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Mindful Littles launches Healing Initiative in Paradise

Submitted by Lisa Sadikman



Peace Kits were delivered to Paradise students last spring. Photo provided

On Sept. 9, Mindful Littles, based in Orinda, officially launched its Healing Initiative in the Paradise Ridge community, which was greatly devastated by the Camp Fire 10 months ago. Integrated lessons will teach students critical mindfulness, yoga and social-emotional learning skills to help them build inner resilience, lower their stress and anxiety after trauma, develop compassion and encourage a positive mindset for the future.

Mindful Littles facilitators will bring the unique approach into every classroom across all three elementary schools in the Paradise Unified School District. In addition to student lessons, the program provides self-care guidance for educators and administrators, as well as service learning programs for the community.

The Mindful Littles story in Paradise is one of miracles. Last spring the small nonprofit, in partnership with Orinda Union School District, facilitated an initiative called Peace Kits for Paradise. Over the course of eight school days, Mindful Littles led mindful service learning experiences for more than 1,600 elementary school students in Orinda. The students learned about the Camp Fire and what it means to be resilient, kind and compassionate. In buddy pairs, they assembled 300 Peace Kits containing 11 mindfulness tools including

student-created breathing tools, gratitude journals, eye pillows and notes of loving kindness and encouragement.

A few weeks later, 30 volunteers with the Orinda Union School District and Mindful Littles visited Ponderosa Elementary School to deliver the kits. They spent the day teaching students how to use the tools in their kits, including how to take calming breaths, ways to access gratitude and how to relieve physical and emotional stress. During this unforgettable heartfelt day together, it became evident that the need for Mindful Littles work was critical in Paradise Ridge.

A growing body of research highlights the tangible benefits of mindfulness for communities and individuals who've experienced trauma. Mindful Littles' goal is to bring these benefits to the children in Paradise during the yearlong program. The program is funded by a grant from the North Valley Community Foundation to the Paradise Unified School District.

"We are deeply grateful and honored to have the opportunity to begin our Healing Initiative in Paradise Unified Elementary Schools," said Tanuka Gordon, founder of Mindful Littles. "Compassion has been at the root of our work from our very first mindful service learning project in my backyard to the programs we oversee in many schools and institutions today. As we begin work with each student in Paradise Ridge, this intention of compassion will remain at the core."

"As someone who grew up in Paradise and studied in PUSD schools kindergarten through 12th grade, I have a deep commitment to seeing the Ridge community recover and thrive in the wake of the Camp Fire," said Lauryn Gregorio, lead Mindful Littles facilitator in Paradise. "I hope to offer my passion for mindfulness, community-building, and resilience in a way that supports students, educators, and families to feel nurtured and supported in the challenging process of rebuilding the Paradise community."

"Our hope is that we can bring deep healing to the beautiful community of Paradise Ridge through our mindfulness, social-emotional learning and service learning programs," said Gordon. "As we plant the seeds of compassion, we hope our work can have a small part in rebuilding Paradise Ridge into a vibrant community once again."

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