

PHASE I COMPASSION WEEK PROJECT, 2015

In Winter 2014, Pam Lewis, Ph.D., completed Rev. Betty Adams' first Cultivating Compassion Training (CCT) course. Betty challenged her graduating class members to create Compassion Week projects for Compassionate Houston's annual event the next April (2015), using new insights.

Pam quickly experienced compassion's creative and purposeful inspiration and an overwhelming sense of agency with Betty's challenge. She designed a structured interview format to be used as a tool to mindfully explore respondents' lifetime memories of kindness/compassion. She recruited residents from a senior living facility (respondents) to be paired with a volunteer (interviewers) from the membership of Insight Meditation Houston (IMH), a partner of Compassionate Houston, for these conversations.

“Project Kindness” was born!

PROJECT OBJECTIVES:

The Insight Meditation Houston (IMH) interviewers offered opportunities through the structured interview format for respondents to recall and describe in detail significant lifetime memories of giving and receiving kindness/compassion.

Expectations:

*** Interviewing volunteers would more deeply cultivate their own compassion through compassionate listening, witnessing and presence.

*** Senior residents/respondents would benefit from increased well-being by recalling significant experiences of feeling deeply cared for and/or offering kindness and compassion to another.



PREPARATION & FOLLOWUP:

- 1) Interview guidelines in verbal and written form were provided to IMH volunteers (n=10).
- 2) Senior living residents who volunteered for the project (n=10) were informed that their memories/experiences were sought as part of Houston's Compassion Week to increase understanding of how compassion had manifested in their lives and to find if they benefit from the recall experience.
- 3) One-time individual interviews took place in person during Compassion Week (April) 2015.
- 4) Simple descriptive data was gathered, and residents gave and received feedback on results of the surveys in a one-time feedback meeting.

METHODS:

Respondents were asked for responses to one or both of the following questions:

1) What is the kindest thing another person ever did for you?

2) What is the kindest thing you ever did for another?

SUMMARY OF RESULTS:

- Average time passed since kindest act received occurred: 40 years;
- Range of time passed since the kindest act was received; 3 to 65 years;
- The average age of respondent 89 (Gender: All-female);
- Context/Nature of Kindness: Unexpected help received at a time of great loss or need (most)

IN-PERSON GROUP FOLLOW-UP SESSION/COMMENTS BY RESIDENTS:

"I appreciated again what had been given to me; It is good to recall feeling both useful and grateful; My own children benefit from hearing about this; This jogged my memory and made me remember other kind acts too."

— Participant 2015

— Participant 2015

PHASE II: HCC HONORS COLLEGE SE, SERVICE LEARNING, FALL 2020

In late Summer 2020, Toni Holland, Ph.D., Director of Houston Community College (HCC) Southeast Honors College, contacted Pam about possible virtual alternatives for her students' 20 hours service-learning requirement during the pandemic. (The service-learning requirement is a component of leadership development taught by Dr. Holland. The focus is on developing emotional intelligence skills.) A modified version of Project Kindness seemed ideal.

Pam and Toni worked in collaboration with the same senior living facility to organize the project. HCC students were paired virtually with seniors residing in that facility, this time under quarantine conditions of the pandemic.

OBJECTIVES/METHODS:

HCC Honors students from the SE campus provided 20 hours of community service virtually through Project Kindness during the Fall 2020 semester. Training of the students included roleplaying interviews (being interviewed themselves) and learning about the science of kindness. Students were paired with seniors and asked them to share cherished memories of kindness received or given. Many students sent follow-up cards thanking seniors for sharing their stories.

For students and their matched seniors who could not schedule the full 20 hours, students were given a website that provided a list of random acts of kindness that they could select for any hours under the 20 required for service learning. It became apparent that kindness is yet one more way to develop resilience at challenging moments.

VIRTUAL GROUP FOLLOW-UP SESSION/COMMENTS:

At the end of the semester, a group celebration of all participants took place via Zoom. All seemed to have benefitted from the experience, and many of the pairs bonded in such a way that they stated their relationship will continue far after the semester. One student claimed it has been the highlight of her experience in college.

One senior commented that she had such an inspired new view of youth as a result of her experience that she had reassured her friends that *"there is no need to worry about the future of our society"*.

PHASE III: HCC Honors Colleges SE and NE, Service Learning, Fall 2021

In late August 2021, additional HCC Honors College Directors expressed interest in having students paired with senior partners for Project Kindness service learning.

Although a larger number of seniors was requested, a total of 23 community- and facility-living seniors, age 65 and older, were recruited over 3-4 weeks from organizations such as adult Sunday Schools programs, a senior living facility, affinity group for mindful aging and friends of Compassionate Houston.

OBJECTIVES/METHODS:

A research component was added by HCC psychology faculty, approved through HCC Institutional Review Board Application and Compassionate Houston's Board of Directors. The research component applied to about ½ of the 20 student/senior partner pairs. For research pairs, informed consent of all participants, pre and post surveys and other measures were applied. The purposes or objectives for research were

1. "To understand the relationship between intergenerational kindness on well-being and intergenerational understanding among community college students" and
2. "To understand the relationship between intergeneration kindness on well-being and intergenerational understanding among senior citizens."

HCC Honors students, whether involved in research or not, received training in interviewing and the basic benefits of kindness. They conducted some 10 meetings with senior partners to explore kindness.

VIRTUAL GROUP FOLLOW-UP/SENIOR COMMENTS:

Research pairs were invited to a Zoom celebration, and comments on the Project were solicited and recorded. This recording will be added here when available.

Senior partner's feedback was solicited via email, and from those responding, was entirely positive. Suggestions for improving the Project and confirmation of willingness to participate again were received. 100% of seniors responding will participate again.

PHASE IV: HCC Honors Colleges SE and NE, Service Learning, Fall 2022

In weekly meetings over several months, volunteer mentors aged 65+ and HCC Honors students shared their memories of kindness given, witnessed, or received, helping students understand the gift that kindness represents.

At the conclusion of Project Kindness 2022, participants came together at HCC on November 15 for a chance to create KindCards to pass on as a tangible example of the ripple effects of kindness.

Enjoy a collection of photos taken from paired mentors with their students, and all participants listening to Sneha Bhavsar introducing KindCards, an initiative she founded in 2020, engaging youth in promoting compassion by distributing postcards with original art and messages of kindness to neighborhood residents.

PROJECT KINDNESS CELEBRATION WITH KINDCARD INITIATIVE NOVEMBER 2022



PROJECT KINDNESS CONTINUES IN 2023

Are you 65+ and interested in mentoring a student over 12-15 weekly meetings? [Email us here](#), and we will reach out to you with details.

Thank you for considering exploring inter-generational kindness.

KindCards created by Project Kindness 2022 participants



"Be the kindness the world needs."

Pam Lewis, PhD President Compassionate Houston