



## First Step

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” This famous quote by Maya Angelou was said by my mother almost every day during my childhood. As I have grown older, the message of this quote has become steadfast in my daily life. I have been both an observer and victim of actions motivated by hate and each time I can hear my mother repeating Maya Angelou’s quote in the back of my mind. Acts of hate and violence have become social norms, but my Community Service Initiative, *First Step*, is working to change the narrative.

*First Step* started as a small presentation that I would take into classrooms across the state. The intended message is to teach students that the “first step” to creating a kinder environment is being the person that stands up for change. This message is demonstrated through my unique tailored, age-appropriate presentations to show students the domino effect of their small act of kindness. Through my partnership with *The Be Kind Crew*, I have been able to elevate the quality of my presentations and quantity of impacted individuals. Not only has this partnership allowed me to increase my outreach, but it has prepared me to spread *First Step* on a widespread scale as Miss Missouri’s Teen.

In addition to my partnership with *The Be Kind Crew* I have created a social media hashtag, #FirstStep2Kind, that is used on all my posts. This hashtag has helped me to launch my initiative in the digital world and form a relationship with *The Kindness Rocks Project*. I have organized a monthly “Kindness Rocks Night” in my community in which people are invited to attend and paint rocks with motivational sayings on them to randomly place around town. My group has been recognized on the organization’s official social media pages allowing the mission of *First Step* to be shared with their 39.6 thousand followers.

*First Step* has created a large impact in the lives of people across the nation, and as Miss Missouri’s Teen I hope to utilize the established partnerships with sponsors, such as Rebel Athletic and their #RebelAgainstBullying initiative, to create a kinder society. As Maya Angelou said, “people will never forget how you made them feel.” In a world that is so full of negativity my program is ready to help individuals of all ages take the *First Step* toward a more united future.

  
Ava Smith  
Miss Central Missouri’s Teen