TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Sabah Randhawa, President

DATE: December 13, 2019

SUBJECT: WWU Kindness Day and the Science of Kindness

PURPOSE: Discussion Item

Purpose of Submittal:

Representatives of the Kindness Day Planning Committee will present an overview of Kindness Day activities.

Background:

Western’s Kindness Day was a product of a summer working retreat for the Senior Management Administrative Resource Team (SMART). SMART membership includes the Assistants to the President, Vice Presidents, Assistant Secretary to the Board, and Assistant to the Assistant Attorneys General. This group brainstormed ideas that would provide a positive experience for our campus community during what can often be a stressful time of year. The team learned that World Kindness Day, launched in 1998, is celebrated annually on the 13th of every November. With an idea and support from the President’s Office, the planning for Western’s Kindness Day activities began. The core group expanded the Kindness Day Committee to include additional committee members, collaborating with faculty in the Department of Psychology, and Professor Christie Scollon’s PSY377 Positive Psychology students.

The invitation to be involved with World Kindness Day was serendipitous for PSY377 Positive Psychology. The event provided a unique opportunity for students to showcase their classroom learning and to apply their creative skills and energy to bring to life some of the principles they learned from positive psychology research.

Professor Scollon requires PSY377 students to complete a group project, and typically this takes the form of a class presentation. Modifying the group project requirement to a real-world Kindness Project took some adjustments to the course syllabus and to student expectations. However, students quickly discovered that the real-world project could be fun and enjoyable.

Western’s First World Kindness Day was a success from both a pedagogical and community-building perspective. Students from PSY377 were able to engage with the Western community as well as bring knowledge outside the classroom. Although the impact of the day’s events cannot be truly measured without bias, qualitative reports from students and Professor Scollon’s observations converged on an overall positive experience that warrants repeating in 2020.
Kindness Day activities included Kindness Booths with warm beverages at four locations on campus, and a Kindness Info Fair where attendees were able to express gratitude with kindness-focused crafts, learn about volunteer opportunities, learn about the science of kindness from the Positive Psychology students and interact with therapy animals.

The Committee was also thrilled to learn about the ripple effect of Kindness Day when colleagues from Procurement, Contracts and Travel shared that they were inspired to launch their own activity and held a coat drive in their department for Blue Skies for Children, a local organization that supports homeless, low-income and foster children in Whatcom and Skagit Counties.