



Niagara Cares Teams Up with Sammie's Buddy Bench Project to Add Nearly 60 Recycled Plastic Buddy Benches to Local Communities Throughout U.S.

With the Help of EarthX and POLYWOOD, the Organizations Will Empower Community Members to Collect HDPE #2 Plastic to Turn Into Buddy Benches for Public Spaces

Diamond Bar, Calif. (Sept. 17, 2024) – Niagara Cares, the charitable division of [Niagara Bottling, LLC](#), the family-run beverage company that has hydrated America since 1963, is joining with [Sammie's Buddy Bench Project](#) to distribute **57** Buddy Benches to communities throughout the U.S., driving local recycling and encouraging community connections.

Together with [EarthX](#), and [POLYWOOD](#), the Indiana brand that pioneered outdoor furniture made from recycled plastic, Niagara Cares will provide Buddy Benches made from recycled HDPE #2 plastic to communities near Niagara Bottling facilities in return for recycling 1,000 pieces of plastic.

Sammie Vance, activist, author, and student, started Sammie's Buddy Bench Project seven years ago. Born out of the human need for connection, Sammie, age 8 at the time, learned of Buddy Benches - which encourage students to sit on the bench if they're feeling lonely and signal other children to come and play. Since then, Sammie's Buddy Bench Project has distributed over **500** Buddy Benches to communities across the country.

"When we learned about the kindness and community involvement that Sammie's Buddy Bench Project promotes, we knew we had to get involved," said Ann Canela, director of corporate giving at Niagara Bottling. "Creating healthy, vibrant community spaces and bringing people together is in our DNA as a company. By connecting people through both a recycling drive and the Buddy Benches themselves, this project will help us create positive impacts for local residents and the environment now and for generations to come. Nationwide, we're working with our local plant teams to identify schools, parks, and other community organizations that could benefit from this impactful initiative."

To place a Buddy Bench in their community, Niagara team members and local residents will launch a drive to collect 1,000 pieces of HDPE #2 plastic, promoting the importance of recycling. Once collected, the plastic is dropped off at a local recycling center, and the participating group will send a photo of the plastic drop-off to POLYWOOD. In return, the local group receives a Buddy Bench that will help create a more sustainable environment that is both inclusive and fosters community connection.

"I am really excited to team up with like-minded people who care about spreading kindness, recycling and making an impact in the world! I can't wait to see more Buddy Benches around the country because of this! We are better together," said Sammie Vance, age 15 and founder of Sammie's Buddy Bench Project. "You don't have to be an adult to make a difference. You can be a kid too."

EarthX, the environmental non-profit founded in 2010, will act as the fiscal agent for the Niagara Cares grant to supply the Buddy Benches. Founded in 1990, POLYWOOD is the first furniture company to make wood out of HDPE #2 plastic, and will act as the manufacturing partner for the initiative. This zero-waste mindset and USA-made furniture brand aligns with sustainability initiatives of Niagara.

"POLYWOOD is honored to partner with Niagara Cares and EarthX to bring Sammie's Buddy Benches to even more schools and playgrounds across the United States," said Doug Rassi, POLYWOOD founder and CEO. "Sammie's commitment to the community, to recycling, and to helping kids feel less lonely is truly an inspiration to all of us at POLYWOOD."

Once the Buddy Benches are placed, local Niagara team member volunteers will present the benches, allowing the team members to further connect with the surrounding neighborhood. To sign up for the POLYWOOD Recycling Program and receive a Buddy Bench for your area, please visit polywood.com/sammies-buddy-bench-project.

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Niagara Cares is the heart of what we do and who we are at Niagara Bottling. For more than 60 years, we have been making a difference for our Team Members, consumers and communities through philanthropic giving, volunteering, water donations and disaster relief. As a family-owned business, we are committed to creating meaningful change for our communities through a spirit of giving back both big and small. For more information, visit niagarawater.com/niagara-cares.

Niagara Bottling, LLC has been family owned and operated since 1963. Headquartered in Diamond Bar, Calif., Niagara operates bottling facilities throughout the U.S. and Mexico. As a leading U.S. beverage manufacturer, Niagara Bottling works closely with some of the largest retailers, grocers, club and convenience stores throughout the country. Niagara produces a variety of beverages including bottled water, sparkling, vitamin and flavored water, teas, sports drinks, ready-to-drink coffee, protein drinks and non-dairy milk products. For more information, visit www.niagarawater.com.

Sammie's Buddy Bench Project was started in 2017 by Fort Wayne, IN native Sammie Vance at age 8. Sammie is now 15 years old on a mission to spread kindness and to make the world a less lonely place starting with making sure all kids have a friend. She has gained worldwide attention through her project where she collected plastic caps and lids and had them recycled into buddy benches for her school and all around the country. It has impacted and inspired many from kids to adults. She published her first

book “Inspire the World: A Kid’s Journey to Making a Difference” in 2021. She has won multiple awards for her activism. Most recently she was featured on Nickelodeon, Disney’s Christmas Parade, Top 20 Finalists for Kid of the Year, named one of People’s Magazine’s Girls Changing the World, featured on Reading Rainbow LIVE, Time for Kids and an “Inspiring Kid” on Nightly News with Lester Holt. For more information, visit www.sammiesbuddybenchproject.com

About EarthX

EarthX is an international nonprofit environmental organization dedicated to educating and inspiring people and organizations to take action towards a more sustainable future worldwide. We assemble and connect people all over the globe to explore sustainable solutions.

About POLYWOOD

For 34 years, POLYWOOD has been transforming outdoor living spaces with durable, sustainable, and timeless furniture designs. All genuine POLYWOOD® products are made in the USA from recycled and reusable plastics and are produced in 99% waste-free facilities in Syracuse, Indiana, and Roxboro, North Carolina. To learn more about the brand and see the products please visit www.polywood.com.

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