IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL

letter exchange

IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL

LETTER EXCHANGE

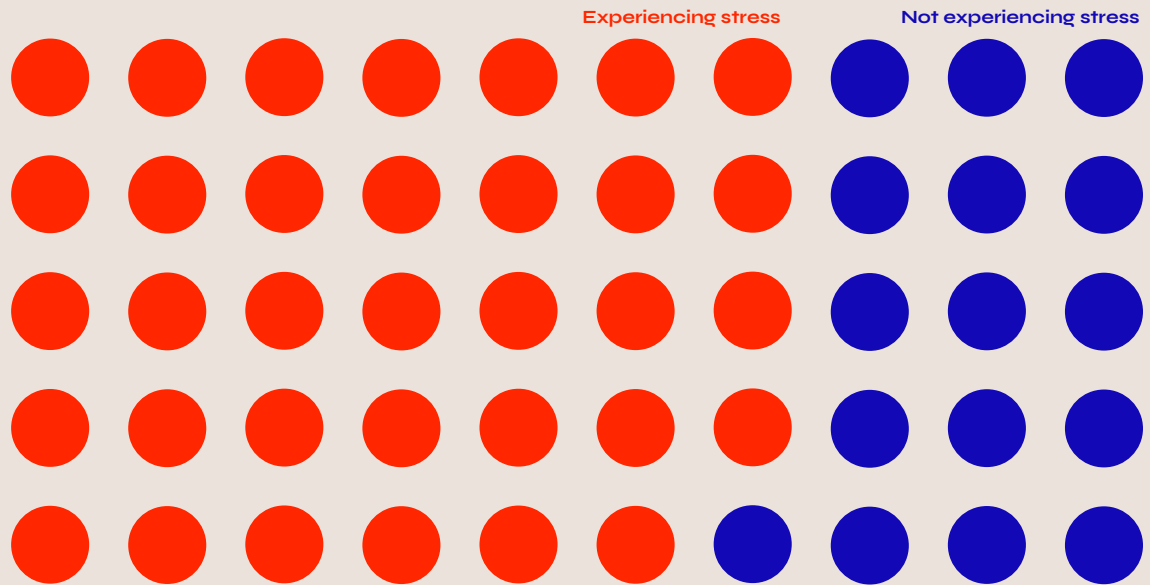**ROXCY STANLEY**

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RESEARCH + OBSERVATIONS

By conducting research into how politics are affecting rural communities, we can identify opportunities for design intervention.

News fatigue is affecting us all - from activists all the way to the least politically active community members.

Experiencing stress   Not experiencing stress

The American Psychological Association has found that the 2020 presidential election is a significant source of stress in the lives of 68% of Americans over 18. [1]

I began this project by researching many issues surrounding news consumption, and identifying the ways each issue was affecting both rural activists and rural community members. News fatigue was a clear issue. It's something that rural activists face, as it's their job to keep up with news at the local and federal level.

" ...a big part of this job is staying up to date on local and statewide news to see how it interplays with the issues we're working on. I regularly read 3 different weekly newspapers and the Tribune daily."

-Sam Van Wetter, RUP Field Organizer

It's also something that's a problem for nearly every American, no matter where they live. Studies have shown that most Americans experience stress linked to politics, and that stress leaves Americans feeling helpless. The forms in which we're consuming news aren't necessarily helping, since media consumption is often full of sensationalized headlines and constant updates. Americans feel like their world and their country is falling apart, no matter what end of the political spectrum they're on, and most people don't know what there is to do about it.

Political polarization is growing, and it's making it more difficult for rural activists to do their jobs.
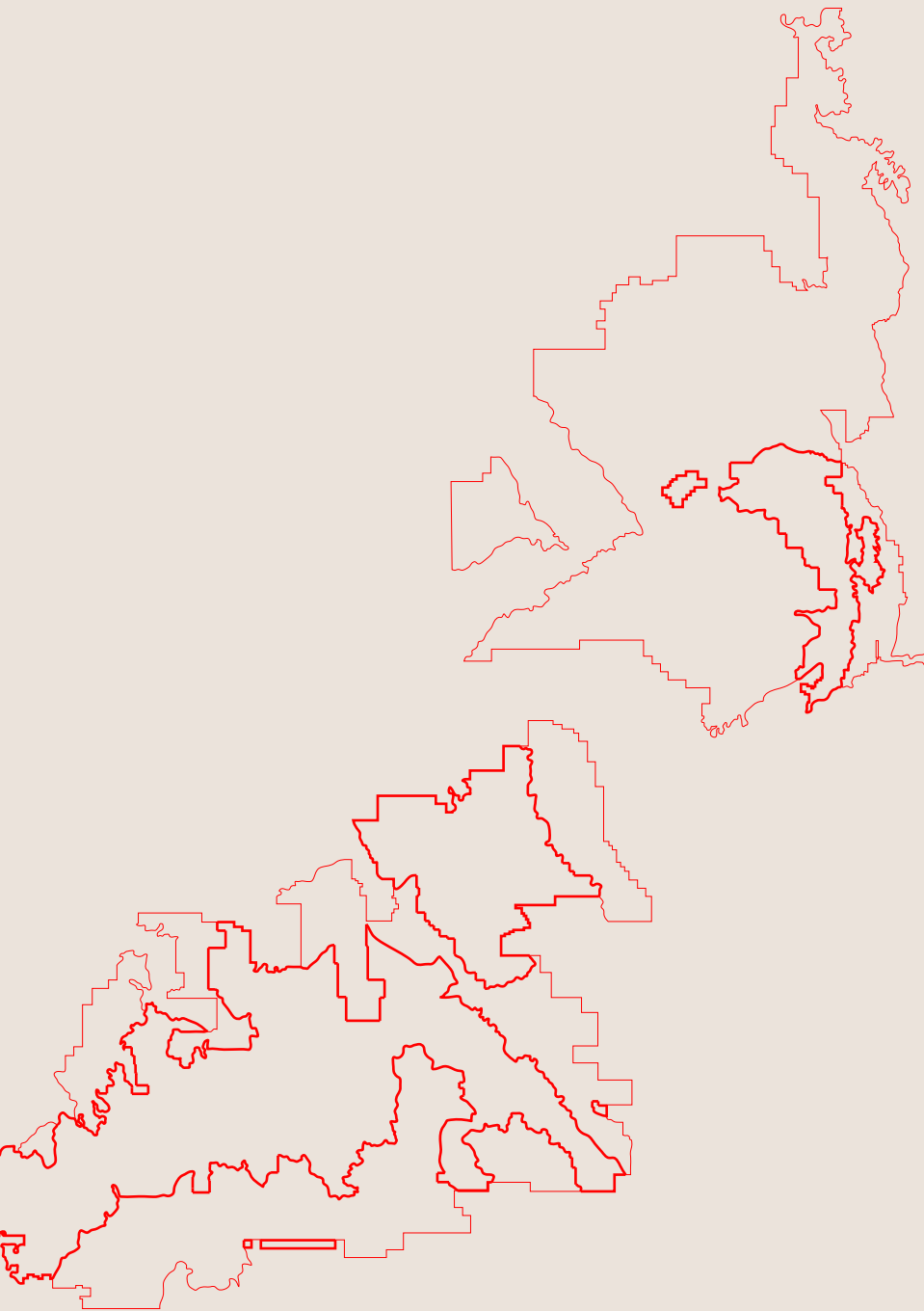
The next issue I focused on was political polarization. With the shrinking of Grand Staircase National Monument and Bears Ears National Monument came a lot of national attention on rural communities in Kane, Garfield, and San Juan counties. This attention brought positive outcomes, like an increase in tourism [2] and funding being directed towards protecting these wild lands. However, it also seems to have contributed to a growing sense of polarization, something that is being seen in communities across the country at varying degrees. According to the Pew Research Center, only 24% of rural Americans say that as far as they know, most or all of their neighbors share their same political opinions. [3] This statistic alone doesn't cause problems for rural activists. However, as we're all seeing, American politics have reached a point where people are uninterested in even talking to those who have different political opinions than their own. Unchecked extreme polarization can lead to communities full of people who will refuse to talk to activists if they think they're "working for the other side."

At the root of these problems is a single idea: healthy communication leads to healthy communities.

All of my research up until this point seemed to point in the same direction; it's become clear to me that healthy communication is able to prevent so many problems that may arise in small communities. Dr. Renata Schiavo, a public health specialist at Columbia Public Health, writes about the importance of community-based communication for health and social change, stating that:

"Increasingly, there has been an emerging acknowledgement that community participatory processes can provide important avenues for disseminating health interventions, particularly in the context of underserved communities in the United States and across the globe." [4]

Communities with strong forms of communication are better equipped to deal with public health issues, like pandemics, and are more likely to be able to carry out substantial social change. Political theorist Hannah Arendt's work reinforces this idea. In her book The Origins of Totalitarianism, she writes about the idea that loneliness leads to totalitarian ideas. [5] This is an issue that rural activists are uniquely qualified to combat, but one that requires narrative shifting and strong communication within communities to even be able to face.

"What prepares men for totalitarian domination in the non-totalitarian world is the fact that loneliness, once a borderline experience usually suffered in certain marginal social conditions like old age, has become an everyday experience ."

– From The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951) by Hannah Arendt"

OPPORTUNITY FOR DESIGN

Taking the previous research and looking for trends, issues, and available solutions leads us to an opportunity area.

Communication must be scalable. It should be able to work for strangers across the state as well as it works for next-door neighbors.

I'd decided that the best response to the issues I'd identified was some sort of community-based communication system. The ideal system would be scalable; it would work between neighbors, across counties, and even across a state, between two complete strangers. I began to narrow my scope even further, using scale as context.

Blanding

White Mesa

Bluff

Montezuma Creek

Mexican Hat
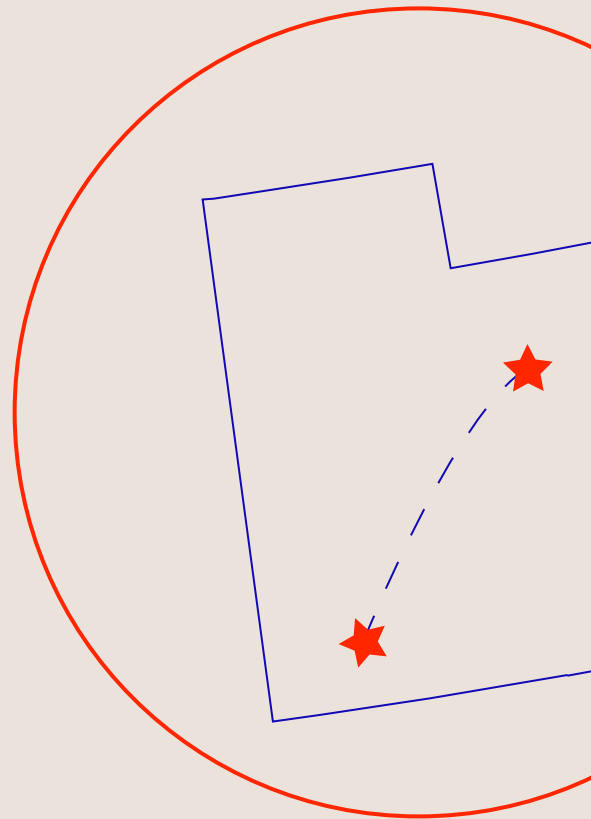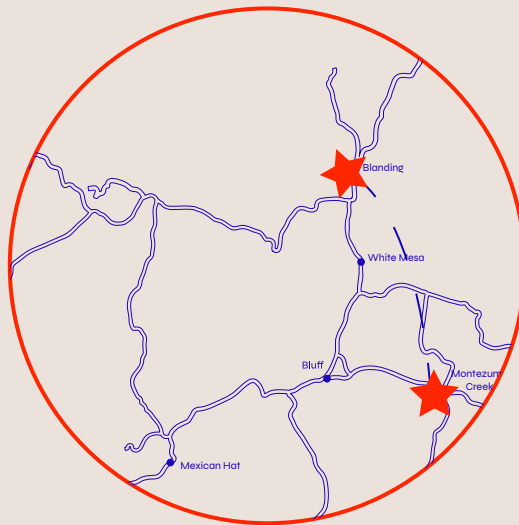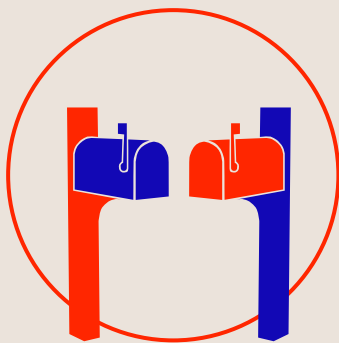
Setting constraints ensure that the system will be fitting for the communities it's geared towards.

My first constraint was that the system couldn't be completely reliant on the internet. In San Juan County, 52.7% of families have broadband internet. [6] I knew that for this to be accessible to the entire state, a user would need the option to participate without an internet connection.

The second constraint was that communication could not happen in person. Through my research I found that rural residents who were communicating with their neighbors were mostly already doing so in person, and you can't fix what isn't broken. I also knew that during a time when in-person contact can be dangerous, now wasn't the time to encourage just that.

Lastly, I decided that if possible I would try to work within any existing systems of communication in the community. This would cut down on costs, and people would feel more comfortable using this new system if it was using something familiar.

Hand-written letters create an opportunity to have slow, carefully crafted conversations.
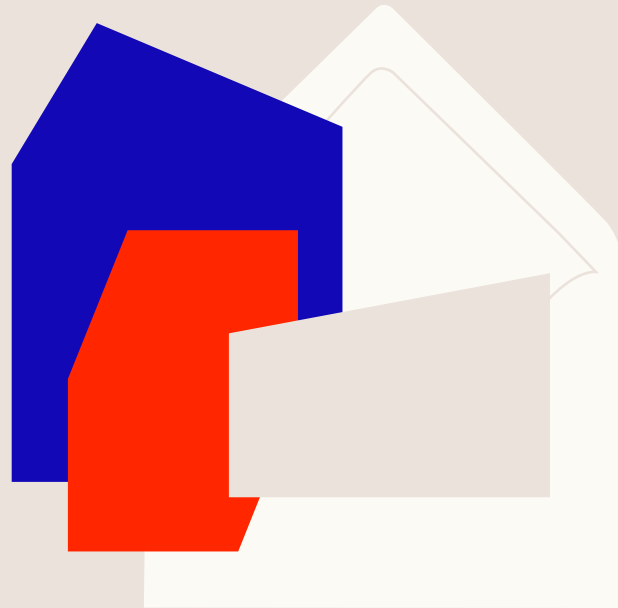
My constraints led me to the United States Postal Service, and the opportunity for communication through hand-written letters. Snail mail was perfect for my purposes. It's a form of conversation that is careful and slow, it takes time and thought to write a letter. I also loved the way that letters turn conversations into keepsakes. Words can live on as long as the recipient wants them to, and can be looked back on and reread as an untouched conversation, appearing to the reader the exact same way they did the first time they were read. I personally have a growing collection of letters from loved ones, most notably my giant collection of postcards from my cousin Maude. Maude and I were born four months apart and have shared nearly all of our most formative life experiences. By writing postcards to me, her thoughts become a sort of shared journal between us. I can look back and see exactly what she was thinking, complete with a date and other markers, like the address she sent it to me at and her return address. This experience of writing and receiving letters is beautiful, and it's something that I believe should be encouraged. It has brought a sense of reverence to my conversations with Maude, a feeling that's a perfect response to polarization and news fatigue.

DESIGN PROCESS

The research and preparation that went into making sure that the end product would be what community members want and need.

10 miles

5 miles
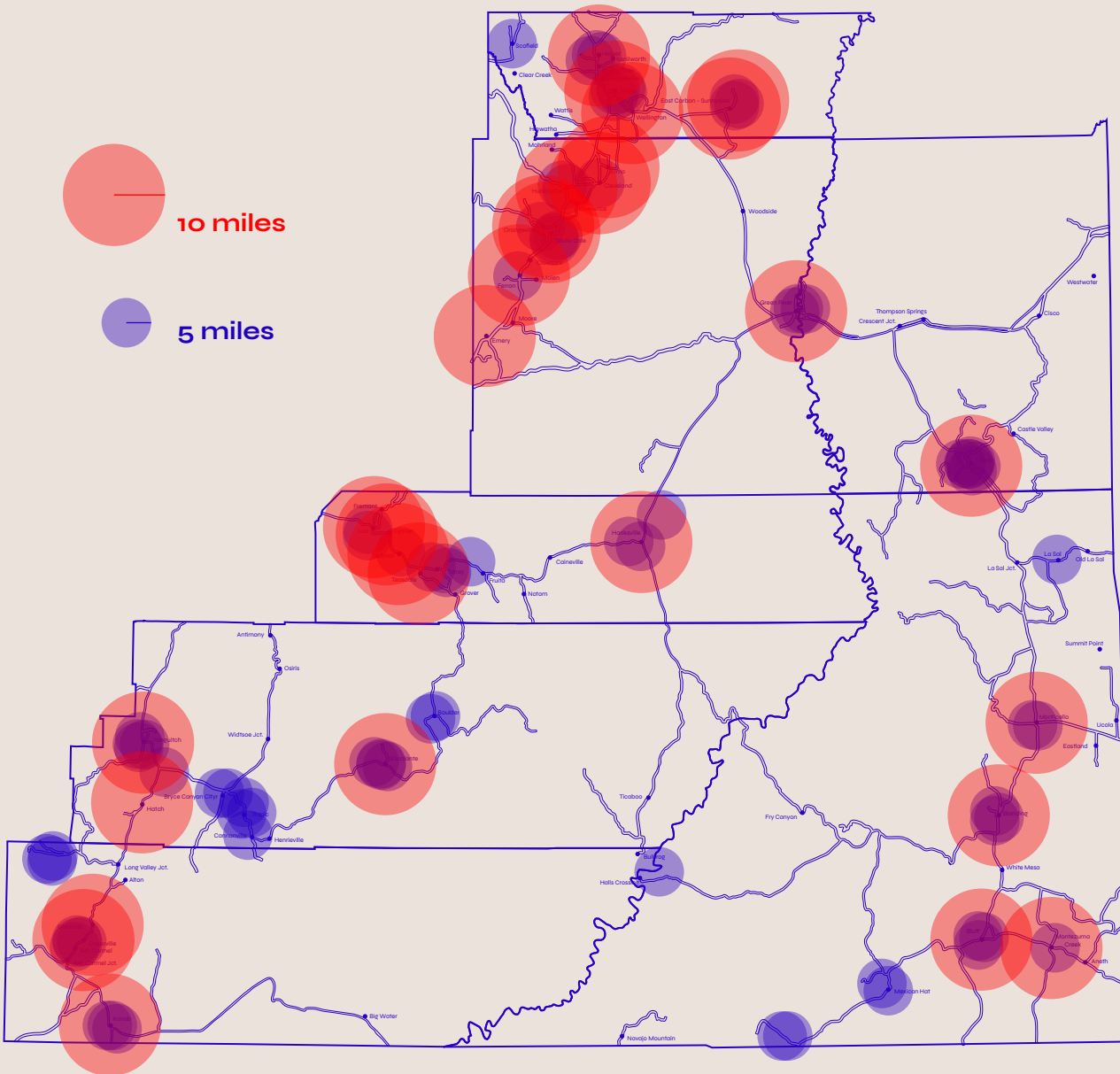
In order to study distance and accessibility with the limits of being unable to visit rural Utah, landmarks were mapped onto a map of all major highways and roads in seven counties in the southeastern corner of the state. Red circles represent Post Offices, and blue circles represent what I'll call "communication hubs," places like grocery stores, coffee shops, and even gas stations. These are places that residents are visiting regularly and could potentially pick up or purchase materials. I found that post offices aren't necessarily accessible in rural Utah. For reference, a resident of White Mesa would have to drive 45 minutes to their nearest post office. That's not a distance I could expect people to drive just to pick up stamps and envelopes. Communication hubs were in most towns in these counties. They are pretty reliable centers of communication already, and would be useful for reaching many Utahns in the most remote areas of the state.
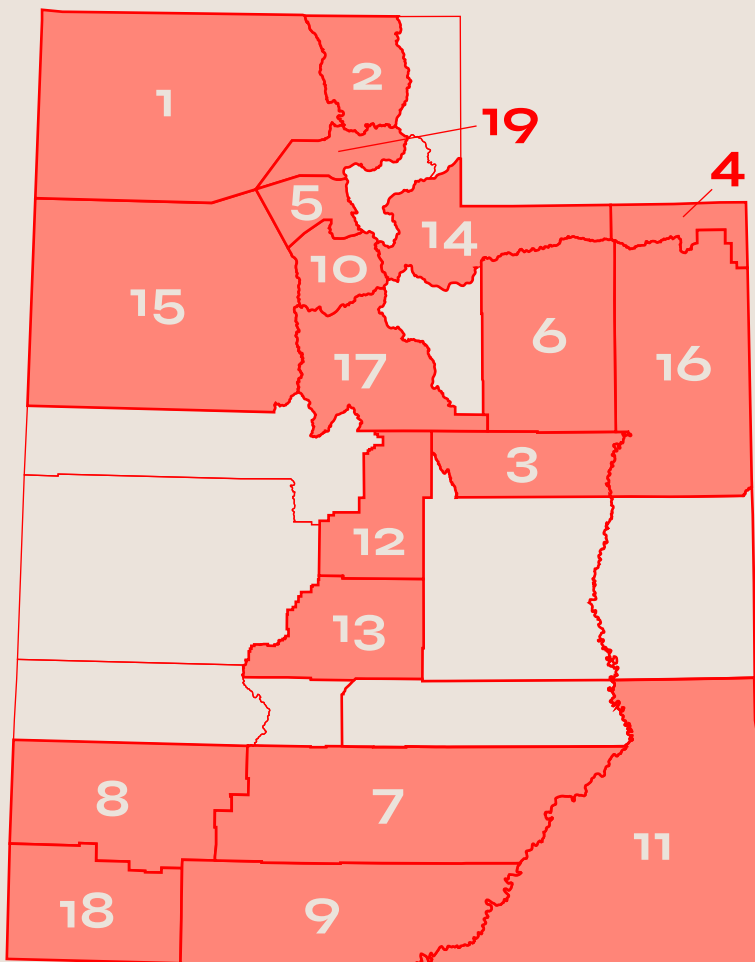
I conducted a survey to gauge interest in a letter exchange program. I marketed it on Facebook by joining community groups and received a total of 446 responses.

Facebook groups used:

Cache Valley 411
Exploring Utah
Duchesne Public
Tooele Valley News and Events
Park City Community Forum
Moab Classifieds Ads
Juab County Community Support
Box Elder County, UT 411
Blanding Classifieds
Sanpete County News
Kane County, UT
Daggett county classifieds
What's Up West Valley City!!!

Many responses from Salt Lake County, Utah County, and Washington County came from family and friends responding to an Instagram Story I posted.

Respondents had the option to leave their email in order to be notified of updates. In total, I now have a list of 113 email addresses.

1. BOX ELDER
38 respondents
26% interested
74% uninterested

2. CACHE
35 respondents
31% interested
69% uninterested

3. CARBON
1 respondent
100% interested
0% uninterested

4. DAGGETTT
4 respondents
25% interested
75% uninterested

5. DAVIS
4 respondents
100% interested
0% uninterested

6. DUCHESNE
28 respondents
50% interested
50% uninterested

7. GARFIELD
1 respondent
100% interested
0% uninterested

8. IRON
2 respondents
50% interested
50% uninterested

9. KANE
7 respondents
29% interested
71% uninterested

10. SALT LAKE
25 respondents
72% interested
28% uninterested

11. SAN JUAN
27 respondents
26% interested
74% uninterested

12. SANPETE
26 respondents
50% interested
50% uninterested

13. SEVIER
12 respondents
42% interested
58% uninterested

14. SUMMIT
11 respondents
0% interested
100% uninterested

15. TOOELE
133 respondents
47% interested
53% uninterested

16. UINTAH
2 respondents
50% interested
50% uninterested

17. UTAH
3 respondents
100% interested
0% uninterested

18. WASHINGTON
8 respondents
75% interested
25% uninterested

19. WEBER
2 respondents
100% interested
0% uninterested

41% of respondents said that they would be interested in participating in this type of letter exchange. This number was consistent among age groups.

PRODUCT OUTCOMES

The ins and outs of
the final product;
a Utah-wide letter
exchange program.

Onboarding will be available through our website as well as through mail-in forms.

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Your e-mail address: [_____]

Your birthday: [Month ⌄] [Day ⌄] [Year ⌄]

Your mailing address: [_____]

Describe a few of your top interests: [_____]

If an odd number of participants sign up, would you be interested in being matched with more than one partner?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

IT'S NOTHING PERSONAL
Sign-Up Form - December 2020

Name
_____

Date of Birth
_____

Mailing Address
_____
_____

Share some of your interests:
_____
_____

What are you hoping to get out of this month?
_____
_____

If an odd number of participants sign up, would you be interested in being matched with more than one partner?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

When a community member decides to sign up for our letter exchange, they have two options for how to do so. The first is through a website, and second is by filling out and mailing in a form that can be picked up at communication hubs. They will fill out a few questions that will help them be paired as accurately as possible. Some of these questions will be asking for personal information, like their age, in order to match children with children and adults with other adults. The sign-ups can also have more in-depth questions, however. For example, one month every user may be asked to rate their interest in local politics, or talk about a few personal interests of theirs. This kind of survey will help every participant have the best experience possible. People who are completely unwilling to talk about politics won't feel forced to, and people who have similar interests could be paired with one another, giving them common ground to build a new friendship on.

DECEMBER 2020

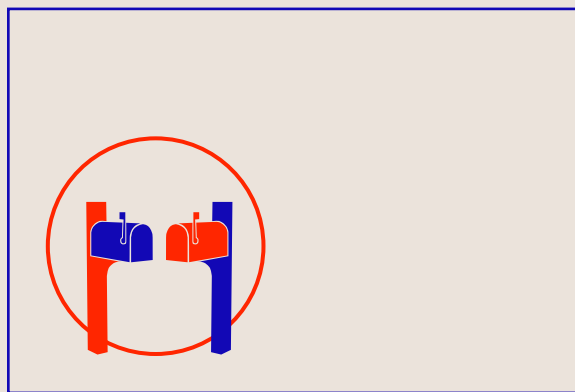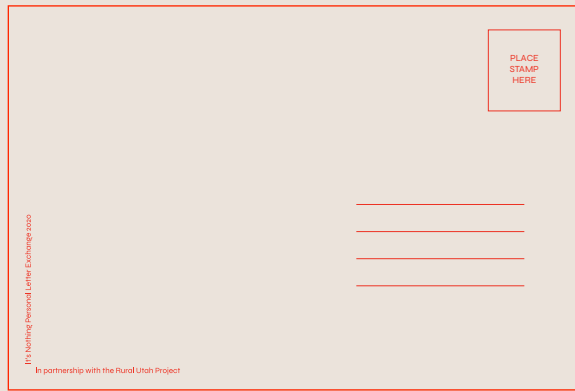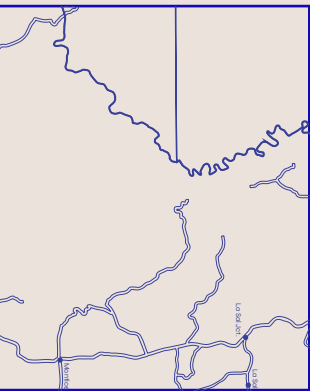|						
25	NOVEMBER SIGN UPS CLOSE	27	28		MATCHES ARE ASSIGNED AND MATERIALS ARE SENT OUT	31
12		3 PARTNER ONE WRITES AND SENDS LETTER	4	56		7
89		10 PARTNER TWO WRITES AND SENDS LETTER	11	12	13	14
15	16 PARTNER ONE WRITES AND SENDS LETTER	17	18	19	20	21
22	23 PARTNER TWO WRITES AND SENDS LETTER	24	25 DECEMBER SIGN UPS CLOSE		27	28
29	30	1	2	34		5

One month is referred to as a "round." After a participant finishes a round it's up to them to continue communication with their partner if they'd like. They will also be able to sign up for the next round and receive a new partner and new materials.

This calendar shows what an average "round" would look like for two participants. Sign-ups close about a week before the end of the previous month. That week, matches are assigned and materials are sent out. This allows enough time for materials to reach any home in Utah by the first of the month. Once materials arrive, participants can look them over and begin to write to one another. Whoever is assigned to write first will send their partner a letter sometime in the first week of the month, and then the two new friends will alternate sending and receiving letters each week. There will be four total letters sent during a round, or two per person.

This four-week span is the perfect amount of time for two people to learn enough about one another to decide whether or not they'd like to continue communicating without a schedule and guided conversation prompts. It's also short enough for participants who want to meet new people every single month.

Postcards are efficient as well as beautiful.

The letter exchange will use postcards for a variety of reasons. Firstly, postcards save paper. Participants won't need envelopes to send their mail, just their card and a single stamp. It will decrease the cost of shipping to send the full package of materials to each participant, and the packages will require much smaller envelopes. Lastly, postcards create an opportunity for local artists to get involved. Each month, the four postcards will be designed by a different Utah artist. The postcards will be collectible items, and only by sending and receiving letters all four weeks will a participant get to see all four postcards for the month.

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

It's Nothing Personal Letter Exchange 2020

In partnership with the Rural Utah Project

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

It's Nothing Personal is a relatively cheap program to run. If RUP was to fund 50 participants for a month, the entire thing would cost only $427.49.

It's easy to see exactly how finances will be broken down for this program. Material costs and unit prices won't change from month to month, all that might change is the number of participants, and therefore the amount of supplies needed. By adding up all supplies, shipping, and the $200 that local artists would be paid for their designs, the total for 50 participants comes to $427.29. This is $12.54 per person, but that number would decrease as the amount of participants increases, because the fixed amount that will be paid to artists makes up a large portion of the costs. If artists are willing to donate work to the program, the total cost for the month will be nearly cut in half.

MONTH ONE
TOTAL EXPENSES FOR 50 PARTICIPANTS

|	
STAMPS (10 STAMPS PER PERSON @ $4.95)	$247.50
POSTCARDS (4 POSTCARDS PER PERSON @ $1.40)	$70.00
ORIGINAL ART (@ $4.00)	$200.00
WELCOME BOOKLETS (1 BOOKLET PER PERSON @ $1.40)	$70.00
ENVELOPES (1 PER PERSON @ $0.09)	$4.99
SHIPPING (1 PER PERSON @ $0.70)	$35.00
TOTAL PER PERSON	$12.54
SUBTOTAL	$427.49

Participants will receive a beautiful package of materials in their mailbox at the beginning of the month.

Participants will receive two copies of two out of the four postcards for the month, so four total. They'll send one copy of each design to their partner, and in exchange they'll receive the other two designs.
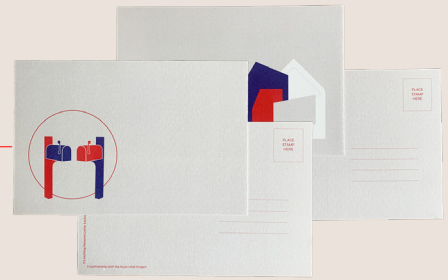
Although only 2 stamps are necessary to participate, packages will include 10 stamps. This creates an easy way for residents to receive stamps in their mailbox for day-to-day use. Stamps can be purchased in bulk, which will lower the price from their cost at the post office.

The info card will have their partner's info, like name and mailing address, on one side. The other side of the info card will let the participant know whether they're assigned to write a letter the first week or the second week.
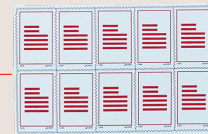
The welcome zine will include a guide to writing a successful letter, an explanation of how the exchange will work, and a list of writing prompts. The same welcome zine can be reprinted and used from month to month, the only thing that will change is the removable list of writing prompts. The zine is printed on regular letter-sized paper and then folded in half to create a booklet.

Weekly prompts are based on research into how people are able to form strong connections and feel comfortable with new people.

WEEK ONE Standard introductions between new friends, with an added conversation starter about their day-to-day life or hometown.

WEEK THREE Topics that encourage discussions about local politics, but don't force those conversations.

WEEK TWO Conversations related to life experiences

WEEK FOUR Conversations that are geared towards two people who are now friends. Topics about personality and opinions.

Prompts will change from month to month, but they will always be based on the premise and order of these four weeks.

In 1997, psychologist Arthur Aron created a study to explore whether a list of 36 questions could accelerate the rate at which two complete strangers would fall in love with one another. [7] Aron's list of questions is still in use today and often cited when talking about how we can build a sense of trust and intimacy between two strangers. The 36 questions are meant to be answered by two people over the course of about an hour, and they become progressively more personal and revealing. I used Aron's study and list of questions in my research as to how we can facilitate friendship that feels as natural as possible, even when the two people have been paired up by a computer. Using the 36 questions as well as studying the format of as many day-to-day conversations as I could, I came up with a four-week formula to creating friendship. Most new friendships consist of conversations that take place in this order. First is what many refer to as "small talk": conversations about day-to-day life with minimal amounts of personal info. Next, conversations become slightly more personal, moving to stories about life experiences. After life experiences people become comfortable enough to begin talking about their personal opinions. During this third week of the letter exchange, there lies an opportunity to encourage discussions about local politics. Our last week, and what I define as the final stage in the getting-to-know-you phase of a new friendship, will be conversations about personality, more opinions, and miscellaneous topics that two people who are now friends naturally find themselves talking about.

Six months of writing prompts have been written and matched up carefully. Four prompts are paired together intentionally for a balance of personal/impersonal, heavy/light conversations throughout the month.

DECEMBER

WEEK ONE
Introduce yourself! Tell your new friend whatever you think a friend of yours should know about you. If you had an intro song, what would it be?

WEEK TWO
What's a smell that brings back good memories?

WEEK THREE
Tell your friend about a time when a long-held opinion of yours changed. What helped change your opinion?

WEEK FOUR
How do you measure success? By that measure, who is the most successful person you know?

JANUARY

WEEK ONE
Introduce yourself! Tell your new friend whatever you think a friend of yours should know about you. What is a weird of useless talent that you have? Were you born with it? If not, how did you learn it?

WEEK TWO
What's the worst meal you've ever had?

WEEK THREE
Do you consider yourself someone who feels comfortable in nature? Do you think that it's important for the government to protect nature?

WEEK FOUR
What are your goals for 2021? How have your goals changed over your life?

FEBRUARY

WEEK ONE
Introduce yourself! Tell your new friend whatever you think a friend of yours should know about you. What has been the best part of your last week?

WEEK TWO
When was the last time you worked really hard on something? What motivated you?

WEEK THREE
Does technology simplify life or make it more complicated?

WEEK FOUR
Who would be the worst person to be stuck in an elevator with? How about the best?

MARCH

WEEK ONE
Introduce yourself! Tell your new friend whatever you think a friend of yours should know about you. Where's the most beautiful place near where you live?

WEEK TWO
Was there ever an event in your life that defied explanation?

WEEK THREE
How much time do you usually spend on the internet in a day? What do you usually do?

WEEK FOUR
What's your go-to way to get rid of stress?

APRIL

WEEK ONE
Introduce yourself! Tell your new friend whatever you think a friend of yours should know about you. What's the best restaurant in your area? How often do you eat there?

WEEK TWO
Who's the funniest person you've met?

WEEK THREE
What are three things you hope are different about the world in a decade?

WEEK FOUR
What is the silliest fear you have?

MAY

WEEK ONE
Introduce yourself! Tell your new friend whatever you think a friend of yours should know about you. What are your plans for this week? What are you looking forward to most and what are you most nervous for?

WEEK TWO
What's a fashion trend that you're glad went away?

WEEK THREE
What are some strange beliefs that people around you have? Why do you think they believe those things?

WEEK FOUR
Who has had the biggest impact on the person you have become?

December's prompts were tested on three volunteers: a 10 year old, a 21 year old, and a 75 year old. The goal with these tests were to see if the same prompts could be engaging at any age. The tests went smoothly, and I received lovely letters from the volunteers.
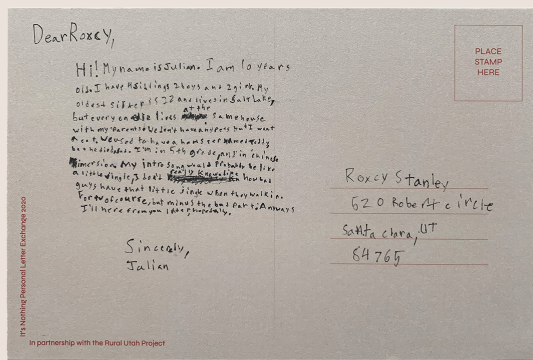
Prompt #1:

Introduce yourself! Tell your new friend whatever you think a friend of yours should know about you. If you had an intro song, what would it be?

JULIAN, 10

Transcribed:

Dear Roxcy,

Hi! My name is Julian. I am 10 years old. I have 4 siblings 2 boys and 2 girls. My oldest sister is 22 and lives in Salt Lake, but everyone else lives at the same house with my parents. We don't have any pets but I want a cat. We used to have a hamster named Teddy, but he died, sad. I'm in 5th grade, and in Chinese imersion. My intro song would probably be like a little jingle, I don't really know like how bad guys have that little jingle when they walk in. For tv of course, but minus the bad part. Anyways I'll here from you later, hopefully.

Sincerely,
Julian

MAUDE, 21
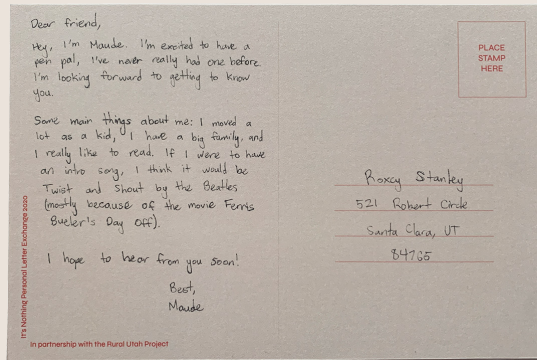
Transcribed:

Dear friend,
Hey, I'm Maude. I'm excited to have a pen pal, I've never really had one before. I'm looking forward to getting to know you.
Some main things about me: I moved a lot as a kid, I have a big family, and I really like to read. If I were to have an intro song, I think it would be Twist and Shout by the Beatles (mostly because of the movie Ferris Bueler's Day Off.)
 hope to hear from you soon!

Best,
Maude

DONNA, 75
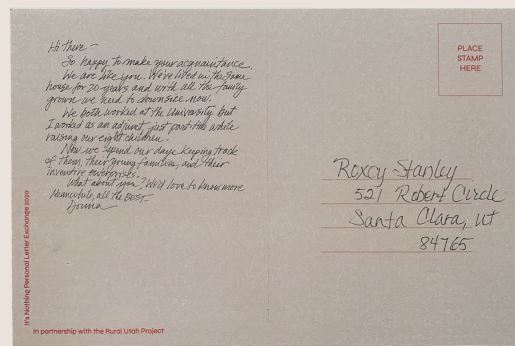
Transcribed:

Hi there-
         So happy to make your acquaintance. We are like you. We've lived in the same house for 20 years and with all the family grown we need to downsize now.
         We both worked at the University but I worked as an adjunct just part-time while raising our eight children.
         Now we spend our days keeping track of them, their young families, and their inventive enterprises.
         What about you? We'd love to know more.
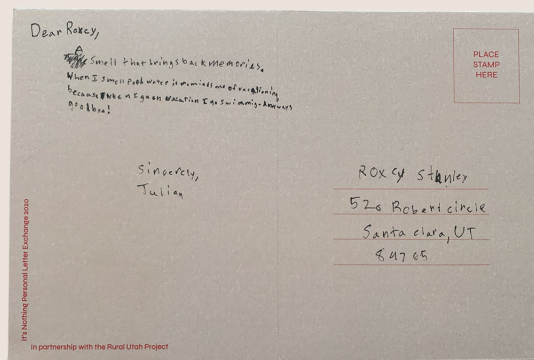Meanwhile, all the BEST.
         Donna

Letters ranged in length and content. It was interesting to see how each volunteer interpreted the writing prompts and the different directions the conversations could go in.

Prompt #2:

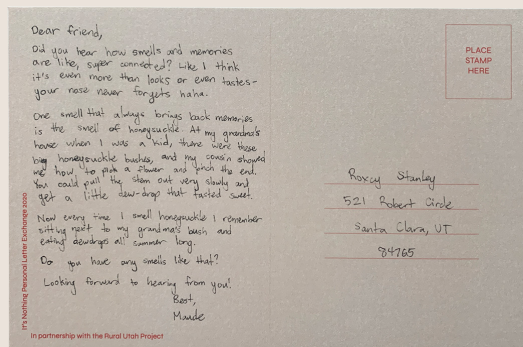What's a smell that brings back good memories?

JULIAN, 10

Transcribed:

Dear Roxcy,

A smell that brings back memories. When I smell pool water it reminds me of vacationing becuase when I go on vacation I go swimmig. Anyways goodbye!

Sincerely,
Julian

MAUDE, 21

Transcribed:

Dear friend,
Did you hear how smells and memories are like, super connected? Like I think it's even more than looks or even tastes- your nose never forgets haha.
One smell that always brings back memories is the smell of honeysuckle. At my grandma's house when I was a kid, there were these big honeysuckle bushes, and my cousin showed me how to pick a flower and pinch the end. You could pull them out very slowly and get a little dew-drop that tasted sweet.
Now every time I smell honeysuckle I remember sitting next to my grandma's bush and eating dewdrops all summer long.
Do you have any smells like that?
Looking forward to hearing from you!

Best,
Maude

DONNA, 75
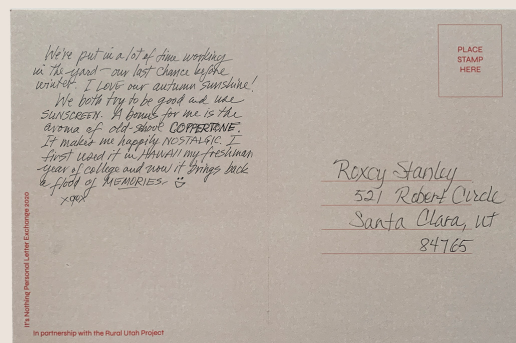
Transcribed:

We've put in a lot of time working in the yard- our last chance before winter. I LOVE our autumn sunshine! We both try to be good and use SUNSCREEN. A bonus for me is the aroma of old-school COPPERTONE. It makes me happily NOSTALGIC. I first used it in HAWAII my freshman year of college and now it brings back a flood of MEMORIES- :)
xoxox

The third week, devoted to conversations that have the potential to turn political, the volunteers mostly stayed apolitical. However, they noticeably were more personal in their writing.
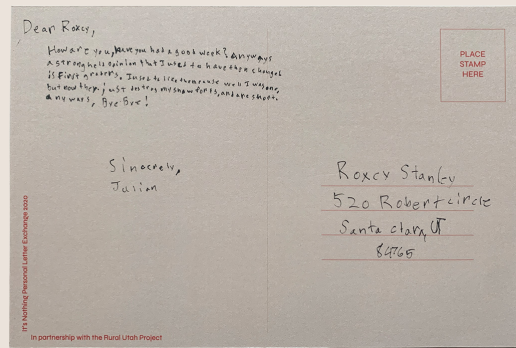
Prompt #3:

Tell your friend about a time when a long-held opinion of yours changed. What helped change your opinion?
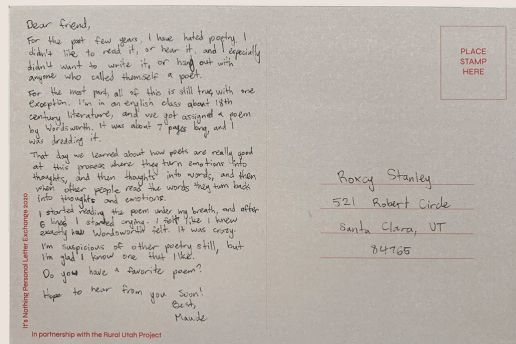
JULIAN, 10

Transcribed:

Dear Roxcy,

How are you, have you had a good week? Anyways a strong held opinion that I used to have then changed is first graders. I used to like them cause I was one, but now they just destroy my snow forts, and are short. Anyways, Bye Bye!

Sincerely,
Julian

MAUDE, 21

Transcribed:

Dear friend,
For the past few years, I have hated poetry. I didn't like to read it, or hear it, and I especially didn't want to write it, or hang out with anyone who called themself a poet.
For the most part, all of this is still true, with one exception. I'm in an english class about 18th century literature, and we got assigned a poem by Wordsworth. It was about 7 pages long, and I was dreading it.
That day we learned about how poets are really good at this process where they turn emotions into thoughts, and then thoughts into words, and then when other people read the words they turn back into thoughts and emotions.
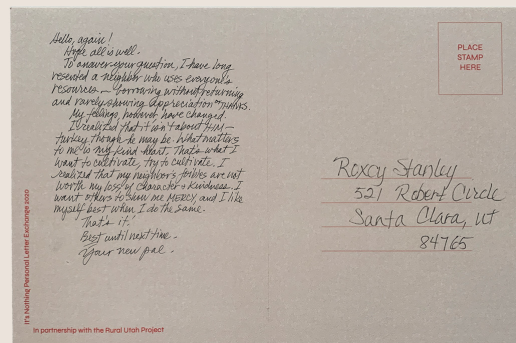I started reading the poem under my breath, and after 6 lines I started crying. I felt like I knew exactly how Wordsworth felt. It was crazy. I'm suspicious of other poetry still, but I'm glad I know one that I like.
Do you have a favorite poem?
Hope to hear from you soon!

Best,
Maude

DONNA, 75

Transcribed:

Hello again!
　　　Hope all is well.
　　　To answer your question, I have long resented a neighbor who uses everyone's resources- borrowing without returning and rarely showing appreciation or THANKS.
　　　My feelings, however, have changed.
　　　I realized that it isn't about HIM- turkey though he may be. What matters to me is my kind heart. That's what I want to culitvate, try to cultivate. I realized that my neighbor's foibles are not worth my loss of character and kindness. I want others to show me MERCY, and I like myself best when I do the same.
　　　That's it.
　　　Best until next time.
　　　Your new pal.

By the last letters the four volunteers seemed completely comfortable communicating through this format.
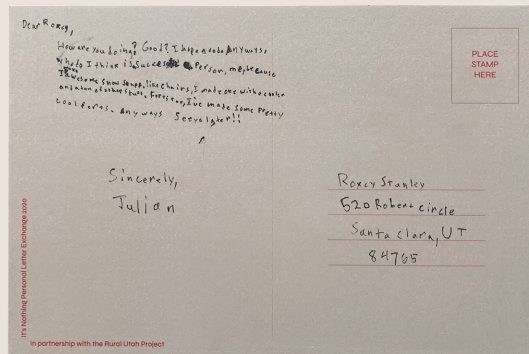
Prompt #4:

How do you measure success? By that measure, who is the most successful person you know?
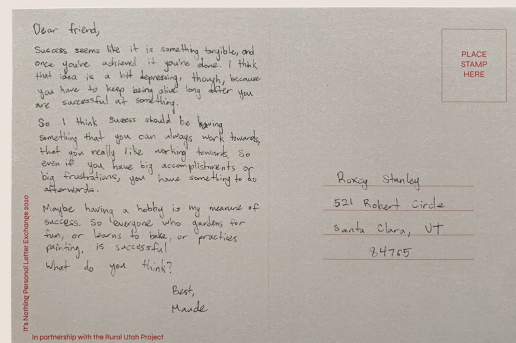
JULIAN, 10

Transcribed:

Dear Roxcy,

How are you doing? Good? I hope good. Anyways, who do I think is a successful person, me, because I make awesome snow stuff. like chairs, I made one with a cooler and a ton of other stuff. Forts too, I've made some pretty cool forts. Anyways See ya later!!

Sincerely,
Julian

MAUDE, 21

Transcribed:

Dear friend,

Success seems like it is something tangible, and once you've achieved it you're done. I think that idea is a bit depressing, though, because you have to keep being alive long after you are successful at something.
So I think success should be having something that you can always work towards, that you really like working towards. So even if you have big accomplishments or big frustrations, you have something to do afterwards.
Maybe having a hobby is my measure of success. So everyone who gardens for fun, or learns to bake, or practices painting, is successful.
What do you think?

Best,
Maude

DONNA, 75
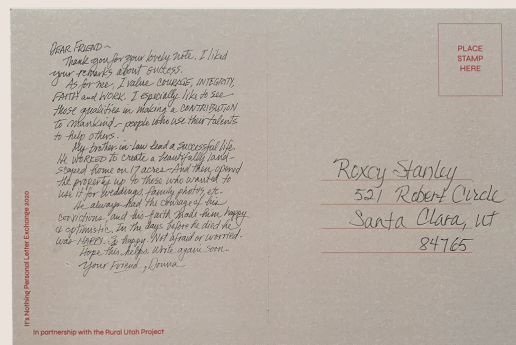
Transcribed:

DEAR FRIEND-
          Thank you for your lovely note. I liked your remarks about SUCCESS.
          As for me, I value COURAGE, INTEGRITY, FAITH, and WORK. I especially like to see those qualities in making a CONTRIBUTION to mankind- people who use their talents to help others.
          My brother-in-law lead a successsful life. He WORKED to create a beautifully land-scaped home on 17 acres- And then opened the property up to those who wanted to use it for weddings, family photos, etc.
          He always had the courage of his convictions, and his faith made him happy + optimistic. In the days before he died he was HAPPY. So happy. Not afraid or worried.
          Hope this helps. Write again soon.
          Your friend, Donna

PROGRAM IMPACT

How the program will impact rural communities and activists.

Activists will be able to use the program for outreach and as an opportunity to define their focus for the month. The program will also encourage community members to be more trusting towards activists.

It's Nothing Personal creates huge opportunities for rural activists. Although in its current form the program isn't intended to be solely for outreach, it can easily be used for those purposes. By asking participants to opt-in to mail from the Rural Utah Project, a mailing list of supporters throughout the state can be easily compiled. The program will also help rural activists clearly define their objectives at the beginning of each month. Writing prompts can be tailored to the conversations that activists will be having that month, helping communities and activists be aligned in their focus. Lastly, community members who participate in this program will be much more receptive to activists. Residents will be more open to simply having conversations with activists, as they'll view their neighbors as people who have similar values, and differing opinions as things that aren't scary to discuss.

Communities will see increased trust, and less loneliness and negative skepticism. Residents will be given a setting in which they are encouraged to discuss tricky subjects with one another.

By participating in this letter exchange, Utah residents will see benefits at the individual level as well as the community level. Letters will bring residents out of their day-to-day bubble, connecting them to strangers in other parts of the state at an extremely personal level. This type of connection has the power to give people more trust in their neighbors, and can teach people that discussion, when done in a kind and understanding way, is an important part of any healthy community. The program is an opportunity for residents to find new friends and talk to people with different beliefs than their own. Letters will live on, serving as an online time capsule, state journal, and proof that it's not that hard to get along with our neighbors when we see them in a personable light.
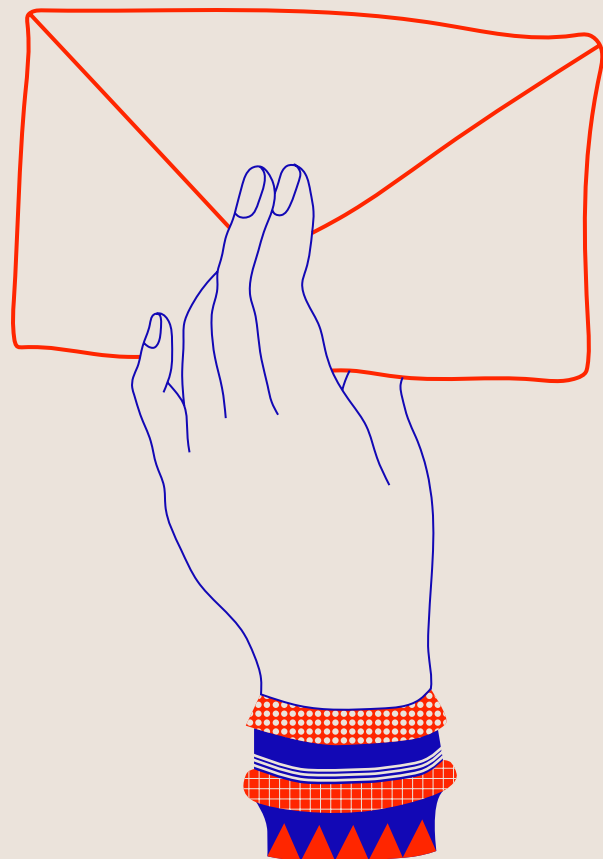
QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?
NEED SOMEONE TO EXCHANGE LETTERS WITH?

Write me:

roxcys@gmail.com

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This presentation is set in Syne

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Photos courtesy of Rural Utah Project.