Kindness matters. The everyday relationships we have with people in our communities are critical to our sense of connection and belonging. The quality of our interactions with organisations and services has a profound impact on outcomes. Kindness is at the heart of our wellbeing.

Most people already consider public libraries to be ‘kind places’. But what if we could build on existing strengths as open, trusted spaces, in order to encourage kindness in both our services and communities, and widen libraries’ reach and engagement?

Over the last four years, we have seen and heard about examples of simple, low-level interventions that can change the nature of places and create the conditions for kindness. Now we’re inviting you to join a group of public library staff trying out small tests of change of their own, learning from and being inspired by each other as they do so.

What are we asking?

We are looking to build a network of Champions for Libraries and Kindness in public libraries across Scotland to be part of a conversation about kindness in libraries, to develop ideas and – crucially – to do something. Over the course of 2020, we want each participant to test out a small initiative in their own workplace, and share this with the rest of the cohort. We are keen to support as many people as possible and if we have more interest that we can realistically support then we’ll come back to everyone with a plan for how we’ll make things work.

What will we provide?

We will provide time and space to develop ideas that might enhance the contribution of public libraries to their communities, by holding two workshops and supporting peer interaction in-between these workshops. As part of this we will share our experience of what works from several years of kindness innovation. And we will make available a small amount of money (approximately a few hundred pounds) to cover the costs of materials needed for practical activities.

What will the impact be?

At the end of the process we will invite each participant to share their experiences at an event; we will capture our collective learning to produce a toolkit of practical ideas for encouraging kindness in public libraries; and we will share this across library networks in the UK and Ireland, with the aim of inspiring others to take forward action to encourage kindness and continue to enhance the wellbeing of communities.

How to get involved:

On Tuesday 31st March we will hold a workshop at Andrew Carnegie House in Dunfermline to launch the programme, develop ideas and form networks with peers. If you want to be there:

- Read this leaflet to find out what we mean by kindness and the very simple, low resource things you could do to encourage kindness.
- Talk to your line manager and head of service to check they are supportive of you spending a small amount of time on this project and take part in two workshops.
- Fill out the expression of interest form.
- Send it back to us at creatingspace@carnegieuk.org by 5pm, Friday 20th March.

Further Information

The Carnegie UK Trust has a range of publications on kindness on our website.
At the Carnegie UK Trust we have seen the popular momentum behind ‘random acts of kindness’. However, we have sought to move beyond the idea that kindness is simple, risk-free and just about people being ‘nicer’ to one another. We have focused on relational kindness, as something that acknowledges the complexity of relationships and allows deep human connection. Kindness, by its nature, is unobligated, and so rather than demanding that individuals behave differently, we have focused on what can be done to create the conditions for kindness.

What do we mean by kindness?

The conditions for kindness

Welcoming places: The places we have to gather or even just bump into each other have an impact on our ability to connect and to deepen our connections to form relationships. Physical design matters hugely. So too do the people who use and manage spaces.

Informal opportunities: Evidence suggests that low level interactions – for example, a greeting or a chat with a member of staff at a checkout, can make a big difference to the quality of daily life for people who might otherwise be isolated and/or lonely. Opportunities matter, but they don’t automatically promote kindness. We need to be able to take risks to engage informally.

Values of kindness: Whilst people understand the economic and social shifts which underpin changing values they miss a sense of community spirit. Intrinsic values matter. Just noticing and asking ourselves what kind of society of community we want to live in makes a difference.

Questions public libraries could explore

• How can public libraries use existing space (or create space) to facilitate quality connections?

• What role do libraries play in narratives of place and belonging that facilitate a sense of community and kindness?

• How can public libraries create the conditions that enable members of the public to take the affective and personal risks involved in acting kindly?

• How can public libraries support members of the public to take and manage these risks positively?

• How do public libraries’ own values filter through the library as a service?
Inspiration and Examples: Low resource -> High Impact

**Places**

- A train station where fresh flowers, books available to borrow, a toy corner and a record player turned a standard ScotRail station into a place for people to stop and chat.
- A university library where a community fridge created new relationships between staff and students.
- Friendly Bench and Chatty Café Schemes, which create spaces where people have permission to talk and connect with others.

**Opportunities**

- Putting a teepee in a hospital to create a ‘space for everyone’, where patients, visitors and staff can meet as people.
- Creating ‘pop-up’ tables to share a cup of tea or shared food – on the street, in supermarkets, in office spaces.
- Creative ideas that encourage people to use spaces in different ways, such as library sleepovers, arts installations and out of hours activities for community groups.

**Values**

- A ‘wall of kindness’ for people to share positive messages and stories.
- A community organisation that produced postcards for people to share to initiate conversations about kindness and relationships.
- ‘Food Train Friends’ and ‘North Ayrshire Kindness Rocks’ badges that identify people as part of a movement around shared values.