

CPMS Community Kindness: making sustainable “Kind Masks for Earth”

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Employees at the CPMS Group are going above and beyond to improve the communities they serve.

As well as being experts in delivering rail projects, staff have, and continue, to make a difference in the local areas and raise thousands of pounds for charities.

Sian Jones is marketing executive at the CPMS Group and has written an article about their efforts in helping:

“CPMS Group Community Kindness is about making a difference to the communities where we work.

We do this by inspiring employees to become personally involved with local community groups and supporting small, local, companies and charities.

In the last few years, CPMS employees have raised over £135,000 in aid of local charities, including NewVic (a Newham Sixth Form College), Headway (a UK-wide charity that works to improve life after brain injury) and the Samaritans. Our most recent initiative has been an online auction and raffle where we raised over

£3,500 for Headway Cardiff and South East Wales. This included Gareth Thomas CBE, the Welsh former professional rugby player, as guest speaker.

CPMS gives all its employees five paid volunteering days every year, to be used to make a difference in the local communities where we work. Of course, volunteering has become a lot more challenging since March this year. The guidelines imposed as a result of Covid 19 have limited both our ability to work together as employees on volunteering initiatives but also to engage on a more personal level with the local community groups we aim to support.

The pandemic has also brought a whole range of new issues for charities of all sizes. Fundraising initiatives had to be either cancelled or scaled back (the Railway Ball is a prime example) and some of the more inter-personal services charities provide to people in their communities has suffered significant limitations. In fact, 72% of charities have said that they have witnessed a huge increase in demand for their support whilst at the same time suffering a fall in revenue. The virus has had a devastating impact on the third sector.

This awareness has motivated us, the Community Kindness Team at CPMS, to be even more creative in our approach to supporting local communities and charities. We quickly put our heads together to find ways to help the key workers, who are working so hard in the care homes and hospices of our local areas. One of the ideas we came up with was face masks, which offer many advantages but also have devastating effects. Positively, face masks are a necessity in our day to day lives now, helping to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and keep us safe. Negatively, the single use masks have a disastrous impact on our environment. They are being used all around the world and end up in our landfills and eventually our oceans. So we decided to make "Kind Masks for Earth".

We immediately reached out to our communities to enquire whether there was a demand. There was, and it was huge! Although medical professionals and those providing care services are required to wear medical grade face coverings, the service users and volunteers who support these much-needed charities were in urgent need of re-usable face masks. And this in huge quantities. So, we did our research. Working with the CPMS Sustainability and Environment Team, we studied the best pattern and sustainable and recyclable materials that could be used to make the masks. 100% cotton was recommended as it can be layered and sewn to filter out particles, whilst easy enough to breathe through. We even managed to source sustainable elastic to bring our masks together. And of course, a sewing machine.

Within a week, we started making sustainable Kind Masks for Earth. It proved to be a very rewarding initiative. It enabled us to make eco-friendly face masks for use by those who urgently need them, whilst allowing us to spend time together again as colleagues after months of lockdown.

Over a period of a few weeks, we made over 200 Kind Masks for Earth which we donated to six different charities, including Age UK (Cambridge & Peterborough), Porchlight (Kent's largest charity for homeless and vulnerable people), Keech Hospice Care (the adult hospice for Luton and South Bedfordshire), Garden House Hospice (hospice care for patients, families and carers across North Hertfordshire, Stevenage and surrounding towns and villages), Jimmy Macs (registered charity for the retired and disabled) and Pinewood Care Home (dementia and residential care home in Ilford).

This was my first initiative leading the Community Kindness team, so I was a little hesitant at first, especially as I had not done any sewing since high school! But I had nothing to worry about. It was a huge success and all the charities we donated our Kind Masks for Earth too were truly grateful. We got some amazing thank you's from all of them.

I am extremely proud of what we have achieved and I would like to say a huge thank you to all of the CPMS employees and their family members for their massive support and efforts in helping us make this happen.

We, the CPMS Community Kindness team, are excitedly looking to the future. We have many more initiatives planned to support local communities and charities, including getting involved in Rail Aid to support the Railway Children and also taking on the 3000-squat challenge throughout November in aid of Refuge.

Remember, you can do a little or a lot to help your local communities and charities. We are in the middle of a pandemic and face masks will continue to be needed. So, if you have some spare time, please do reach out to your local community to see if they need sustainable face masks. Simple templates can be found online and, if you have not sewn before, why not try something new, learn a new skill (or polish an old one) and make someone's day a little safer?

I leave you with some words from Garden House Hospice, one of the organisations we gave masks to:

'Thank you so much to the CPMS Community Kindness team for making the masks and donating them to the Hospice. Thank you so very much.' – Jean Allison, Garden House Hospice."

Sian Jones marketing executive at the CPMS Group. Visit www.cpmsgroup.com

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