

Spreading a Little Kindness

by Rhonda Frevert, Burlington (Iowa) Public Library

Inspired by a youth program at the nearby Keokuk Public Library, a staff team at the Burlington Public Library developed a plan for an all-ages Kindness Club set to start in March 2020. The pandemic forced a decision just days ahead of the kickoff event. Opting not to cancel, they quickly adapted and went virtual by creating a Facebook group for participants.

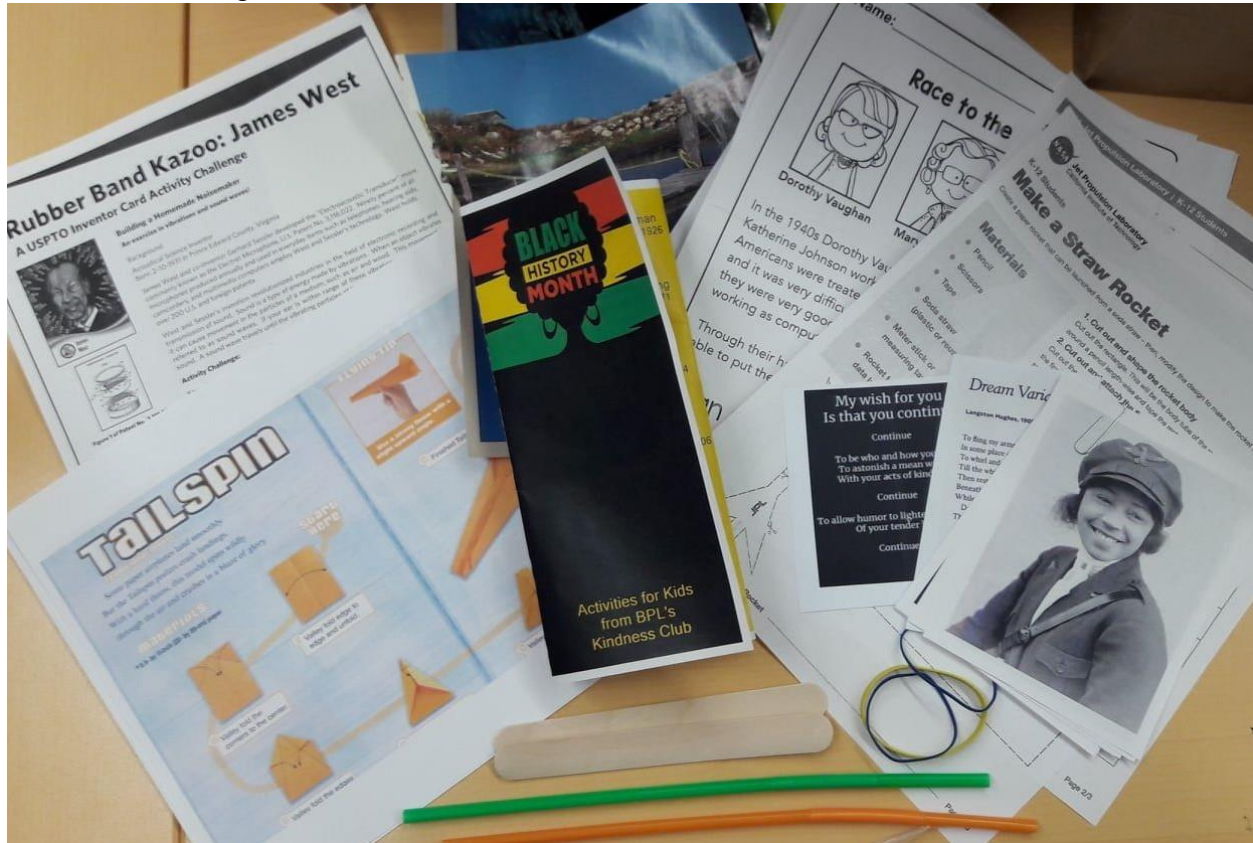
Using videos and informational posts, the staff introduces a new kindness topic each month. They also promote the club through bookmarks and the library's newsletter.

To encourage connection, the club started with letter writing and then constructed and delivered hundreds of May baskets to local seniors. Other projects included learning about pollinators and distributing seeds to support them, collecting supplies for area schools, spotlighting the importance of supporting local businesses, and painting an outdoor obstacle course on the riverfront for families to enjoy. A winter project focused on backyard birds with kits including identification guides and supplies to make simple homemade bird feeders.



The library has a longstanding tradition of collecting food in November as part of Burlington's Community Thanksgiving Dinner. When the dinner was canceled, the Kindness Club partnered with Miss Great River to collect canned goods to distribute to local food pantries, created a display on food insecurity, and made handouts about area food pantries. They also collected warm outerwear to distribute locally.

This month the club celebrated Black History Month by sharing stories of local Black history, developing a book display, and distributing hands-on activity kits for families to learn about Black historical figures.



All of the club's projects use items already on hand or low-cost materials with support from the Friends group. One of the May basket recipients even made a donation to support the club's efforts.

Starting the Kindness Club in the midst of a pandemic and remaining active over the past year speaks to the creativity and dedication of our staff. It has been a valuable cross-departmental team experience, an overall bright spot in a tough time, and a nice connection with our community. We look forward to having that first in-person club meeting someday. Until then, we continue to look for ways to spread a little kindness.