

Durham School Services Fills Bus with Words of Encouragement for Mental Health Awareness Month

"Welcome to the Graffiti Bus: Where Everyone Matters"

AMES, IA, USA, May 16, 2023

/EINPresswire.com/ -- In celebration of Mental Health Awareness Month, Durham School Services' (DSS) Ames location has introduced a special, meaningful project started by DSS' Ames General Manager Sara J. Knight, called the [Graffiti Bus](#), a bus decorated internally with words of encouragement written by DSS' team members and Ames Community School District students. All 2,500+ Ames Community School District students will have the opportunity to ride the Graffiti Bus at least once before the end of the school year.

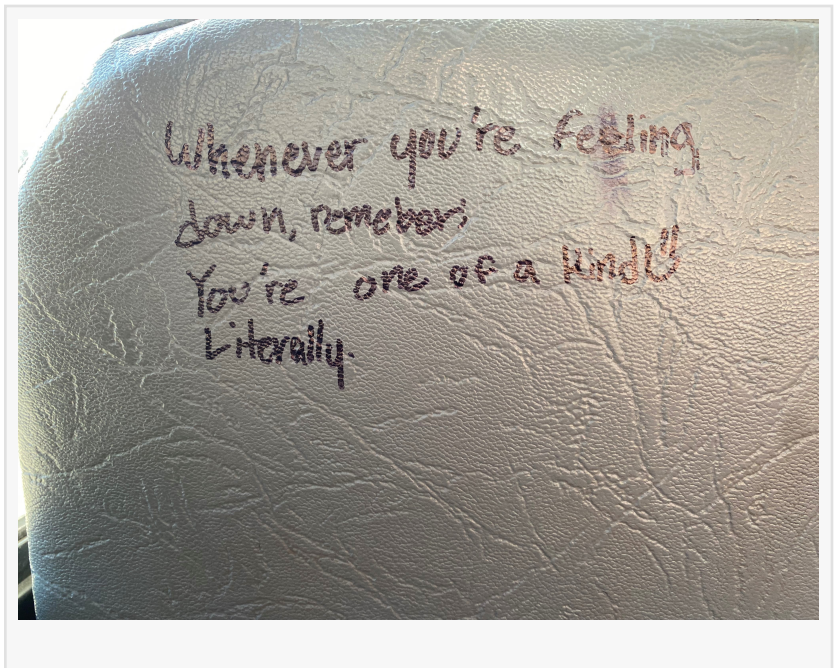


Pictured L to R: Russ Fulton, Supervisor of Safety and Training, and Sara J. Knight, General Manager

Durham is proud to continue to spread awareness about and support mental health care and services for students through the Graffiti Bus project and its [donation](#) of a school bus to its partner West Jefferson Hills School District in Pennsylvania, to transform into a mobile mental health service vehicle.

A series of events and encounters spurred on the inspiration behind the Graffiti Bus project. The first was an incident involving a student who used to ride Sara's bus when she was a school bus driver in 2014. To the surprise of everyone around the student, including Sara, the student committed suicide unexpectedly. This incident had a major impact on Sara, and she asked herself whether she could have helped prevent it by giving the student more encouragement and support. From that point on, Sara knew she wanted to honor him when the right opportunity presented itself.

Nine years later, that opportunity presented itself when Sara found what she had initially thought was typical graffiti on the back seat of one of her school buses, that is, until she read what it said – “Whenever you’re feeling down, remember, you’re one of a kind, literally.” Upon reading this, and another inspiring moment Sara had when she watched a Jennifer Lopez performance from her documentary where she sang, “if you wanna live your life, live it all the way and don’t you waste it,” a light bulb went off in Sara’s head and the Graffiti Bus project was born.



“I immediately felt encouraged by the message [on the back of the seat] and thought, wow, this student left a message of hope for any student that sat there and read it,” said Sara Knight,

General Manager at DSS’ Ames location. “It was like a light bulb went off in me, and it made me think about how we can use words to encourage others. At that time, I started putting messages of hope and encouragement around our break room, hoping to fill my team with positivity, but I knew I wanted to take these thoughts and ideas further.”

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By the last day of school, every student we transport will have had an opportunity to experience the Graffiti Bus. If it impacted one person's life, the entire project was worth every effort.”

Sara J. Knight, Ames General Manager

The project’s inception officially began in April when Knight presented the idea first to her team, who was very supportive and excited about the project, and then to their partner Ames Community School District, who wholeheartedly gave their support to implement the project. Upon receiving the school district’s blessing, Sara

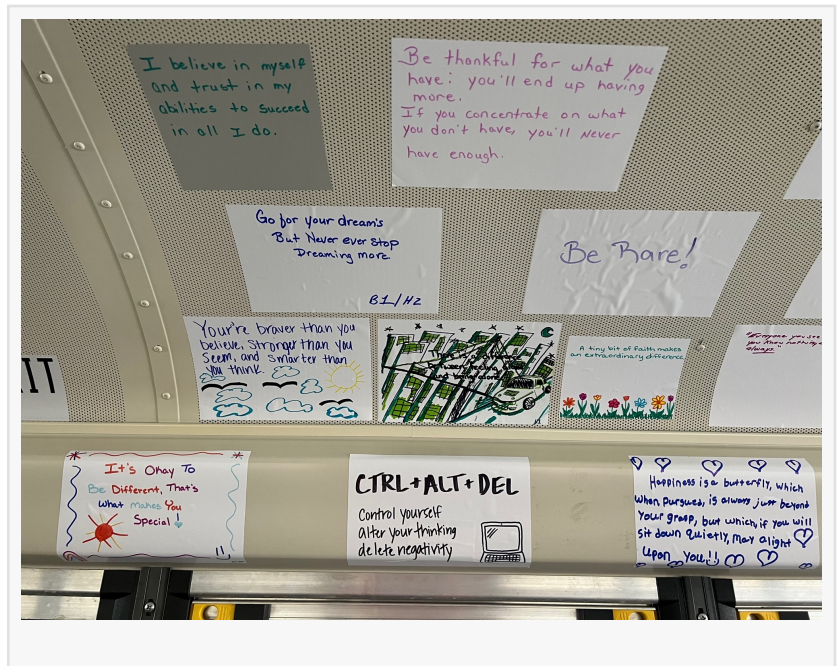
and her team started working out the routing logistics, and on April 25, 2023, the Graffiti Bus officially started its maiden journey. The team also made it a point not to leave any students out and turned it into an all-inclusive endeavor.

“The purpose is to come together to make a difference in the lives we touch by spreading positivity and filling our students with hope and encouragement,” said Sara Knight. “Besides the Graffiti Bus, we have four special education buses, and those students are unfortunately not able to ride the Graffiti Bus. We made a bunch of graffiti messages for those buses too. It was important that this bus touch every life we transport. By the last day of school, every student we transport will have had an opportunity to experience the Graffiti Bus. If it impacted one person's

life, the entire project was worth every effort we put into it. I can have an idea, but without the team's support, an idea remains just that. They are the sole reason the vision came to life. Team Ames really is the best team ever!"

"We are grateful for our many partnerships that have a positive impact on our students, and the Graffiti Bus through Durham is one shining example," said Amy DeLashmutt, Director of Communications at Ames Community School District. "Their conscious consideration for the health and well-being of our students, as well as putting in place action steps to create a sense of belonging, is precisely what we mean when we say Ames is amazing. Thank you for taking such good care of our students."

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About Durham School Services: As an industry-leading student transportation provider, Durham School Services is dedicated to the safety of our students and People, transporting more than *one million students daily and employing approximately 20,000 drivers across North America (*Pre-COVID Figures). For more than 100 years, we have been committed to Excellence and upholding our mission of getting students to school safely, on time, and ready to learn. Through this mission and a grassroots approach to our operations, Durham School Services has earned recognition as a trusted transportation provider among our Customers and the Communities we serve.

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