just your local fire department. Or, it might be you and a team of friends, schoolmates, and/or community members who all get together and do something that makes 100 people smile. Consider:
   - **WHAT & WHERE?** Give your project a working title and summarize what you will do and how you will pull it off. Will you need supplies, space, some kind of help, assistance, or even permission to pull this off?
   - **WHO?** Will this be just you, or do you need a team (small or large) to get the project done? Will you need to partner with an organization, non-profit, church, etc.? What kind of assistance will you need from others, if any, to be successful? You can also combine forces with other 4-H'ers and work together on a project idea if you like!
   - **WHEN?** Your project might be a one hour thing, a one day thing, or it might take place over a longer period of time. When it happens and how long it takes is, again, totally your CHOICE.
   - **HOW?** Step by step, how will you (and perhaps your helpers, partners, etc.) pull this off?

3. **<u>Implement your project.</u>** After you've figured out all of that, DO IT! And as you brainstorm and finalize your project idea, keep this step in mind. Better to plan a simple project, where it's just you helping just one person, than to plan some huge monster project that doesn't actually get implemented. (Ugh. Who is soooooo over "action plans" that never end up with any ACTION???) Remember, this project is what you make of it.

   And we are going to hold you accountable, only because YOU MATTER and we want folks experiencing all the kindness from your implemented projects! **Thus, part of your commitment when attending this summer's conference will be one of the following:**

   a. If you haven't yet implemented your "Random Acts of Kindness" project before the conference, you must at least have your idea in mind and be prepared to present what your idea is to a small group of fellow 4-H'ers from across the state. They will offer feedback and suggestions to help you be successful when you return home and actually implement the project.

   OR…

   b. If you have already implemented your project, be prepared to share it with a small group of conference attendees. You'll want to summarize what your project was, how it went, how it impacted others, and what it meant to you. **(Please bring pictures to share!!!)**

Soooo...what are you waiting on? Start thinking and planning, and have fun! We can't wait to hear all about it June 13-15, 2016!

They may forget your name, but they will never forget how you made them feel. ~Maya Angelou