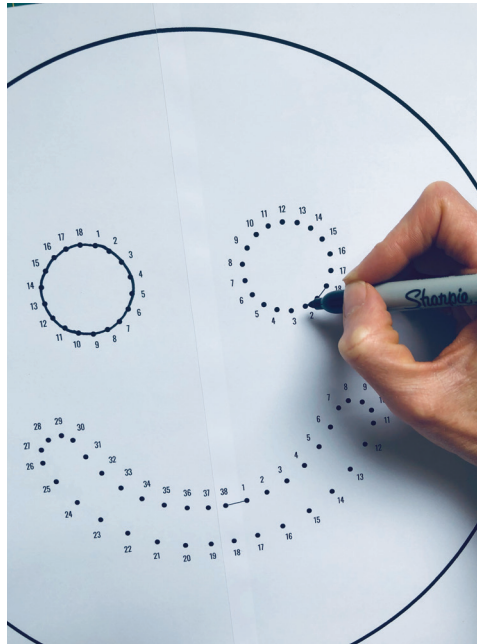


OUR WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY: THE POWER OF A SIMPLE SMILE

by Kimberley Bevan

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The rainbow pictures displayed in our windows last year were a symbol of hope. They were a joy to look at as we trod the same streets and neighbourhoods over and over last Spring on our daily walks.



--> Join the dots to draw your smile

a great listen. Simply the act of smiling can lower stress levels, reduce blood pressure and elevate our mood and that's because of the endorphins and serotonin released by our brains when we smile. The very act of seeing someone smile triggers an automatic muscular response in our own face to mimic the smile that we just saw. Smiles bring about smiles.

So it got me thinking about this month's project....if when we smile we feel happy, and seeing someone smile triggers an automatic response to smile back.....how could we spread happiness throughout

We couldn't see people, but we could see the pictures they had made. We clung on to what they stood for and they reminded us that our community was still there, in their houses, still finding ways to support each other.

And so here we are, nineteen months on, seeing a sense of normality returning. As we re-emerge and tentatively peel away our face masks, I have come to realise how much I have previously taken for granted the privilege of greeting someone with a smile. Smiling is good for our health. Ron Gutman's TED talk called "The Hidden Power Of Smiling" is



--> Line your streets with smiles!

our community using the power of a simple smile?

Turn over to reveal the centrefold dot-to-dot smile! All you have to do is join the dots to draw your smile, and pop it in the window this September as you did your rainbows! It's as simple as that. Feel free to add colour and draw into it however you like! Let's use our windows of opportunity to line our streets with smiles and continue showing our solidarity and warmth for our community.

A couple of months ago Reverend Kate Bottley said on her BBC Radio 2 show that 'yes she'd obviously

missed seeing her family and friends during the pandemic, that went without saying, but most of all she'd missed the chance encounters with strangers'. I got what she meant. I realised I had missed being able to smile at strangers.

My daughter was born two weeks before Lockdown 1.0. She is all too familiar with strangers wearing face masks. As the pandemic played out, this hasn't stopped those strangers smiling at her from behind their masks. She has waved and smiled at people from her pram and in turn they have cooed over her and returned her smiles, mostly forgetting their smiles were in fact concealed by their masks. Luckily it didn't matter though, because my daughter had come to learn that eyes smile too, and so too do voices. She has made several people's day with her smile, one lovely lady in Heaton Moor actually reversed her mobility scooter to tell me so.

So, this September there may be a little boy or girl on their very first walk to school that would welcome seeing a smiley face in your window. Or there may be a new mum or dad out walking their newborn baby in the pram after an exhausting night in need of a smile. Or perhaps there are other elderly ladies or gentlemen out and about on their mobility scooters looking for a smile to make their day too.....whoever is passing by let's not underestimate the power a simple smile may have that day.

As ever, we'd absolutely love to see what you do with your smiley faces and see how many you spot in the windows around The Heatons and Reddish. Please tag @kimbeaubevan and @heatonspost on Instagram with any smiley sightings including the hashtag #MadeWithTheHeatonsPost .

