

Kindness Matters

When it comes to changing the world with positivity, Carlsbad leads the way.

Written by Lois Swagerty



Members of Kids for Peace pose in front of the Kindness Matters sign at the Strawberry Fields (photo by Tanya Perez).

Driving north on 1-5 through Carlsbad, it's impossible to miss the colossal, colorful sign at the Strawberry Fields that proclaims KINDNESS MATTERS. It's a fitting motto for a city that's become known as The Kindness Capital of the World.

KINDNESS CAPITAL

The kindness movement began 18 years ago with a small group gathered in the backyard of Jill McManigal, co-founder and executive director of Kids for Peace. Inspired by Ghandi's words, "If we are to achieve lasting peace, we must begin with the children," McManigal and high school student Danielle Gram brought a dozen caring kids together to do something positive and created the first chapter of Kids for Peace.

Pooling their ideas, the kids created a "Peace Pledge" and got to work serving their community, caring for the environment and making friends around the world. Local schools saw the impact and asked for help with addressing bullying. McManigal believed that focusing on kindness was the best way to accomplish that goal and The Great Kindness Challenge was born.

"We challenged students to do as many acts of kindness

as possible in one week using a checklist we provided," says McManigal. "It allowed every student to help create a culture of compassion in their school." From there, Kids for Peace chapters grew from three schools—Jefferson, Hope and Kelly—to more than 41,000 schools with 20 million students in 115 countries around the world today. McManigal says, "We're proud that it all started right here in our beautiful city. Carlsbad has put kindness on the map."

KINDNESS CULTURE

"The Carlsbad community has been great at supporting our kids," says McManigal. "Early on we got financial assistance from the Carlsbad Charitable Foundation, and the Carlsbad Unified School District helped spread the word to hundreds more districts nationwide. With the science of kindness gaining recognition and the proven effectiveness of our program, the California Department of Education now promotes The Great Kindness Challenge to every public school in California."

Kids for Peace also partnered with the Carlsbad Chamber of Commerce to launch the Kindness-Certified Company program, with more than 100 local businesses joining in. These companies lead the way in being good to their employees, community, country and planet.



Students celebrated World Kindness Day at the fields (photo by Tanya Perez).



The epic Kindness Matters sign was created by Kids for Peace along with the Carlsbad Unified School District. Students from Carlsbad High and Aviara Oaks Middle School designed and cut out the 8-foot and 5-foot-high letters, and each CUSD school decorated one letter at a community-wide painting party. The landmark was welcomed by Jimmy Ukegawa, owner of Carlsbad Strawberry Company, who agreed to display it on his property.

KINDNESS CHALLENGE

This year's 14th annual Great Kindness Challenge kicks off on January 25 from 11 a.m.–2 p.m. at Carlsbad High School with a Kindness Move-a-thon. "Our theme this year is 'Kindness Moves,'" says McManigal. "Our presenting sponsor is Jazzercise, a local women-run business with a heart for kindness, compassion, community and kids, promoting healthy living and positivity."

All of Carlsbad is welcome to attend the Move-a-thon which will include dances led by Jazzercise instructors; kindness stations for painting kindness rocks, writing thank-you letters to first responders, making recycled dog toys for local shelters and other activities and a giant pep rally with music and dance performances from each elementary school. Most visible of all, schools will decorate a designated police car, fire truck or trash truck that will drive around Carlsbad and share the kindness message for the whole week of January 27–31.

The entire Carlsbad community is invited to participate in this "Kindness Takeover" by decorating their vehicles with positive messages, displaying kindness signs in business windows, school fences and marquee and performing thoughtful acts of kindness.

KINDNESS MATTERS

"Kindness has the power to bring people of all ages, backgrounds and beliefs together," says McManigal. "It transcends all differences, unifies communities and is a universal value we can all agree upon. We invite everyone in Carlsbad to embrace it. Let's all come together and show the world that kindness matters."

As Mr. Rogers said, "There are three ways to ultimate success. The first way is to be kind. The second way is to be kind. The third way is to be kind." And by that measurement, Carlsbad is leading the way to success.

KINDNESS MATTERS

#GreatKindnessChallenge
 TheGreatKindnessChallenge.org
 KidsForPeaceGlobal.org
 KindnessCertified.org

SAMPLE ACTS OF KINDNESS IDEAS

- Smile at 25 people
- Cheer for every player on both teams
- Take a treat to your local firefighters
- Create a family gratitude jar
- Read a book to a younger child
- Share food with someone who is hungry
- Do a household chore without being asked
- Cut out 10 hearts and leave them on 10 cars
- Donate something to an animal shelter
- Entertain someone with a happy dance



a) Principals and students from Carlsbad Unified School District celebrated The 2024 Great Kindness Challenge with members of the City Council (photo courtesy of Kids for Peace). b) Kids for Peace youth display the Peace Pledge at Holiday Park (photo by Samantha Gleaton).

