Pen Pals for A Purpose

St. Clair County Community Mental Health (CMH) is excited to start the Pen Pals for A Purpose program and to have you as a volunteer. As you write to your pen pal, we hope you will be able to develop a relationship with someone you otherwise would not have been introduced to. Our goal is for you to have an outlet and a means to connect with others in a positive and uplifting way. Youth volunteers who participate will be paired with an adult pen pal, creating a connection with someone from a different generation. Topics have been provided for you to help guide your conversations.

Explanation of the Program

- Throughout the duration of the program you will write six (6) letters to your pen pal, each centered around a different topic.

- Generally, letters should be written within five to seven days of receiving a new letter from your pen pal. The adult volunteer will write the first letter on each topic, and the youth volunteers will respond.

- We have provided an age-appropriate informational sheet expanding on what each topic is and why it is important for health and well-being.

- When writing to your pen pal, you are free to write about whatever you would like but we ask that you keep the theme for each letter in mind.

- Once you have written your letter, please mail it to the address listed below. CMH will then be responsible for passing the letter on to your pen pal. Envelopes and stamps can be provided to you as needed. To request materials, please email kzultak@scccmh.org or call (810) 985-8900.

- If CMH has not received a letter within two (2) weeks since you received your last pen pal letter we will contact you to follow-up.

- If you have any questions or concerns at any point throughout the program, please email Karen Zultak at kzultak@scccmh.org or call (810) 985-8900.

Address:
St. Clair County Community Mental Health
Attn: Pen Pals for A Purpose
3111 Electric Ave
Port Huron, MI 48060
Pen Pals for A Purpose: Getting Started

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in volunteering with the Pen Pals for a Purpose program! Below is a step by step guide for how to get started. We look forward to your participation and hope you have a wonderful experience writing to your pen pal!

Thank you for your consideration,
Karen Zultak
Pen Pals for a Purpose Program Supervisor

How to get started for youth volunteers (ages 6-17)

1. To get started, send in a signed Consent Form and a completed Information and Interest Form to the address below.

2. We will assign a pen pal to you and notify you via email with the first name and age of your match. If your pen pal provides additional information such as hobbies or interests, we will let you know that too!

3. Your adult pen pal will write to you first. Once you receive your letter, please respond within seven days following the Topic 1 Guide.

4. Please send all of your letters to the address below.

Address:
St. Clair County Community Mental Health
Attn: Pen Pals for A Purpose
3111 Electric Ave
Port Huron, MI 48060
The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant effects on children's ability to socialize outside of their family unit. Numerous studies show that social isolation can impact physical and mental health well beyond the duration of loneliness. Volunteering has been shown to be one effective method to help combat this. As a result, we have created Pen Pals for A Purpose to pair children and adults as a way to create multigenerational connections they might otherwise not have. With your approval, we would love for your child to participate in this new opportunity.

Pen Pals for A Purpose Consent Form

To the Parents or Legal Guardian of a Child Interested in Participating,

The COVID-19 pandemic has had significant effects on children's ability to socialize outside of their family unit. Numerous studies show that social isolation can impact physical and mental health well beyond the duration of loneliness. Volunteering has been shown to be one effective method to help combat this. As a result, we have created Pen Pals for A Purpose to pair children and adults as a way to create multigenerational connections they might otherwise not have. With your approval, we would love for your child to participate in this new opportunity.

Please initial to indicate you agree to the following statements:

________ I agree to open and read each letter with my child to monitor the content of what is being written.

________ If I have any concerns about the content of the letters, I will immediately report it to Karen Zultak, kzultak@scccmh.org, at St. Clair County Community Mental Health.

________ I will hold my child to the obligation of writing a minimum of six letters for the duration of the Pen Pal program.

________ After the completion of the program my child will have the opportunity to re-enroll for a second period either with their current match or a new match.

Name of Child__________________________________________________________

Printed Name of Parent or Legal Guardian________________________________

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian_____________________________________

Date Signed________________________________________________________________

St. Clair County Community Mental Health, 3111 Electric Ave, Port Huron, MI 48060
www.scccmh.org, (810) 985-8900, kzultak@scccmh.org
Pen Pals for A Purpose
Information and Interest Form

Contact Information

Child's Name:___________________________________________________________

Birthdate (Month/ Day/ Year): ________________________________

Age: _________________________________________________________________

Male___________________ Female___________________ Prefer not to say__________________

Name of Parent/Guardian:_______________________________________________

Mailing Address: ______________________________________________________________________

Contact Phone Number: _________________________________________________

Parent Email Address: _______________________________________________________

Child Email Address: ________________________________________________________

How did you hear about our program?_____________________________________

☐ I agree to receive emails pertaining to the Pen Pals for a Purpose Program.

☐ I agree for my child to receive emails pertaining to the Pen Pals for a Purpose
Program and understand that I will be copied on any emails he/she receives.

Interests (Answering is optional)

What do you want to be when you grow up?_____________________________________

What is your favorite book or movie?___________________________________________

What is your favorite season?_______________________________________________

What is your favorite sport?_________________________________________________

What is your favorite holiday?_____________________________________________

Is there anything else we should know about you?______________________________
Pen Pals for A Purpose
Topic Overview

Topic 1: Gratitude

Topic 2: Happiness

Topic 3: Love

Topic 4: Pride

Topic 5: Admiration

Topic 6: Hope
Gratitude

When your pen pal writes to you this week they will be sharing some of the things they are grateful for. When you write back share some of the things you are grateful for in your life. You can talk about gifts you have received, experiences you have had, friends or family members you appreciate, or anything else that you are grateful for.

What is Gratitude?
The definition of gratitude is “the quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness”. Essentially, gratitude is a warm feeling of thankfulness towards the world or towards specific individuals. To feel grateful is to be thankful for what you have and to not be constantly seeking more.

Why is Gratitude Important?
A research study compared feelings of gratitude and materialism among teens. The results showed that the teens who were more grateful and less materialistic were happier, more satisfied with their lives, friends, family, neighborhood, and selves. The group has had more hope, greater engagement with their hobbies, higher grades, and less envy and depression. Positive emotions open us up to more possibilities by boosting our ability to learn and make good decisions. One positive emotion often leads to another positive emotion like happiness, joy, or love. Gratitude can lead to positive actions by inspiring us to return the kindness that was shown to us.

Optional At-Home Activity
Sometimes feelings of gratitude can happen spontaneously, but more often than not, we have to create the feelings of gratitude by deliberately taking the time to appreciate what we have in our life. It can be difficult at first but once we develop a habit for feeling gratitude it will come easier. During the next week, at the end of each day try to list five things that happened or interactions you had that you were grateful for that day. You may find it is easier than you think.
Happiness

What made you happy this week? Was it something big or small? Do you feel happy again when you think about it? How do you make other people feel happy? Answer some of these questions in your letter to your pen pal.

What is Happiness?

Happiness is a sense of well-being, joy, or contentment. You don't have to be happy all of the time to be living a happy life. It is important to remember that achievements, material possessions, and money are not the only things that make us happy. Happiness comes from within and often the relationships we have with the people in our lives.

Finding Meaning in Life

Life is busy. Often, we are constantly thinking about the next place we need to be or thing we need to do. Slowing down and paying attention to what we are doing and why we are doing it can help us reflect on our happiness. During this next week, pay attention to the effects of your day-to-day actions. Notice the ways that you make a difference. Live your life based on the values that are important to you. Take some time to think of what really matters to you and maybe even write down a list. When things get tough, pause and think of the things in your life that make you happy.

Why Happiness Matters

Happiness is more than a good feeling. It is a feeling of truly enjoying your life and the desire to make the very best of it. Researchers have been studying happiness to determine if it actually leads people to living more successful and well-rounded lives. Some of the things they have found are:

- Happy people tend to be more successful
- Happy people tend to be more likely to reach their goals
- Happy people tend to be healthier (physically and mentally)
- Happy people tend to live longer
- Happy people tend to have better, healthier relationships
Love

Your pen pal will be sharing some of the things they love in their life. There are a lot of forms of love. Love doesn't always have to be a romantic love. People can love a possession that holds a lot of emotional value for them or a friendship they have. When you write to your pen pal, share about the things you love in your life.

What is Love?

There are many different definitions and expressions of love. Love means to be deeply committed and connected to someone or something. Experiencing love means you may share a special bond with someone. It is possible to love items or activities in your life like chocolate, movies, or football as well as friends or family members.

The Media and Love

Love is everywhere! We see the themes of love in shows we watch, music we listen to, and books we read. There are many different nuances to love, so it is important that we critically assess how the love we are seeing on our screens is being portrayed. Is it realistic? Is it dramatic for comedic benefit? Not all relationships we see in media are healthy ideals.

How to Say "I Love You"

There are so many different ways to say I love you! Here are a few new ways for you to try out.

- Italian: "Ti amo" (tee ah-moh)
- Spanish: "Te quiero" (teh kee-eh-ro)
- French: "Je t'aime" (sure tem)
- Portuguese: "Eu te amo" (uh teh ah-mo)
- American Sign Language: look at the picture and recreate this sign with your hand
Pride

Your pen pal will be writing about some of the things that they are proud of and asking you to share what you are proud of. Think about the things you have done that make you proud of yourself and share them with your pen pal.

What is Pride?
Pride means having a feeling of positive self-esteem and self-regard. The word pride can have both positive and negative connotations. Pride means to have a feeling of self-respect. Many people take pride in their work, achievements, skills, and experiences as well as being proud of those they are close to.

How to Improve Self-Esteem and Be Proud of Yourself
Self-esteem is your opinion of yourself and your abilities. While everyone occasionally doubts themselves, low self-esteem can leave you feeling insecure and unmotivated.

Some tips to improve your self-esteem are...
1. Speak and think kindly about yourself
2. Don't compare yourself to other people in your life
3. Exercise
4. Forgive yourself for mistakes you have made
5. Focus on what you can change, not what you can't
6. Celebrate your small victories
7. Surround yourself with supportive people

Things You Should Always Be Proud of
- Your abilities
- Your sense of style
- How much you learn and grow
- Your traditions and values
- Yourself!
Admiration

Your pen pal will be writing about who and what they admire in their letter to you this week. When you write to your pen pal this week, share some of the things you admire and explain what it is about those things you admire.

What is Admiration?
Admiration is a feeling of strong approval or delight with regard to someone or something. When we admire something, there is a sense of wonder, delight, and approval that it inspires. When we think about who we admire, many people can jump to different celebrities or athletes that they admire. We admire the skills people possess, but it is possible to also admire qualities or traits that the people in our life have.

Optional At Home Activity
Write down as many people you can think of that you admire. For each person, write down what it is that you admire about them. These can be anything! You may admire the way someone handled a stressful situation or admire how someone is outgoing and tries to make everyone feel welcome. Once you have done this, write down reasons you think people may admire you. This can be hard because many people struggle with complimenting themselves. Dig deep until you come up with at least ten things.

Now What?
Now that you have your list, use it to remind yourself that you are worth admiring. Then the next time someone you know does something you admire, don’t hesitate to tell them! Everyone loves receiving compliments and being noticed. By complimenting them you are reinforcing they are more likely to repeat the positive behavior. Take the time to appreciate the people around you and everything they add to your life.
Hope

We hope that you have enjoyed participating in this program and writing to your pen pal. We have loved having you participate in of Pen Pals for A Purpose. This week your pen pal will share some of the hopes they have for their life. When you write your last letter, share some of the things you hope for.

What is Hope?
The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines hope as, "to cherish a desire with anticipation; to want something to be true or to happen," but we know that it is much more than that. To have hope is to want an outcome that makes your (or some else's) life better in some way. Not only can it help make a tough situation more bearable, but it can also improve our lives because when we envision a better future it motivates us to take the steps to make it happen.

Why is Hope Important?
Having a lot of hope, especially during hard times, corresponds with higher levels of personal wellbeing, life satisfaction, and even academic or athletic achievement. Hopeful individuals tend to have better relationships and are more likely to achieve their goals. When you envision something hopeful it gives you a moment of happiness you otherwise would not have had. The American Psychological Association conducted a study and found that children who grew up in poverty but had financial success later in life all had one thing in common - hope.

How to Develop Hope
Even if you are not in a dire situation or feeling stress, being hopeful can improve the quality of your life. Here are three ideas to continue developing your ability to hope:

1. Write down what you are looking forward to. Whether it is something next week, next year, or even 10 years from now, writing down what we want makes us more likely to take the steps needed to get it.
2. Think about your future and imagine what you want your potential best self to look like. Create different pathways on how you can get there.
3. When you find yourself stuck, try to answer the questions "What do you think is the next best thing to do?" or "When have you overcome something like this before?". These questions may help remind you that the situation you are in is only temporary and you have the skills needed to get through it.