

Boxes of hope

HOW 11 CLUBS CAME TOGETHER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIVES OF YOUNG WOMEN WHO'VE BEEN SEXUALLY ABUSED.

Words **WENDY ROSE GOULD**



Eagle Scout candidate Ethan VonDuhn had a somber request when he approached the Kiwanis Club of Brecksville, Ohio. He had learned that patients who were brave enough to report sexual abuse and seek treatment at a hospital had to leave their clothing behind as evidence. They often were given second-hand, hastily gathered garments in return — providing little comfort in an already traumatic time. A local hospital was seeking donations of new outfits to distribute instead.

Would the Brecksville Kiwanians help?

Not only did club members say yes, but they recruited the other 10 clubs of Ohio Division 24 to join the

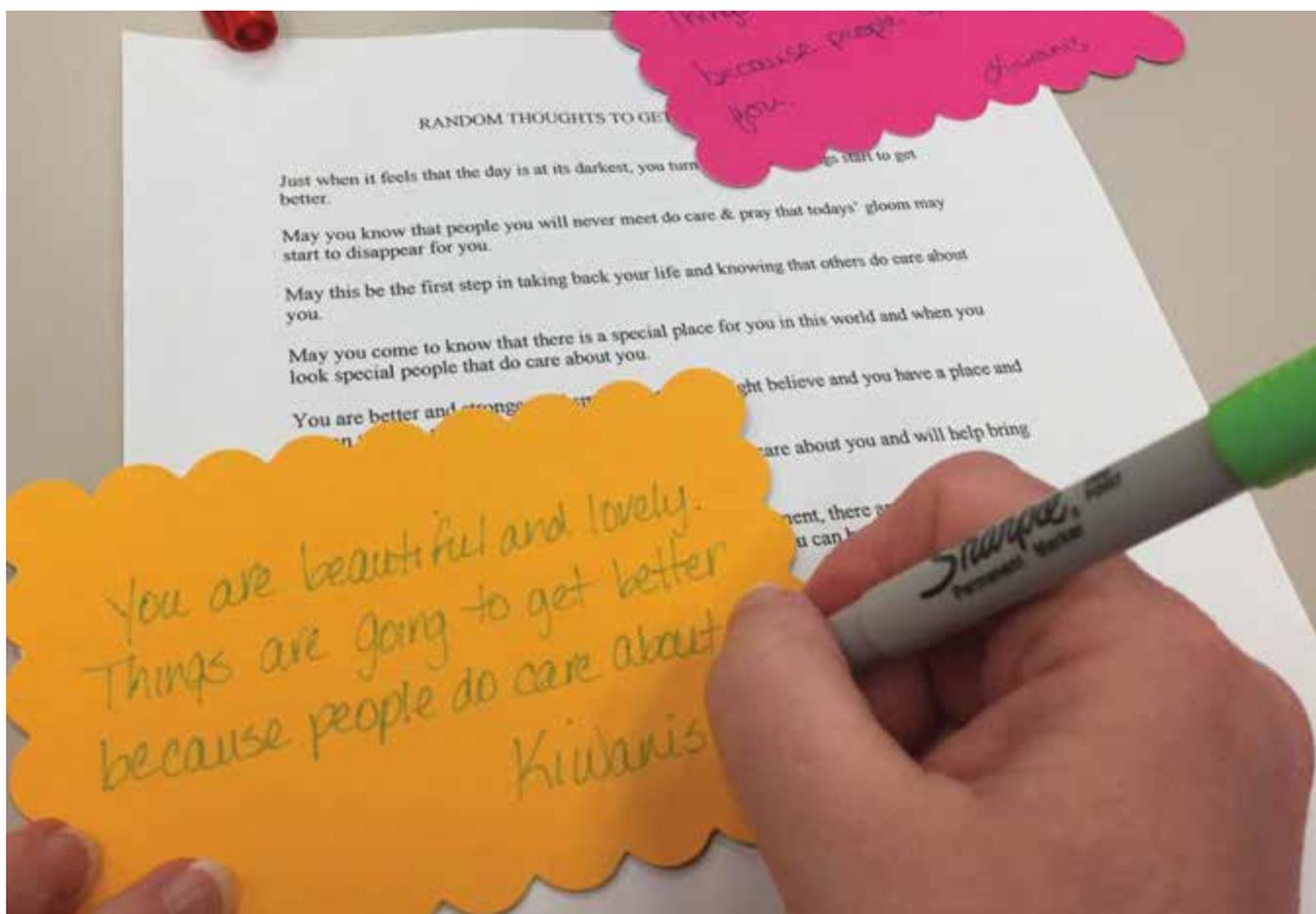
effort. And sadly, there was much need. Hospital nurse Elizabeth Booth expanded on VonDuhn's original information when she spoke to the Brecksville club. Sexual abuse is more common than many people think, she explained, with an increase in opioid addiction and human trafficking creating even more cases.

The Division 24 clubs knew exactly what they needed to do. They collected monetary donations, held fundraising events and ultimately purchased enough cloth-

ing to create 100 gift-box donations for preteen and teen girls.

"After being through a traumatic experience, the need for new, unused clothing is important for a person's self-esteem," says Kevin Brusk, a Brecksville Kiwanian and former Division 24 lieutenant governor who led the project. "Each package contained a modest outfit consisting of a top, slacks, socks and underwear. One of the most important items in the packages was a handwritten note of encouragement. We wanted these girls to know that there are people who care about them and love them, and





that there is good in the world.”

For example, one note read, “Please know that you are thought about and admired for your courage and strength.” Another said, “You are beautiful and lovely. Things are going to get better because people do care about you.”

Kiwanians carefully wrapped each outfit in tissue paper, inserted a note and gift-wrapped the box in preparation for delivery.

“When we arrived at the hospital, our favorite nurse, Elizabeth, along with a local TV camera and some outreach staff from the hospital, greeted us,” says Brusk. “They had known the number of packages that

we were bringing but were overwhelmed when they saw them.”

Afterward, the Kiwanians once again met with Booth, who reiterated the importance of the donations. The beginning of the healing process greatly affects a victim’s future, she explained. The members’ donations and kind words foster trust and show compassion at a time when the young women most need

such encouragement. Many of the recipients, she added, asked to keep the boxes that held what Brusk and the other club members called Kiwanis Care Packages.

