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Contact:
Robert Martin
Director of Communications
800-25-PEACE, ext. 7797
Robert.martin@kidspeace.org

KidsPeace Youth, Nursing Home Residents Connect Amid COVID-19 Lockdowns

Handmade cards carry simple message: “You Are NOT Alone!”

OREFIELD, PA (July 2, 2020) - Loneliness has proved to be a “side effect” of our society’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether you’re an elderly resident of a nursing home, or a young person being treated in a residential mental health facility, the coronavirus lockdown has had the same effect – separating you from your family.

Youth in KidsPeace’s residential treatment programs in Pennsylvania recognized this shared experience, and reached out to those in area nursing homes to let them know “*You are NOT alone!*”

Stephanie Kerns, director of recreational therapies and enrichment services for residential programs at KidsPeace’s Orchard Hills Campus, says the idea came as residents were finishing the “*Relationships and Communication*” portion of their Community Living curriculum.

“We received a request for our clients to make greeting cards for individuals in local nursing homes. Our clinicians presented the idea as a way to discuss the significance of bolstering relationships with individuals in our communities,” Kerns noted. “Our youth jumped right on board with the idea and really made this project their own.”

Many of the KidsPeace clients made multiple handmade cards, including positive and upbeat messages of hope and inspiration for the nursing home residents. “Some of them even wrote silly jokes in order to give the recipient a little chuckle,” she recalls.

“Our kiddos felt as though they could genuinely relate to individuals in nursing homes because neither group has been able to visit with their families in person due to COVID-19,” Kerns said. “This is something many of our own residents have struggled with, but they felt some solace knowing they were not alone, and they tried to share that message through the cards - writing things like “*We are in this together*” and “*You are never alone!*””

In total KidsPeace clients created 80 cards that were sent to Country Meadows and Cedarbrook, two nursing homes in the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania. Country Meadows’ Director of Dynamic Living Wendy Balik confirmed the cards were a big hit among their residents. “Our folks loved them; they read them out loud to each other,” she said. “They were really touched by the messages, especially coming from children, and they did recognize they share with the KidsPeace kids the experience of being away from family.”

(more)

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Kerns said while the cards may have helped brighten the recipients' day, their impact was equally important on the kids – and on the staff caring for them:

"We were blown away by the compassion the kids showed for the nursing home residents. I think the most impressive component of this entire activity was seeing how many of our youth felt compelled to participate while expecting nothing in return for doing so... (just) hoping that when the residents read these messages, they would feel just a little more hopeful, a little less lonely, and a whole lot more special."

You can hear more about the greeting cards project from Stephanie Kerns on the "Cards CONNECTING Humanity" episode of the Conversations with KidsPeace podcast series, available at kidspeace.org or wherever you get your podcasts.

Since 1882, KidsPeace has been building on its expertise to give hope, help and healing to children, adults and those who love them. Through its comprehensive range of residential treatment programs; accredited educational services; unique psychiatric hospital and foster care and community-based programs, KidsPeace is dedicated to helping people connect, transform and overcome their challenges to ensure a stable future, transition to adulthood and gain independence. Since its doors opened, nearly 300,000 children have participated in one of the multitude of programs KidsPeace offers.

For additional resources or more information on how to get involved, become a foster parent or make a donation, please visit www.kidspeace.org. Follow us at www.facebook.com/kidspeace.org or on Twitter @KidsPeace.

Attached: Pictures of cards of encouragement made by children in KidsPeace's residential treatment program and sent to area nursing homes in the Lehigh Valley.



