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It's all about kindness

by Emily Olsen — 07/21/2022 Reading Time: 5 mins read

EPHRAIM—A grassroots project that started small about nine months ago but has grown to encompass distribution of more than 400 signs and the two murals painted by local volunteers.



Linda Christiansen puts up some of her "kindness" signs at the south entrance of Manti on U.S.89.

Little did Linda Christiansen know, but Sanpete Kindness would fulfill a large need in the county and beyond.

Christiansen is not a therapist but simply hopes her signs to provide a pick-me-up for anyone who may be going through self-doubt or emotional pain.

"People call Sanpete Kindness a suicide prevention service, but I don't know how to prevent suicide," she said. "If only one person who, because of my signs, thinks twice about hurting themselves, then that's all I ask for."



Juliana Hutchins Ash (left), puts finishing touches on "kindness mural" at the Ephraim Park at 300 N. 200 E. After painting murals in Arizona for many years, she recently moved to Ephraim, and became part of the kindness program. Helping her paint butterflies are (L-R): Kaci Mitchell, Eva Johnson, Jetta Bender, Ana Brazell, Matt Duncan, Jaxon Duncan, and (above the sign) Thomas Duncan. From a children's song, the mural reads: "I want to be kind to everyone, for that is right you see, so I say to myself, kindness begins with me."

Kade, Christiansen's son who died at 21, was the impetus for her starting her organization, which is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. When he died from suicide in April 2021, someone came up with the hashtag *#kindlikekade*.

"I want Kade to be the reason, the spark, for why we did it," she said, but she clarified that Sanpete Kindness is not just about Kade. "Everyone is important," she said.

Kade had experienced struggles throughout his life, and Christiansen and her husband, McCrae, had done everything they could think of to help him.

At school, he had an IEP, or individualized education plan, which is given to students who need special help. For five years, she and her husband drove him to Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City every week for specialized therapy.

In 2019, volunteers in Sevier County started what they called the Encouragement Project. They created two-sided signs with messages of encouragement. By sending an email, a resident could request a sign for his or her yard, and a volunteer would deliver it.

Soon after Christiansen's son's death, a co-worker approached her about doing something similar in Sanpete County.

"I wasn't sure if I was the right person to do it," she said. But six months after Kade's death, she asked for time at a Sanpete County Commission meeting to explain what she initially called the "Be the Light" project. (She later changed the name of the project to "Sanpete Kindness.")

She told commissioners she wanted to create signs and art work containing positive messages and asked for permission to post some of the signs in the county courthouse. The commission approved the request. Her husband also supported the plan. "He knew that I need to start a project to help others."

Christiansen started working with Mike Barton at I-Four Media in Ephraim to design signs with slogans that she comes up with. She pays a little more for double-sided signs that are waterproof so they will last longer.

The co-worker who originally suggested the project to Christiansen encouraged her to focus on Manti, but from the get-go, she wanted her organization to cover all of Sanpete County.

Christiansen has received approval from almost every city in Sanpete to post signs with encouraging slogans, such as, "It's going to be a great day," "Keep your chin up," and "You can do this."

She plans to rotate the signs from community to community so the slogans can stay fresh.

Her brother, who lives in West Jordan, posted a kindness sign in his yard. When his children had a lemonade stand one day, some people came by saying they didn't want any lemonade but simply wanted to thank the family for posing the sign.

While getting Sanpete Kindness rolling, Christiansen also put her hat in the ring to be the next county clerk. The present county clerk, Sandy Neill, is retiring and not running for re-election.

Christiansen has worked in the Sanpete County Building Department for 26 years but feels that now is the right time to make a change.

"I have so many best friends in the courthouse," she said. "It was a really hard decision. I know my job like the back of my hand, but I need to grow, and I need to learn new things."

Christiansen, a Republican who is running unopposed, is taking a series of 10 courses through the

Lieutenant Governor's Office that will provide the certifications she needs to be the county clerk. She will complete them by mid-January of next year.

Her experience in the Building Department will benefit her as county clerk, she says. "Every voter in this county is identified by their address," she said, and at the Building Department, part of her job has been to assign county addresses to new properties.

Sanpete Kindness has come a long way in just a few months.

The organization has hosted a softball tournament to raise funds. The first kindness mural was painted in Spring City near the location and a second is being completed at the Ephraim Sports Park with an unveiling party scheduled at the park on Saturday, July 30, at 10 a.m. All are welcome.
