

Secret Agents of Kindness

<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2017/secret-agents-of-kindness>

Grades and setting: all grades and all settings, inside and outside of school (The teacher who developed the program required students to complete acts within the school grounds with the goal of changing school culture: however, students also decided to complete acts outside of the school.)

Summary: This program was developed by high school teacher, Ferial Pearson. (Based on her TEDx talk, her students made significant contributions.) From Teaching Tolerance (www.tolerance.org): “The idea behind Secret Kindness Agents, which Pearson details in her TEDx Talk and in a book she has written about the program, is both simple and profound: to perform an anonymous act of kindness every day and, thereby, spread kindness throughout the community. Anonymity is a key element of the program, as it shifts the focus from the self to others and thus allows the “agents” of kindness to remove themselves from the equation—in effect, to become selfless, which is the DNA of kindness.”

Secret Agents of Kindness includes four steps:

Step 1: Students write a list of about 10 to 15 potential positive benefits of Secret Kindness Agents, and make a list of the potential risks.

Step 2: Students brainstorm anonymous acts of kindness, or jobs, and select Secret Agent names for themselves.

Step 3: Once students select their jobs and verbally commit to honor those jobs, they perform their acts of kindness every day for a week.

Step 4: At the end of the week, students write reflections on how their jobs have affected them and those around them. They then select new jobs for the next week and begin the process again.

One of the stipulations of the project is the teachers have to be Secret Kindness Agents themselves.

Effectiveness/Outcomes:

For her dissertation, Pearson conducted a study using a questionnaire to explore the perceptions of 23 educators regarding the Secret Kindness Agents project. Here are some of her findings:

Impact on educators: Many of the educators perceived that they became kinder and more aware in their homes and communities, as well as in their work environments, they developed more compassionate attitudes and behaviors in regard to classroom discipline, they developed an interest in becoming kindness role models, and they experienced improved well-being.

Impact on students: Teachers perceived that as a result of this project, students showed improvements in empathy, kindness and politeness inside and outside of school, academic performance, sense of pride in belonging to their school community, self-esteem and well-being. They were better able to understand others' points of view, had less anger toward others, fewer negative behaviors, an increase in positive emotions and behaviors, and improved relationships with each other.

Impact on contexts: Teachers perceived improved faculty and staff dispositions and morale, an increased sense of community and creation of safe spaces, and improved school climate,.

According to Pearson, in a 2017 interview, the program has been done in over a hundred rural and urban schools throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Cost: free (Pearson had a rule that acts of kindness could not cost any money.)

Contact information and useful links:

TEDx talk by Ferial Pearson: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RVnoHV_Id9k

Secret Agents of Kindness: How Small Acts of Kindness Really Can Change the World, by Ferial Pearson (proceeds go to charity): https://www.amazon.com/Secret-Kindness-Agents-Really-Change-ebook/dp/B00PYZ0D80/ref=sr_1_1?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1540083045&sr=1-1&keywords=secret+kindness+agents

Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/SecretKindnessAgents/>