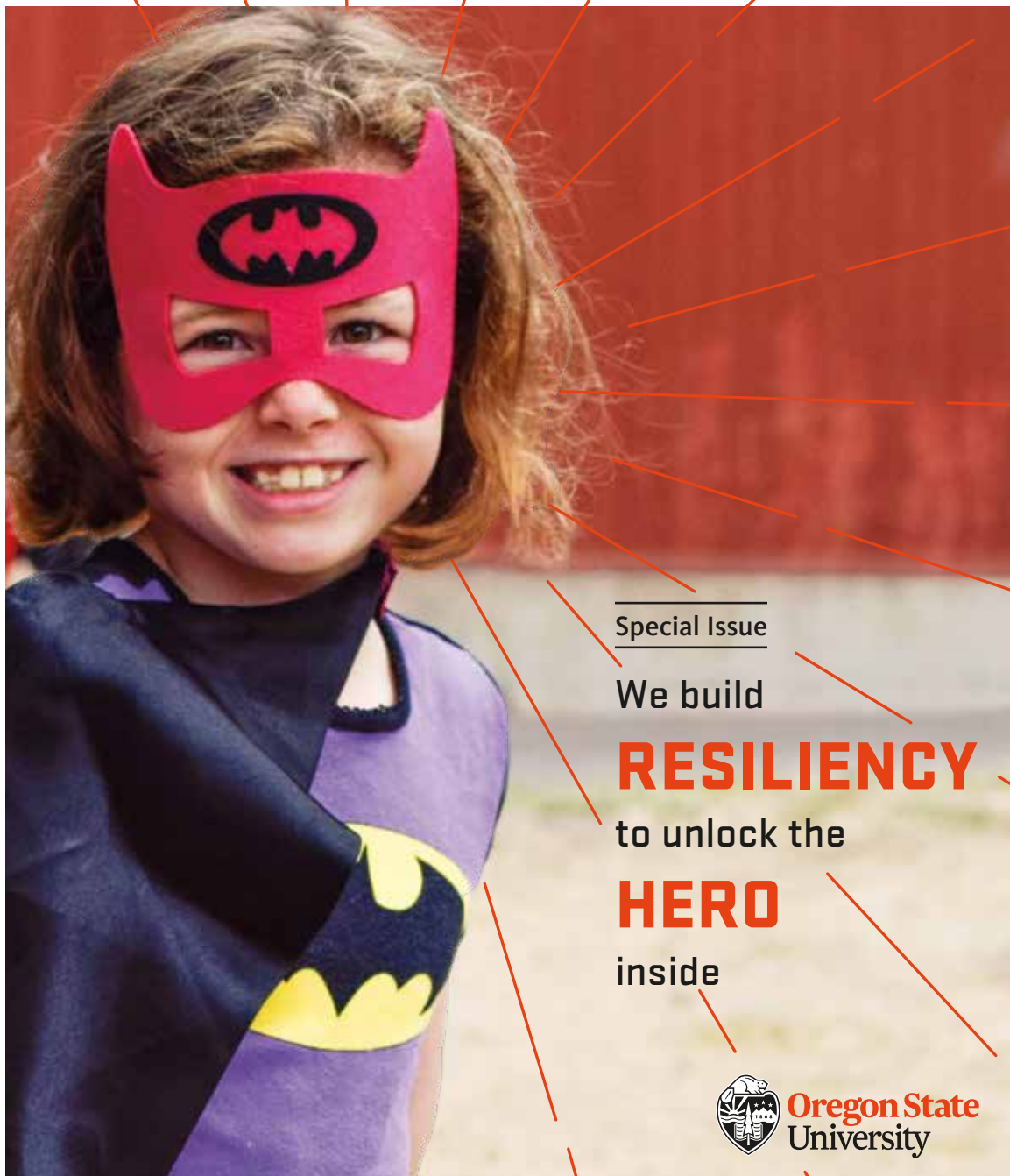


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COLLEGE OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SCIENCES

Fall 2019



Special Issue

We build

RESILIENCY

to unlock the

HERO

inside



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To be **RESILIENT**, you need the right tools

KidSpirit sets youth up for success

BY KATHRYN STROPPEL

SEVENTEEN YEARS AGO, KIDSPIRIT DIRECTOR KAREN SWANGER OVERHEARD THREE BOYS, AROUND 8 TO 10 YEARS OLD, TALKING ABOUT THEIR

STRESS. Skeptical, she asked why and was blown away by their response, which included family divorce and financial problems — tough stuff for people at any age.

Her curiosity changed her perspective. “Never assume age is connected to stress,” she says. “Never undervalue someone’s struggle. Life is hard. That moment changed my trajectory and that of KidSpirit.”

Because of that experience, KidSpirit, which offers summer and no-school-day camps for youth, has been laser focused on serving both the needs of the OSU students who help run the camps, as well as the young campers in their care. “The concept for us,” Karen says, “is that as staff work on skills themselves, they model them for the youth they work with.”

The KidSpirit team employs a variety of approaches to build resiliency, which share common themes of choice, self-regulation, personal awareness, self-efficacy and self-confidence, positive thinking, being intentional and mindful, and practicing acceptance and gratitude.

CHANGE BEGINS WITH ME

The phrase “mental health” is rarely spoken at KidSpirit. It’s simply part of its culture. “Just like we don’t say, ‘This training is appropriate for people on the spectrum.’ It’s just good teaching,” says **Gabby Schmit**, aka Tiger Lilly, a kinesiology undergraduate who has worked at KidSpirit for one year.

They may not say it, but mental health strategies are just what students are learning, and it begins during the onboarding process. Before summer, each of the approximately 100 student staff spends 22 hours in training, and each term more than 45 students further strengthen their skills with six hours of training that includes tools to build resiliency and

improve coping skills for themselves and their young campers.

Kendra Zangle, speech communication major, is finishing a nine-credit internship earning special credit in kinesiology. “I’m learning that we’re all in this together. Don’t be afraid to be uncomfortable; it helps you grow.” She may be leaving the internship with 270 hours of experience, but most importantly, she says she’s gained confidence and a sense of belonging.

Kaily MacDougall is a business major who graduated in June 2019 but is sticking around to serve as program coordinator during the summer. Her growth, she says, lies not only in new skills but also in newfound confidence and an appreciation of her capabilities.

“When I first started here, I had no office skills but a can-do attitude,” Kaily says. “I doubted myself and needed a lot of reassurance. I was scared at how much responsibility I was given, but through mentors, trainings and taking on more, I feel I can do this! And if I struggle, I have resources to help. I love the work I do here.”

BUILDING A LIFE TOOLBOX

Karen strives to help students advocate for themselves and to identify self-care skills centered around four key concepts:

1. **Know yourself and what fills your bucket.**
2. **Have confidence in your skills and who you are.**
3. **Accept that it’s OK to make mistakes. Learning from them is important.**
4. **Communicate early and often, openly and honestly, and in all formats. No gossip.**

These concepts may be innate to Karen, who was raised by a mother/teacher with a growth mindset — a belief that a love of learning and resiliency are essential for success — but she recognizes that not all students have the skills they need to thrive.

“The better you can navigate life, the better you are for yourself and others,” Karen says. “Some come to college with tools that work and some that don’t. Some need new tools.”

In particular, she witnesses students struggling with a key component of growth and positive mental health — self-regulation. She challenges students to explore and answer: What do we do to calm down and bring peace in the midst of uncertainty and stress? How do we self-soothe and self-regulate? “If I do one thing in life, it’s to give people those skills,” she says. “If you don’t have the appropriate skills and know the hero inside of you, you can’t be strong leaders for youth.”

Read more of Karen’s wisdom on the next page . . .

KENDRA ZANGLE



KAILY MACDOUGALL



“If you don’t have the appropriate skills and know the hero inside of you, you can’t be strong leaders for youth.” ~ KAREN SWANGER



KAREN SAYS ...

Resiliency happens one action, one day at a time.

Know yourself and give grace.

Mistakes help us grow. Ask: What did you learn? Did you clean it up? How did you make it better?

What do you need when you're under stress to help you move forward?

You are not what you think. The worst critic is yourself.

Never undervalue someone else's struggle.

Choose your attitude.

Have courage — and be curious.

Change "I can't do that" to "I can't do that YET."

Pleasure comes from hard work, not perfection.

There's no such thing as common sense. We have shared cultural values, which aren't the same for everyone.

Be kind, and show empathy.

