

Creating Your Kindness Group

At times you may sense a feeling of 'aloneness' when you think about the kind acts you have performed in your promotion of kindness. You go out and become a shining example of kindness, and because of a lack of contact with other people performing kind acts, you wonder if you are the only one trying to 'make a difference'. At times this sense of isolation can be discouraging, and your zeal may waver.

To achieve the greatest impact in your kindness crusade, and gain the most satisfaction from your kind acts, the formation of a Kindness Group is highly recommended. Meeting with like minded souls will not only keep your enthusiasm high, it gives you a platform from which you can develop skills to enrich your life still further.

Forming your group

The formation of a group requires two ingredients: people enthusiastic about kindness, and a meeting place. Where do you find people enthusiastic about kindness? From friends and acquaintances, and possibly even strangers. There may be occasions (for example, at a party, a conference, and so on) when you make contact with a person who expresses more than a passing interest in kindness when you discuss it. These are the people who will be interested in joining your Kindness Group. There may be interested people at your workplace, at your sporting activity, at your church, and so on. Another source for members for your Group is advertising by way of notices. These can be posted at the supermarket, community centre, any notice boards in your area, the school, church, shop windows, etc. When talking about a meeting to prospective members of the group, mention it as a short, informal discussion. People are more inclined to attend a short meeting, so you need to keep the first meeting to no longer than two hours. Also make it clear that you have no affiliation with political or religious organisations (and that you're not going to sell Tupperware or similar, at the meeting!).

Where will you meet?

The meeting place will usually be your home (we do not recommend that women invite male strangers into their homes), but sometimes this may not be convenient. If this is the case, investigate where a small room can be hired for two hours at a reasonable cost. Try the local council, they normally have rooms at the council chambers, as well as at community centres. Churches sometimes hire out a space, check if there is a local Scout Hall, try the Leagues Club, there are always a number of areas available. Non profit associations are normally given a discount. Approach the booking officer personally, tell your story, and ask if you can have the room 'no charge' as an act of kindness.

Planning your first meeting

The first meeting should be planned carefully to ensure it is a success (even if you have only one other person). Everyone should leave with the feeling that something has been achieved,

that there are clear directives on what needs to be done, and everyone is looking forward to the next meeting.

Ritual and story telling once played an important role in our culture, but with the rapid pace of modern living it seems there is little time left for such things (we acknowledge there are daily rituals we all go through, but in this instance we are talking about those of symbolic significance). This is sad because ritual and story telling can bring richness into our lives. If you can incorporate these in your Kindness Group activities, you can use them to good effect.

Let us suppose you have found one or more people interested in coming to your first meeting. The day has come, and you've prepared some finger food (fruit is one choice - watermelon, rock melon, grapes. Or cheese and biscuits, or chocolate biscuits, and so on. For something to drink, mineral/spring water and fruit juice, and/or tea/coffee). You may like to have stick-on name tags for each member at the first meeting. Also prepare a simple agenda. Be clear about your objectives. What do you wish to achieve? You can simply talk about acts of kindness and read examples from the many books available. Or you may choose to agree on selecting certain acts of kindness the group can carry out, such as: smiling and nodding at passers by; paying compliments; sending a card or letter to a friend or relative you haven't been in contact with for some time, and similar acts. At subsequent meetings you could decide to organise your own little community project, such as: visiting a retirement centre once a month and taking magazines, flowers, and other small gifts; visiting a children's ward at a hospital and taking toys; making the toys to take to the children in hospital; dropping coins in a children's playground, and so on. You may like to take up the cause for an underprivileged group in your area with the local, state, or federal government. Even though a task may appear difficult, you will find people sympathetic to your cause. Bear in mind that the whole point of the exercise is not just to do something nice for someone else, but to enjoy doing it! If you don't enjoy it, you're not being kind to yourself, and that is the first principle in practicing acts of kindness - it has to be a 'feel good' experience for all concerned.

Your first meeting

The first meeting is a 'getting to know you' affair, so it should be simple and brief. Have a clock prominently on display, and about 15 minutes before the meeting is due to end, bring to the attention of the group how much time remains. Keep the conversation focussed on what you have chosen to achieve i.e., keep to your agenda. At subsequent gatherings you may wish to introduce a little ritual in the form of having a candle burning on the floor or on a small table in the middle of the floor, and sit the group in a circle around the candle. You may even choose to carry out a short meditation, but make sure all members of the group feel comfortable about such things. One of the group should take notes. Someone will usually volunteer to do this, but make sure their writing is legible, unless they agree to type up their notes. Have a pad on hand with something that will give a solid backing, so as to make writing easier. Record all members present, their addresses and telephone numbers.

The first meeting will generally consist of getting to know one another; sharing some acts of kindnesses that members have been involved in; agreeing to carry out some simple acts of kindness, and defining what these might be; exchanging names and phone numbers; and

agreeing on the date of the next meeting, and its location.

You may like to consider the following in your discussions. (a) What does the group want to do? Are the acts of kindness to be restricted to family and friends, or do they include the community? Are the acts of kindness to be anonymous? If the group wishes to be more adventurous, they may like to start a community project. If so, the following could be considered. Does the community have any specific needs not being met? Write down all the suggestions about the acts of kindness mentioned. If they are too general, try to be more specific. (b) The next step is, what action do you need to take to achieve what you talked about in (a)? Do any 'specialists' need to be seconded to your group? Do you need to approach any establishments for donations of funds or goods? Do you need to work in with any other group, e.g. the local council, Apex, etc? (c) When will you do this? (d) Which one of you will approach the media with your plans, so that you can gain publicity for your venture/s?

For your first meeting, the agenda might read: 1. Everyone introduces themselves 2. Have a snack 3. Sit them down and ask them to give their idea of what they would like to do (write ideas down). Some people are reticent by nature. If you have one in your group, gently prompt them by asking if they would like to add something to what has been said. 4. Decide 'what'. Briefly summarise each suggestion and decide on a short list if there have been a number of suggestions. 5. Decide 'how'. Discuss how you will carry out your act/s. For simple acts, this will not be necessary, but at a subsequent meeting you may decide to organise a small community kind act, where the following will need to be discussed – (a) What materials, objects, services, actions are required? (b) If you need more information, or if other people need to be involved, select which one of you will do this. (c) Decide 'when'. (d) Decide 'where'. Will you need to find a space to carry out your act of kindness? A room, parking lot, footpath? Delegate someone to investigate. (e) Decide if you wish to involve the media. If so, choose someone to liaise with the media. 6. Decide the date and time of your next meeting. 7. Close the meeting and have some tea or coffee. If you don't want people to stay too long, make it clear at the start of the meeting that there is a definite finish time for the meeting. If the meeting is to run for two hours, it will need to be run efficiently. With a strong chairperson, matters should be resolved relatively quickly, and everyone should have a clear understanding of what is to be done. Allow for a little more time for the second meeting, as people will recount their acts of kindness carried out since the last meeting.

You might also choose to place a small ad in the local paper, or post notices in the area, about your group and/or your project. You might canvass local business for support. Being involved in a community project means you will be meeting new people. This will not only increase your circle of friends, it could mean hearing about other and better job prospects.

The group would need to keep in regular contact with each other, to ensure that everyone is kept informed of what is going on, and to share bright ideas and so on.

You may also wish to read one or two examples from one of the many books that are available with kind stories. Such stories will help to keep the group motivated.

After you have held two or three meetings you may like to invite a representative from your local

community service groups, such as Apex, Lions, Rotary, CWA, etc. It is good to keep in touch with these people as they have had considerable experience organising community programs.

You will find that working with a group will enhance your enthusiasm and feelings of fulfilment. You will gain some lovely new friends, and you will effectively raise the level of kindness in your community. As Irving Berlin wrote in the lyrics of I've got Rhythm, "Who could ask for anything more?"