

LOUISVILLE, KY
Mayor Greg Fischer

MAYOR'S GIVE A DAY WEEK OF SERVICE

In January 2011, at his first inauguration as Mayor of Louisville, Greg Fischer cited three city values to be sought: A city of lifelong learning, a healthier city, and an even more compassionate city. Mayor Fischer envisioned Louisville as a thriving, resilient community built on compassion, which he defines as ensuring that every member has the tools and opportunities they need to thrive, flourish, and reach their highest human potential. For the City, this means building the “social muscle” needed to confront the inevitable challenges, both natural and man-made, that cities face.

In November of that year, in signing a resolution with the Charter for Compassion International, the Mayor and Metro Council formally committed Louisville to becoming a “Compassionate City.” The intended impact of this commitment was: to identify community issues that need to be addressed through compassionate action; to nurture and grow a community that has greater awareness and understanding of these issues; and to take deliberate action to remove barriers that keep people from realizing their full potential. That same year, Mayor Fischer issued a call for residents to offer one day of service to others, an initiative he called “Give A Day.”

In its first year, the initiative drew hundreds of individuals to perform one day of service. By the following year, with the help of community partners, the commitment had grown to a week of service. It is now an annual week-long celebration in which the entire city engages in acts of volunteerism, service and compassion.

Thanks to the collective expertise and support of its founding group of leaders, the Mayor’s Give A Day (MGAD) Week of Service breaks records every year for numbers of volunteers and acts performed. Now in his third and final term, Mayor Fischer is taking steps to ensure that MGAD is sustainable and continues to grow after his administration, including creation of a Board of Directors to grow the event and develop strategies, partnerships and opportunities for all citizens to be engaged in year-round service.

Other compassion-related, year-round initiatives and partnerships in the City include:

- The Compassionate Schools Project, an effort in Jefferson County Public Schools that facilitates the integrated development of mind and body by interweaving support in academic achievement with instruction on mental fitness, health, and compassionate character;
- Lean Into Louisville, an unprecedented series of presentations, conversations, activities and art exhibits to explore and confront the history and legacy of all forms of discrimination and inequality;
- Metro Mentors, which allows and encourages City employees to spend two hours of paid time each week working with at-risk youth;
- Compassionate Louisville, a grassroots network of organizations that have adopted the Compassion Resolution and work to raise awareness and champion the growth of compassion. A steering committee and work groups were formed to focus on Youth Education, Elderly, Healthcare, and Neighborhoods;
- University of Louisville teaching compassion and mindfulness to its medical students and hosting the annual SOUL (Student Outreach Uniting Louisville) event during MGAD;
- WE DAY, a national organization that promotes compassion and service year-round throughout Kentucky and organizes an annual youth empowerment summit and We Walk for Compassion event during MGAD, with more than 3,250 business employees and students participating;

- Passport Health Plan Spring Community Wide Cleanups with Brightside, with more than 19,000 employees from local companies removing litter and debris from neighborhoods, parks and schools; and
- Other local compassion champions include: Muhammad Ali Center, Center for Interfaith Relations, Interfaith Paths to Peace, Global Game Changers, Southern Seminary, Presbyterian Center USA, and more.

Many corporate partners have now implemented service/volunteering into their business plans and are offering their employees the opportunity to spend time each week volunteering, while still being compensated. They are also helping the City make a greater impact by offering financial assistance to eligible non-profit agencies to cover MGAD project materials, such as cleaning supplies, gardening tools, paint, gloves, etc. In 2018, the City allocated more than \$11,600 to 51 agencies; it plans to offer the opportunity to participate to more agencies, and to double the amount granted to them in 2019.

MGAD is helping create what Mayor Fischer says is the “social muscle” that a city relies on in times of crisis. In 2015, the crisis took the form of a mosque being vandalized with graffiti. The day after it happened, Mayor Fischer called on the community to show up to help paint over the graffiti. More than 1,000 community members arrived to do the work that could have been managed by five, turning a tragedy into what was seen as a beautiful outpouring of love, interfaith community, and compassion.

Louisville is now described as a place where compassion is a way of life, where collaboration between government and individuals is improving the lives of residents and building a greater sense of community and social cohesion. The City has been in contact with more than 40 others interested in adopting its model, and is now partnering with the University of Louisville on a Compassionate City Index, which will be launched in late Spring 2019 and shared with other communities. A video on MGAD is available [HERE](#).

Additional information is available from Janice Cates, Director of Development and Compassion Initiatives, at Janice.cates@louisvilleky.gov, or 502-574-8135.