



SHREVEPORT SCHOOLS EXPAND CULTURE OF CARING

Community Renewal is thrilled to announce that Atkins Elementary became the second We Care School in Shreveport this fall, further expanding a culture of caring into our city's classrooms.

"This is an amazing cause and we are going to get behind it one million percent," said Atkins Elementary Principal Belinda Stewart. "At the end of the day, we want to produce a culture of individuals who care. This is an invaluable gift we can give and it won't cost us one cent. It starts with us being the model for our kids. If we teach them to be caring individuals, our world will be a better place."

The idea for We Care Schools was conceived in a conversation between Community Renewal volunteer Mary Richter and her friend Kasie Mainiero, principal at University Elementary. Kasie shared her experiences of encouraging teachers and students to care. It was a light bulb moment for Mary who enthusiastically responded, "I must get you together with Community Renewal!" Mary's insights opened a new opportunity. The CR Institute assembled a team to follow Mary's lead and We Care Schools is the outcome.

A second year at the pilot school, University Elementary, started with a Community Renewal workshop in August. Planning has begun with Principal Ginger Gustavson to adapt We Care Schools to Captain Shreve High School for the 2020-21 school year.

"It is exciting for our team to explore with educators how Community Renewal principles and practices can enhance education. 'Students don't care what you know until they know that you care' is an accepted truth previously left to individual teachers' understanding and application. We Care Schools invite educators, students, parents and school partners to co-create a culture of caring as the foundation for learning and community," said Kim Mitchell, director of our Center for Community Renewal.

"We Care Schools are proving to be a fun opportunity to align a gift we all have in common, our capacity to care. It doesn't take a training manual to care, but when we practice intentionally prioritizing that gift in all our daily relations, the power of caring together is released."

A We Care School community begins co-creating a culture of caring equipped with new insights into the Community Renewal model and a new game, Caught-You-Caring. This school-year duration game involves observing caring acts, then writing the caring act on a card along with names of the actor and observer. Caught-You-Caring is practical

skill-building to see good in others. It is also structured for cooperation (combining cooperation, collaboration and competition) through teams connected across grade levels.

Additionally, the school community is encouraged to experiment with creating practices to prioritize caring actions. During the pilot year, 18 educators and students at University were celebrated with Pathfinder Awards for innovations and practices that contributed to creating a culture of caring. One example: a fourth-grade student's

pathfinder initiative became known as Recess Rangers. The shy student blossomed socially and emotionally by enlisting and training 40 students in evoking student behaviors that contribute to a school culture of caring. For perhaps the first time in the history of recess, behavioral problems practically vanished.

"My hope for the future is that we see children who learn relational skills and learn how to be a better community member," Mainiero said. "And there in turn they create a better country, a better city and a better community wherever they go. We want them to care about others. That's number one."



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- Atkins Elementary Principal Belinda Stewart



STUDENTS AND TEACHERS GROWING IN CARING

Annaleigh Hester didn't know her school custodian, Ricky Fisher, but she knew he might appreciate a bit of help at the end of the day.

Although only 9 years old, this third-grader has kindness on her mind because caring for others is now part of the curriculum at her school, Shreveport's University Elementary – our first We Care School. The movement to emphasize caring in education is now growing to other elementary schools and will soon be promoted in a Shreveport high school.

"I really love to help people. It's

one of my favorite things to do," Annaleigh said. "I thought about sweeping my classroom and it made me happy when I started doing it. Then I started writing a letter for Mr. Fisher every day and then I got to meet him in person and I am so glad that I did."

In this second year of We Care Schools at University Elementary, trained administrative team members are guiding six strategic-doing teacher groups in culture of caring pathfinding. One new initiative is credited for an increase in the number of students documenting caring acts. Every morning selected caught-you-caring cards are read by students over the intercom. Increased practice is attributed to gains in what and how students consider caring acts. When the game began last year,

many cards were for caring acts like picking up litter, something appreciatively noted by the school's neighbors. Now, caring acts include examples like Annaleigh's sweeping of the classroom. Skills to see good in others are growing within a school culture of caring.

"The more I look for good in my students and others, the more I recognize positive changes in me." Master Teacher Gwyne Clavijo shared this observation about the schoolwide caught-you-caring cards game to her colleagues and Community Renewal team during a recent monthly leadership team meeting at

Atkins Elementary School in Shreveport. Shifting the foundation for learning to a school culture of caring is the purpose of We Care Schools.

How many ways can we share and prioritize caring in our lives? "Gwyne's discovery confirms brain science research about helpful chemicals produced from committing, watching or hearing about caring acts. The intentional practices of looking for and prioritizing caring begins to change the way we think, the way we behave, the way we feel. It moves the school community from individual good intentions to shared intentional good."

In seeking new pathways to Atkins' culture of caring, principal Belinda Stewart

asked, "How could Community Renewal be more visible and recognized on campus as the caring people?" The response is a new volunteer opportunity, Growing Me to We. Prepared volunteers periodically visit campus to recognize and call attention to caring acts, then help everyone nearby celebrate. It is fun, important work, coaching a priority shift to a school culture of caring. Team member Tanja Robinson is coordinating this initiative and has prepared an initial group ready to share the love. Volunteers are presented a Growing Me to We T-shirt, game cards, stickers and a short training.

When an entire school community engages in creating cultural practices, the power of caring together emerges as a creative force for common good. Principals are now creating space in school schedules for teacher gatherings to share encouraging experiences about creating a school culture of caring.

From our teacher gathering experiments at Atkins Elementary, first grade teacher and leadership team member Sherri Andrews commented, "This time together has become important to me. I can see a difference in others and myself as we share and hear positive messages."

WE CARE SCHOOLS

is an Institute for Community Renewal learning-doing collaboration with several schools – University Elementary, Atkins Elementary and Captain Shreve High School.

If you are interested in helping, give us a call at **318-425-3222**.



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– Annaleigh Hester, 9

WE CARE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE EXPANDS, BUILDS A CULTURE OF CARING

What will I do with retirement? A good question Tina Kendrick considered as she and husband Terri, a doctor, retired from their careers to live on Lake Claiborne. Among many possibilities, Tina felt a calling to bring Community Renewal to her newly adopted community, Homer, Louisiana. She signed up for the online Community Renewal Catalyst learning experience (one-hour per week sessions over 8-weeks).



During those Catalyst sessions Tina learned about a program emerging through the Community Renewal Institute -- We Care Schools. It was a light bulb moment. Tina could see a new path to replicate Community Renewal in Homer. Start with We Care Schools. Grow a school culture of caring as the foundation for learning and community. A successful career as an educator and administrator provided insight for Tina's Catalyst action plan and her authentic way of presenting Community Renewal.

Sharing the vision of Community Renewal and We Care Schools with the Claiborne Parish Schools Superintendent William Kennedy and his Administrative Team was Tina's first step. The next step: Experience our CR pilot We Care School. Touring University Elementary with principal Kasie Mainiero is inspiring and convincing. Randomly stopping a student or walking into a classroom, the power of caring

together shines. Superintendent Kennedy and his team now see the possibilities for all schools in Claiborne Parish becoming We Care Schools, starting with 400-student Homer Elementary during the 2021-22 school year.

Over the summer, Tina, with support from a CR Institute team, provided guidance for planning activities with Homer Elementary Principal Monica Morrow, Assistant Principal Alyson Perry, and Schools Administrator Mary Prior. The school year theme emerged from a song by Thomas Rhett, "Be a Light." A CR workshop and planning session expanded the core team to include teachers Laura and Doug Gryder, Ashley Wafer, Lisa Long, Tisha Featherston, and Lori Lewis.

Inspiring table decorations included small black boards with quotes like:

- *Students don't care what you know until they know that you care.*
- *We rise by lifting others.*
- *Kindness – it costs nothing but means everything.*
- *Kids won't remember everything you teach them, but they will remember all the ways you love them.*
- *Tell me and I forget, teach me and I remember, involve me and I learn.*

Homer Elementary We Care School started the school year with student "house" assignment celebrations and fanfare. Students are connected across grade levels in six conceptual houses that have colors, logos, T-shirts, caring themes, and mottos. "Caught-You-Caring" cards are bringing attention to caring acts, growing relational leader skills to see good in others. Tina is on campus weekly, encouraging educators and guiding their We Care School plan development. Tina is a true pathfinder, creating a new way to share the Community Renewal Model.

University Elementary is in the fourth year as the pilot We Care School. During the back-

to-school teachers Zoom workshop, Principal Kasie Mainiero emphasized that being a We Care School is more important than ever.

KATZ News is a new UES student video broadcast production that promotes and celebrates being a We Care School. Selected Caught-You-Caring cards are read to the student body as daily announcements. Increasingly students are writing the cards to recognize caring acts of their fellow students and teachers. Students are taking the cards home to share the school focus on caring with their families. Pathfinder Awards celebrate individual actions that increase each school's culture of caring. It is inspiring and hopeful to see the power of caring together continue to emerge through creative pathfinding in our We Care Schools.



GET INVOLVED

Contact us at 318-425-3222 to learn more about the We Care Schools initiative!

GROWING GREENER AT UNIVERSITY ELEMENTARY

University Elementary in Shreveport -- a We Care School -- focuses on a culture of caring about place and each other. During the last school year, UES partnered with Community Renewal, Growing Greener, and Strategic Doing to address climate challenges with the power of caring together. The goal was for students to learn about becoming more resilient as a community adapting to climate change. Our 5th graders led the charge by collectively developing, organizing, and carrying out projects using the Strategic Doing discipline.

Students first participated in a Growing Greener card game. Through this activity, students saw they can make a positive difference for the environment by adding just a few small changes to their lifestyles. After drawing a special place they care about, students sorted cards to acknowledge what they already do to help the environment, such as recycling or donating clothing to help others. They also sorted cards by actions they might be willing to do, and by what they will not do. Students realized that they had to be intentional about changing their habits. If they each picked just one thing to work on, it could be done, and everyone's small changes contribute to community climate resilience.

Using the discipline of Strategic Doing, two science teachers guided 150 fifth-grade students' conversations from their newfound individual agency to ideas about what they could do together. With a list of their ideas, students deliberated to find the "Big Easy," agreeing on a project that produces the biggest impact with the least effort. Students next engaged in design conversations about what they will do together, producing an action plan, success metrics, and accountability to meet regularly for learning and making adjustments together. One student asked the teacher, "Is it okay to have this much fun in class?"

The first student-designed project was a clothes reuse and recycling drive, which had the added benefit of directly helping the school community. Students planned and organized

the project from start to finish. This included advertising and promoting their campaign and collecting, sorting, and redistributing donated items. Through the project, they realized that it could be hard work to really be able to help. Some also did not realize that "needing" a uniform was an issue for some children, so it was good for them to be aware that some students come from hard places and may not have all that others have.

Our second big project was in partnership with a local small business, Cotton Street Farms, which grows clean, fresh produce using hydroponics. Students learned about sustainable farming, hydroponics' environmental advantages, and microgreens' nutritional benefits. The project culminated with students growing and harvesting their own microgreens. Mr. Billings, the business owner, came and educated all of the students on microgreens, and they even could taste some. He showed them how to make their own microgreens kit with cabbage, kale, kohlrabi or arugula, spinach, Swiss chard, and mustard lettuce. The children were unsuccessful with their first round of microgreen kits when they left them out in the sunny window over a long weekend, and the plants did not get enough water. They learned from their mistakes and tried again with new kits. With the new kits, they grew their own lettuce successfully and ate it on the last day.

As we reached the end of our pilot year, the 5th-grade students used their knowledge to lead lower grades in discussions and activities on environmental issues and how they can make an impact. Our students became change-makers and empowered younger students to follow and take an interest in doing things together that



Teachers Jamie Minor, left, and Angela Harris led the Growing Greener initiative at University Elementary.

make a difference in our world by helping the environment. They were talking about their next big project being a paper recycling project, to collect all the unwanted paper from around the school and sort it to be recycled.

This initiative, Growing Greener Communities through Schools, is an example of how new capacities grow from the UES culture of caring through pathfinding. This climate journey began with fifth graders discovering individual agency, then empowering their agency through guided conversations that moved their classmates and school community to collective action. Fifth-graders grew new skills as relational leaders along this path toward climate resilience.

Many of our students are worried about climate change. All our students will face the challenges of climate change during their lives. Our approach, combining Growing Greener individual action and Strategic Doing collaboration discipline with the UES culture of caring, helped our students see that they can have a local impact on a global issue. These were the first small steps to helping them develop climate resilience.



Students see that they can have a local impact on a global issue"

WE CARE SCHOOL HELPS CONNECT A COMMUNITY

Stories feed imagination and emotion. When an adult reads to a child, magic happens. Somehow, while delivering thoughtful words and art from a book, experiences accumulated over a lifetime shine brightly. Wholeness grows in both reader and listener. It is beautiful to behold.

Now imagine a group of adults from many walks of civic life caring together as a team that reads to all pre-k through 2nd grade classes twice every month, what would that look like? Community Renewal Catalyst Tina Kendrick and Homer Elementary Principal Alyson Perry answered that question over the course of the 2022-23 school year.

Tina, a retired educator, and her husband Terry, a retired physician, moved from a Shreveport home to their retirement life on Lake Claiborne. During her 2020 Community Renewal Catalyst training, Tina learned about the pilot We Care School (WCS) at University Elementary (UES) in Shreveport (Principal Kasie Mainiero 2018-2022; Principal Ashley Atkins 2022-23+). Tina's educator career melded with her Catalyst training into an innovative new strategy to replicate the CRI model in their adopted community of Homer, Louisiana: Start with We Care Schools, then grow citywide.

Tina's first pathfinder initiative: engage a school community in adapting CRI principles and practices to create a culture of caring as the foundational priority for learning and community. Tina shared the vision with Claiborne Schools Superintendent William Kennedy and Special Education Director Mary Prior. Homer Elementary (HES) became a We Care School the 2021-22 school year (Principal Monica Morrow) and continues through a second year (2022-23+ Principal Alyson Perry). Tina is a volunteer, champion, and advocate for growing relational capacities of the school community. Every school needs a Tina.

The next pathfinder initiative: connect the Homer community to the school culture of caring. Tina invested time volunteering with community organizations like Homer Main Street, the Garden Club, and also co-founding Tapestry Community Women's Ministry. Her social networks grew along with

her creative insights about relationally connecting community and school. A We Care Campus Clean-Up project led to organizing a larger We Care Campus Beautification/Community Garden project.

Sharing ownership in ideas can grow trust, align networks, and combine resources to do more together. One example: Resources invested by Homer Main Street networks aligned with resources available through Piney Hills Master Gardeners and Garden Club. Tina shared discovering a volunteer resource, "Sanctioning the We Care Campus Community Garden project for Master Gardeners service hours requirement is a win-win!" A pattern of change is emerging.

During the 2022-23 school year Tina collaborated with Principal Perry in another community relational connecting idea, HES We Care Reading Café. Tina recruited volunteers, organized schedules, participated as a reader, and managed the process for community civic leaders to read to all pre-k through 2nd grade classes twice monthly. These volunteers are growing the boundaries of the HES culture of caring beyond school walls.

"Reading Cafe Sessions have been



Mutually Enhancing Relationships are growing. I am extremely grateful!"

- Tina Kendrick

extremely well received by faculty and students," Tina said. "Volunteers know and are known by students and teachers. Mutually Enhancing Relationships are growing. I am extremely grateful!"

At We Care Schools, Pathfinder Awards recognize individuals and groups that help us better understand and grow the school culture of caring. On May 11, a team of 15 We Care Reading Café volunteers were celebrated as Pathfinders for activating the power of caring together to grow relational connections



between school and community.

The collective civic gifts of the Reading Café volunteer team inspire hope. They shine in serving community as former Head Start teacher, gifted artists /musicians, summer arts camp teacher, director and board members of Homer Main Street, former teacher / coach, retired CPA's, Home Sweet Homer volunteers, Library Board president, former elementary teacher, grandmother, church members, Garden Club members, Keep Hope Alive volunteer, Food Pantry volunteer, co-founders of Tapestry Community Women's Ministry, columnist for The Guardian, former physician and English professor, VP branch manager and community development officer of GIBSland Bank, professional forester, and Special Education Department volunteer.

Tina describes volunteer team character traits in their Pathfinder Awards: compassionate and caring, conscientious caring leader, radiant smile and caring heart, champion cheerleader, compassionate community servant and relational leader, generous giver of many talents, true blessing, immersed in serving HES students with acts of kindness and caring, dedicated servant leader, humble and caring heart, giving and loving personality, always willing to go above and beyond to help others.

We congratulate and celebrate Gale, Pat, Christy, Jimmy, Nancy, Graham, Denice, Michelle, Christi, Terry, Sherry, Sylvia, Phillip, Mary, and Weston. Thank you!

Stories move us. Connecting our capacity to care together is a powerfully renewing force for community.