

Safe Neighborhoods News

Safe Kids Now Network, LLC APRIL 2025

Stephanie Mann, Director

Sher Graham, Editor



Making Neighborhoods Safer for Children and Families!

Safe Kids Now Network LLC (www.safekidsnow.com) shares information to empower and keep children, families, and neighbors safe throughout our global communities.

NEIGHBORHOOD BREAKING NEWS!

- INTENTIONAL GRATITUDE. Be in gratitude each moment of the day for each small success.
- New column: Mental Health Mindfulness: Seeking stories of HOPE from personal trauma incidents that have happened to adults and kids. For more information, email slgraham4969@gmail.com if you would consent to share your story for Safe Neighborhoods News.
- SPREAD AWARENESS. Visit the SKN website and check out the resources. If you have any resources we can add, email safeneighborhoods@gmail.com.
- Sher Graham shares her perspective on May 4, 1970, Kent State University campus mass shootings. She was a freshman and on campus during the week events prior to the shooting.
- Stephanie discusses the role of community governments working together to engage residents to collaborate to keep kids safe.

From the Director's Desk

What an April this has been. There are so many mass shootings in our country, juvenile violence increase and parents seeking guidance in keeping their kids safe. This month, our articles focus on the role of communities in keeping kids safe, mass school shooting experience from Editor Sher Graham, and a new column "Mental Health Mindfulness."

I love the advice that Charlie Kirk gives students on college campuses. He is right on target! Many young people are confused about this topic.

https://patriotpowersnetwork.com/charlie-kirk-drops-truth-bomb-weak-men-come-from-easy-women/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=charlie-kirk-drops-truth-bomb-weak-men-come-from-easy-women

Children are God's love gift; they are Heaven's generous reward - Psalm 127:3

Let's Make Cities Safe for Kids

By Stephanie L. Mann

Police departments are militaristic organizations with a Chief, Captains, Commanders, Lieutenants, and police officers, and they rely on police training. Many years ago, crime prevention activists worked with community activists in our county and formed the Citizens Crime Prevention Committee. We were independent from police departments and worked with many city services for training and guidance! As trainers, we work with the police but not for the police. The role of a police officer is to react to crime. The role of citizens is to prevent crime.

As citizen activists, we received a grant from the Office of Criminal Justice Planning. We set up an office with a program director, secretary, and six "Neighborhood Safety Experts" (NSE) who looked like and spoke the language of various communities. I was one of the NSE who worked with city leaders and helped organize 27 city-wide volunteer committees. We recruited volunteers and offered stipends in low-income communities.

Volunteers organized "Neighborhood Watch" groups to help neighbors take responsibility for neighborhood safety and unite the community. NSE significantly reduced fear, stress, and anger. NSE ran meetings, reduced public outrage, and involved citizens to help keep neighborhoods safe. Citizens felt empowered, and police only showed up at meetings to explain their role and answer questions. Volunteers recruited other volunteers, explaining why citizens were critical to keeping neighborhoods safe. They shared stories about problems, stopping youthful bad behavior, and solving minor issues.

In high-fear neighborhoods, and without being noticed, neighbors played checkers, watered the grass, and walked the dog while they took pictures and wrote down descriptions, times, dates, and license numbers. They identified drug dealers and traffickers, which NSE reported to police. We had many stories of success.

The NSE trained committee members, assigned roles, and learned community concerns. With guidance, youth went door-to-door with surveys and even offered to help seniors. NSE created networks of communication, a newsletter, shared stats and resources, held monthly meetings to educate, and invited experts to speak. We recognized citizens and police for their successes and had a yearly banquet. At our last banquet, 450 residents and police attended the celebration.

The 27 different police departments learned that involved citizens can create positive change and become police supporters. In the process, the Citizens Committee helped reduce crime, drugs, and many other concerns, including reduced gun sales.

"We the people" can change behavior and attitudes toward community safety and police. At the end of six years, city leaders and police chiefs expressed appreciation for the 27 volunteer prevention committees that the Citizens Crime Prevention Committee had organized throughout the county. Prevention is all about citizens taking responsibility for home and neighborhood safety.

Every city should consider hiring and training citizens to be Neighborhood Safety Experts and help bring neighborhoods together to reduce fear and social isolation for the safety and mental health of the whole community.

About the Director: Stephanie L. Mann, Crime and Violence Prevention Consultant and founder of Safe Kids Now National Network LLC. Her experiences in crime prevention has given her the insight, wisdom, and vision to advocate for safe communities and neighborhoods for all children around the world. She is the author of six books on family, home, neighborhood and city safety. Stephanie conducts workshops and keynote speeches as a professional speaker on crime prevention and safety. You can reach her at safeneighborhoods@gmail.com or visit <https://www.safekidsnow.com>

Seven Days Changed my Life Forever

By Sher Graham

May 4, 1970. Kent State University. I woke up early to make sure I could walk to my class at the Speech & Hearing Center. Yet, my intuition felt different. The six days prior had been intense days of protesting the Vietnam War, bringing our military personnel home, silent prayers for friends and family who had not come home, and for equality in our country.

The campus celebrated the first Earth Day on April 22, 1970, with an estimated 20 million people nationwide with over 10,000 sites including elementary and secondary schools, universities and community groups across the United States. Yet, my intuition still felt different. As much as we celebrated the Earth Day raising awareness of environmental issues and encouraging preservation and protection of our natural resources, there was an underlying tension I could see and feel as I observed the group participants and continued to hear underpinnings of displeasure of how our government was managing our military in Vietnam.

Small groups of protesters would chant and wave signs around campus buildings and collectively share flyers and informational materials about the war, their stance and ask for support in protest. I remember not knowing what to believe or what side of the war I stood on. Looking back 50 years later, I realize I was in my own thought world – naïve about what was happening and not sure if I wanted to choose a side or if I really understood the rationale for why the US had invaded Vietnam. So confused. I choose to continue to attend classes and not get involved.

It wasn't just Kent State campus where there were protests and uprisings. The entire country was in unrest over their loved ones drafted to serve and then get shipped to Vietnam, some never to return home and others who were never found again. Sadness was everywhere. Since I was 13, I had been involved in state politics as an advocate for mental health and intellectual disabilities. I became friends with many of the legislators in the Statehouse, and with some part of their family. I knew the legislators in Northeastern Ohio and met them when they came to campus to talk with the college President and local National Guard leadership. Much was left unsaid but observance told me that there was much going on behind the scenes to plan and make sure our campus was safe.

The nearest National Guard Armory was in Akron, 10 miles away. Rumors began to surface with National Guard troops staging there, in anticipation of any violent acts occurring on campus. The more negative the rumors, the more protesting groups gathered on campus. There is a difference of opinion about 'who' the makeup of the 2,000 protesters who came to Kent State to hang out, protest or just be a part of the happening.

During the week, I talked to my grandmother and found out that my uncle who was a member of the Ohio National Guard stationed in Columbus, that his unit had been called to Columbus in case of potential incidents at Ohio State University, where he was deployed. Later on, I also learned that my cousin Steve had come to Kent to visit a friend and he could not return to Ohio State as the city was under lockdown.

I continued to go to classes daily, even though class attendance was low. Protesting groups grew in size. I found myself becoming part of the observing people who wanted to see what was going on, but did not want to protest. As President Nixon announced the authorization of the US into Cambodia to fight the Viet Cong, the war effort grew and so did the chants and signs and acts of violence on our campus.

By the end of April, I met individuals who had come to Kent from other parts of the country to be a part of this protest. Kent was known as a liberal college, so your political party did not really matter. What was important was your stand on the war and the invasion. As of this writing my memory does not recall all of the groups on

campus but I do remember the Weather Underground Organization and Black Panthers. People from West Coast colleges such as Berkeley were on our campus. The National Guard had moved into the area and by April 30, our campus was the scene of military arsenal and National Guard members staged by the President's office and in front of other buildings.

Kent State University is located within the city limits of Kent. City went on lockdown. Curfews were enforced. And then it happened.

Friday, May 1: Demonstration organized to protest Cambodian invasion, with the burial of a copy of the Constitution, symbolizing its 'murder.' Crowds moved toward the center of town that evening, breaking windows of local businesses. The mayor declared a state of emergency and elicited assistance from the Governor's office. Downtown was closed, and people were forced back toward campus by riot-gearred police with tear gas. That was the first time I remember not feeling safe. I thought if I just stayed in my dorm and went to class, I would be safe.

Saturday, May 2: Townspeople were threatened. Students helped to clean up downtown. An injunction was issued prohibiting damage to campus buildings. Evening came and over one thousand people surrounded the Army Reserve Officer Training Corp building; it was set on fire. At that time, my boyfriend and I walked to the area and stayed on the hillside watching the chaos. Later, we found out that the NBC news crew was filming behind us. His high school varsity jacket was on a segment that his father saw on the NBC Nightly News. Several hours later, he received a telephone call asking him why he was on the news and by the building. National Guard cleared the area and students and non-students had to stay in the dormitories.

Sunday, May 3: I attended church on campus, and prayed for peace. That day was full of meetings resulting in miscommunications between state, local and university officials. Messages that were spread amongst the city and campus were not the same. I lived in Fletcher Hall, not far from the Commons. Later that evening, I heard shouting and ramblings from the Commons as I walked the campus before curfew. It was spring and the silence in the air was disturbing. I could feel the tenseness in the atmosphere. The crowd did not disperse. The Ohio Riot Act was read and tear gas fired. I remember smelling the tear gas from where I stood. It was time to return to my dorm.

Monday, May 4: My 10 am class was still scheduled. I left the dorm at 9:30 to walk, as I was not sure how long it would take me to get to the building. After class, I had to walk the same path up the hill from the Commons I had originally taken. Several days prior, it was determined that a rally at noon would be held, even though it had been banned. Coming down the hill, I heard chants, curses and seeing rocks thrown at the National Guard who were staged on the Commons hillside across from where I was walking. I ran as fast as I could, rushing into the dorm to the shouts from others that gunshots and tear gas had been fired. More tear gas. More rocks. Near Blanket Hill, the guardsmen turned and fired into the group. I learned that four people were dead and nine people were wounded. Hours later, I heard that Allison Krause and Sandy Schuler had died. Allison had lived on my floor in the freshman dorm. I really liked her. We were so different but she had confidence in her beliefs and used her voice to stand up for what she believed in. That was something to this day I wish I would have had the confidence to do so, So much more happened you can Google and read about. Campus was on full lockdown. We were told through the resident advisors that we were able to leave on Monday, May 5, by bus. Buses to various other Ohio cities were taking students, no matter where you lived, to cities away from Kent. My boyfriend and I took our books, some clothing and we got on a bus that took us to my hometown.

I am leaving this story here, as I could write much more.

I wanted to share this with our members because it reminded me of the tragic terrorism incidents of mass school and workplace violence incidents in our global community this month. It is not all that it appears to be. We must find a way to end the violence through acts of kindness, respect for others, and making sure that we take each moment not for granted but in gratitude that we are chosen to be on this Earth.

About the Writer: Sher Graham began as a community activist at age 12. Her commitment to making life better for others began with the legacy inspired from her grandmothers. As an international best-selling author, speaker and workshop facilitator, she shares her personal journey of surviving parental substance abuse disorder, humiliation trauma, verbal/physical assault and being an unwanted child who had no voice through her speaking, writing, and workshops. She is an international best-selling anthology author of 14 mental health, spiritual and business books. Her journey has led her to advocate for mental health services for everyone, bring awareness of mental illness stigmas and to guide others to create heart calm within their chaotic environments. You can reach her at slgraham4969@gmail.com or <https://www.shergraham.com>.

MENTAL HEALTH MINDFULNESS

Welcome to “Mental Health Mindfulness!” This new column focuses on stories of SKN’s national network members, information on mental health, mindfulness, as well as topics and issues related to community health of our families and children. Children come in all ages. Each child is a unique individual, with gifts, talents and dreams of creating a peaceful world. What are your gifts and talents you can share with someone today? Sher

It is important to take one day at a time, one hour at a time. Sometimes it is all that we have. On March 6, my brother passed suddenly. Cause of his death has not yet been determined. As I was the last family member to find out, as other cousins knew the day it happened, I received the call 27 hours late. Family dynamics are not always ‘hunky dory’; my family relationships were tolerable. Yet, that incident has forced me to make sure I cried and grieved, even though at the time I told friends I was ok that it was between he and God. Despite that emotion, it was an AHA moment for me. I don’t want a sad heart. I want to be happy again.

So, here are my words of wisdom for April.

- 1. Be in gratitude you were chosen to be alive on the Earth.*
- 2. Every morning I wake up and say “I’m still alive, a miracle. And so I keep on pushing.” Jim Carrey*
- 3. If you want to make your dreams come true, the first thing you have to do is wake up.” JM Power*
- 4. Lose an hour in the morning, and you will spend all day looking for it. Richard Whately*
- 5. Write it on your heart that every day is the best day of the year. Ralph Waldo Emerson*
- 6. I am heart calm. Sher Graham*

Edits From the Editor

Note: The articles in Safe Kids Now News do not necessarily reflect the vision and mission of our organization. We provide a forum for our network members to express their thoughts on current topics related to children and families. If you have any issue with an article, please let us know.

YOUR NEWS: *If you have relevant articles or announcements about important events aligned with our efforts to shed light on the issues related to families and kids, please email safeneighborhoods@gmail.com by the 1st of each month. If it is an event, email no later than 60 days lead time to promote your event.*