It’s not a stretch to say that fruit flies led high school junior Alex Kline to organize an American Red Cross blood drive. The flies were at the center of an intensive genetics project that Alex undertook at her school, One Stone’s Lab 51 School in Boise, as she learned how specific traits are transferred.

Aware of her project and also of her leadership abilities, one of her academic coaches nominated Alex for the Students of the Year program. Affiliated with the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, the program assigns the students a mentor and engages them in fundraising efforts to benefit cancer research. That’s when Alex made another discovery. “I learned … that 25 percent of blood donations are given to cancer patients,” Alex said.

Teen wins leadership scholarship for work

Idaho teen Alex Kline recently was awarded a scholarship for helping organize a Red Cross blood drive through the Leaders Save Lives program. She also helps out at the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

Cradled, warmed, looked after

Montana Red Cross volunteers helped Damian Burwell, her baby, Maci, and boyfriend Travis Dirette during an armed standoff near their Livingston home. The community worked together to make sure families like Damian’s, displaced by the standoff, were fed and sheltered, which in Damian’s case, prevented them from sleeping in their vehicle.
We need your compassion

IN THE KNOW

Read about some new volunteer opportunities, learn how to print your ID badge, make plans to Ketchup with Friends and meet a new teammate in this month’s Red Cross NEWS & HAP PENINGS.

KETCHUP WITH FRIENDS: What is it? Our monthly virtual social gathering on Microsoft Teams. NO agenda, just good times meeting other Red Crossers. (Oh, and there might be a draw or two.) Congratulations, Traci Bruha, February’s winner! The next Microsoft TEAMS meeting is March 9 at noon.

Join on your computer or mobile app. Click here to join the meeting.

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because we were panicking. We had a 1-year-old who was not in a good mood and really didn’t want to go home but we couldn’t go home, and it was freezing outside.”

That night and the next, the family was able to stay at the local Travelodge, where they were also provided meals at no cost.

“We were so relieved when we got to the hotel room,” she said. “Our 1-year-old sleeps in a crib, and the hotel even had a pack-and-play we could use and her diapers were all taken care of so we didn’t have to spend a fortune on fast food.”

Over three days, Montana Red Cross worked closely with community partners to provide more than 55 overnight hotel stays and serve 66 meals to 19 families displaced by the armed standoff.

Volunteers also handed out blankets and comfort kits with hygiene items like tooth paste and shampoo and helped replace critical medications left behind.

The standoff, which began on a Tuesday afternoon, finally ended Wednesday night when law enforce ment was able to take 17 into custody. Families were allowed to return to their homes the following day.

“The families were definitely appreciative,” Red Cross disaster action team volunteer Joa Mainwaring said. “We heard from several of the families we helped ask how they could become volunteers.”

Duman’s daughter even got something special to put her at ease at her temporary home-away-from-home. “Maci got the cutest Mickey Mouse toy, and she loved it,” Duman said. “It gave her that extra little ‘oh, everything’s OK.’”

Valerie Utley, a Red Cross disaster responder who lives in Livingston, is proud of how well her community stepped up. That included local restaurants that got warm meals out the door quickly, the property manager who helped make sure tenants found a safe place to stay and emergency officials who helped coordinate efforts.

“I can almost see the whole community all coming together,” she said. It’s compassionate responses like these, she said, that make her proud to wear the Red Cross vest.

“It doesn’t matter the situation, the Red Cross is there,” she said. “It’s not just during fires — it’s not just hurricanes — it’s the small fires, it’s the standoff, it’s anything, and I love that about the organization. All 151 years growing up, I’ve seen them on TV and always wanted to be part of an organization that’s bigger than myself, bigger than the dog and be there for somebody. Even if it’s just holding their hand, giving them a hug, reassuring them … to give them some sense of reassurance and in a very trying time.

“The Red Cross mission is what I’m about.” — Story by Matt Ochsner, regional communications director

YOU CAN HELP

Did you know Montana Red Cross helped more than 700 people following a disaster last year? Help us respond to disasters big and small by making a financial gift today.

Visit MontanaRedCross.org or call 800-272-6668 to learn more.
Red Cross account manager Margee Sell, left, presents Boise high school student Alex Kline with her $1,000 scholarship.

Linked organizations — the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and the American Red Cross — and Alex realized she had another leadership opportunity to work with both to make a difference.

Because of an iron deficiency, Alex is unable to donate blood right now, so she began to look for other ways to help.

One day while surfing the Internet, she came upon the American Red Cross website. There, she learned about Leaders Save Lives, a program that encourages students to host blood drives and offers them an opportunity to win a college scholarship.

Hosting a blood drive would be a way to assist the Red Cross. It also would help her set the stage for her Leukemia and Lymphoma Society fundraising campaign.

Margee Sell became Alex's Red Cross mentor, helping her arrange a donation site and work out other logistics like recruiting donors.

At first, it was challenging. As the date of the drive drew nearer, only three people had scheduled a donation appointment. But Alex didn’t give up. She brought up the drive during discussions with her friends and convinced her school to put information into its weekly newsletter.

Word began to get out. Not long after, a local television station interviewed Alex, and after the story aired, the blood drive schedule began to fill up.

By hosting a Leaders Save Lives drive, Alex was eligible for a chance to win a Red Cross scholarship. To qualify, a drive needs to bring in 25 units. Alex’s drive collected 38.

Her name was automatically entered into the Leaders Save Lives national scholarship drawing, and she was one of hundreds from across the country to qualify. Her hard work paid off.

In January, Alex learned she was one of four $1,000 scholarship winners, money she will use to pursue an even bigger goal — studying genetics at a major U.S. university.

“Do it!” Alex exclaimed when asked if others her age should consider hosting a blood drive. “It’s a great way to get involved with your community and gain leadership skills.”

— Story by Red Cross writing team volunteer Ellen McKinnon