

# WESTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY ITEM SUBMITTED TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

**TO:** Members of the Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Sabah Randhawa, President

**DATE:** December 11, 2020

**SUBJECT:** **WWU Kindness Day**

**PURPOSE:** Discussion Item

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## **Purpose of Submittal:**

Trustee Hunter Stuehm, Assistant Secretary to the Board of Trustees Rayne Rambo, and Kindness Day Planning Committee members will present an overview of the second annual WWU Kindness Day events.

## **Background:**

For the second time, Western celebrated World Kindness Day on Friday, November 13<sup>th</sup>. World Kindness Day highlights our shared humanity and responsibility to take care of one another. Western first celebrated World Kindness Day in 2019, with campus booths and a Kindness Fair celebrating the science and practice of kindness. This year, Western's celebration of World Kindness Day evolved to intentionally address the role kindness in social movements, change, and times of stress. The direction pivoted from typical conceptualizations of kindness and was driven by the Board of Trustees' June 2020 conversation on racial equity and systemic racism.

This year, Western celebrated Kindness Day online, with a series of interviews conducted by Hunter Stuehm, graduate student in Western's audiology program and member of the Western Board of Trustees. Hunter interviewed individuals from the Western community who were nominated for their exemplary kindness to share their thoughts, stories and life experiences on how kindness has led them to who they are today as leaders in their community.

The invited guest to be interviewed by Stuehm included Uzma Ahmad, mental health counselor and Western's first lady, Sislana Ledbetter, Executive Director for Counseling, Health and Wellness, Celeste Mergens, Founder & CEO, Days for Girls International, Laurel Ballew, Executive Director of American Indian/Alaska Native and First Nations Relations and Tribal Liaison to the President, Leonard Jones, Director, University Residences, and Steve Swan, Former Vice President for University Relations & Community Development. Interviewees included guests from multiple university divisions and community organizations, with diverse experiences studying and practicing kindness. Interviewees then served as part of a discussion panel on Kindness Day, November 13<sup>th</sup>. The focus of the panel was assembled on the

preceding interviews, focusing on what role kindness serves in the face of divisive politics, racist violence, and growing tensions in the US.

More information about Kindness Day activities, student academic projects related to kindness, and the complete video interviews and panel discussion, are available at:

[www.wvu.edu/kindness](http://www.wvu.edu/kindness)

Psychology professor and member of the Kindness Day Organizing Committee Jim Graham, summarized the spirit of Kindness Day and its urgent relevance in our times this way:

*“If you define kindness as being nice, considerate, or friendly, then kindness is not enough,”* said *“Given the historic and current issues facing the United States, kindness has to be bigger than that. The practice of kindness needs to include a willingness to stand up and take action on important issues and to hold ourselves and our community accountable for how we treat others. I’m excited about the panel. I expect the panelists will challenge the contemporary notion of kindness and encourage us to expand our notions of what kindness means and how kindness looks. Sometimes, kindness means a warm smile and an encouraging word. Sometimes it means speaking up for social justice and taking action against oppression.”*