LEAP to Kindness

My second cornerstone, kindness, will take a similar tumble when faced with unkindness. Let’s for a minute take a realistic picture of the unkindness that children will see and face. This month is Domestic Violence Awareness. Children living in such a home will see and experience some of the following on a continual and reoccurring basis: one parent routinely putting the other parent down, name calling, belittling, bad mouthing, mocking, threatening; one parent slapping, pushing, hitting, strangling, aiming a gun at the other; in the night hearing yelling, screaming, crashing, and fear; a parent who is constantly on guard that tension seems the only emotion in the one, is always not only trying to be sure that everything is perfect in the house but constantly demanding that the children be good, not say or do anything that will upset the other, yell at the child if something is not right, saying do not bother me, I cannot help you, sometimes slapping; and some experience the same abuse from that parent.

April is Child Abuse Awareness Month. Some children are physically, sexually, and/or emotionally abused by a parent or other relative. Many children live in poverty. Consequently they often are poorly dressed, do not have the school supplies that are necessary, miss school, and are unable to attend the school events that cost extra. These children can be brutally treated unkindly. These are laughed at, teased, and sometimes constantly harassed by other students. Other students see this behavior and nothing is done to stop it even though no adult is there to observe. Another unkind behavior is bullying. In the 2014 Door County Youth at Risk Survey students self-reported that they were bullied on school property during the 12 months before the study and had been electronically bullied.

Finally, let’s just consider what a child sees about his world. We hear over and over again about a mass shooting a school, a college, a church or a theater. Both drama and comedy are showing acts of unkindness more frequently than kindness. Commercials sell products by the use of unkindness. Athletes are praised for trash talking. There are often physical altercations on the field. A coach yells in the face of a player. Our country’s leaders verbally attacking each other. War, war everywhere.

Clearly those children who are experiencing unkindness most of the time, know little of what kindness is nor how to be kind. Others have seen and received kindness, but with unkindness being the normal, you would suspect that they would see the way to act is with unkindness. Of course we have children who see kindness and do practice it. I am not sure that the group alone is strong enough to keep that cornerstone standing.

Last fall Terry Lundahl with an idea she called LEAP (Learning to Empower and Appreciate All People) decided to take action. She with Dorothy Scott got the support of each of the mainland schools. First through the schools they were able to attract students who were interested in the movement of human kindness and of being creative in sending that message. It was a mix group of about 40 young people all who were talented and wanted to express themselves. Second this group was to put together a presentation that could us dancing acting, singing, playing an instrument, or speaking to address human kindness. Additional facilitators were added: Cheryl Pfister, Claire Morkin, Amanda List, Andria Nikouplolis-Weliky, and Nikki Hedeen. Starting in January the group met each Sunday for a few hours to from scratch put a show together. Imagine all the creativity and then the energy to put their ideas into some active art form. Further the increased understanding everyone gained about kindness and its importance in our interaction. With hard work the result was a show at Southern Door Auditorium on April 17. It was very well received. Through a variety of artistic media the attendees were able to grasp what they had learned and wanted to share with all of Door County.

The LEAP project is on schedule for 2016 and their performance is scheduled for April 15 and 16 evening at the Southern Door Auditorium. Please save the date. Students will be able to get involved in early 2016 with the same process. This is sponsored by Ministry Door County Medical Center. With young people wanting to spread the word, we have a much better chance for civility.

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Door County Civility Project