THE POWER OF CONNECTING THROUGH KINDNESS

By Pam Lewis

"Kindness is the connection that links us all together and strengthens the bonds within our communities, neighborhoods and families." - Rosalynn Carter

In mid-November we celebrated our annual Compassion Week with many of you, following the theme **"The Nurtured Community: Well-being Through Connecting."** More than 500 people participated, some reporting that the ability to connect with other compassion enthusiasts was most meaningful.

And then, about 7 days ago, we celebrated the completion of our Fall 2023 **Project Kindness**, where senior volunteer mentors are paired for 10 weeks with freshman Honors College students from Houston Community College. The intergenerational pairs explore kindness at the same time they are getting to know each other. Despite their differences beyond simply age, the pairs tend to bond strongly and cherish their relationships. Many maintain contact long after the project ends.

While most of us know that social connection benefits us individually and societally in innumerable ways, we may not equally appreciate that neglecting our need to connect puts our health and well-being at risk.

Most of us also know that the power and benefits of kindness are broad, deep and contagious. How might these two, connection and kindness, reinforce each other to create stronger relationships and bonds?

We asked our Project Kindness students:
- *"What do you think it is about the emphasis on kindness that allows you pairs to get to know each other with such warmth and depth in just 10 weeks?"*

They responded:
- *"Starting out with kindness as a foundation means that it is easier to be open to each other and to trust than it is in other new relationships, especially those with people very different from ourselves."*

Well, **what do you know**, research supports these 19- year-olds' brilliance! When kindness is the norm in an interaction, one is more likely to feel trust and acceptance, become interested in the other, and want to listen/learn more.

These are findings we will explore more as we expand future Project Kindness applications. Consider trying this over the holidays yourself by asking family and friends "What is the kindest thing that happened for you today?"

Pam