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## Interview with Jen Rubino, Teen Founder of Cards for Hospitalized Kids

Written by Opal Vadhan [2 Comments](#)

While most highschoolers are trying to balance school, and being a teenager, Jen Rubino has bigger things to take care of. Jen Rubino founded her own charity [Cards for Hospitalized Kids](#), and used a hardship in her life and made it positive. She manages to run her own charity, be a student, and battle her illness. Her charity has sent thousands of cards to kids all around the country, and even managed to get celebrities involved. Jen Rubino, is changing lives day by day, and is an inspiration to people everywhere. Who says you have to wait til your older to change the world? This article shows that you can make a difference, no matter how old you are. I had a great time interviewing Jen, and hope you all feel inspired

after reading this!

**So you started a charity called Cards for Hospitalized Kids which is incredible, can you tell all those who don't know about your organization what it's about?**

Cards for Hospitalized Kids is a national charitable organization that is all about giving joy to hospitalized kids and showing them that they aren't forgotten about. When kids are hospitalized, they typically feel isolated and lonely, but getting a card helps lessen those feelings. Doctors provide the medicine and we provide ill kids with hope, joy & magic through cards. Last month, we gave cards to more than thirty-five hospitals across the country and more than 3,100 hospitalized kids received cards from us last month.

**When and how did you start your own charity?**

When I was 11, I was diagnosed with a serious medical condition and my illness reached its worst point last February when I was in the intensive care unit at the hospital recovering from a very painful surgery. Being away from my friends and my school were causing me almost as much pain as the surgery itself. During that hospital stay, small gestures from volunteers, like receiving a blanket and a card, helped me maintain hope at a time when I was closest to losing hope. Those small acts of kindness made me determined to find a way to help others the way those volunteers helped me.

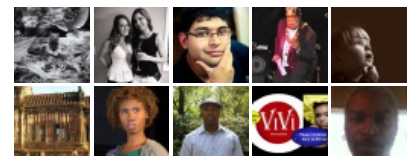
One night in the hospital, I came up with the idea of a foundation that makes cards for hospitalized kids and I started writing down ideas for the foundation on a piece of paper in my hospital room. This is when Cards for Hospitalized Kids really began. It started small. Initially, it was just some people in my community making cards for local hospitals with me, but Cards for Hospitalized Kids grew steadily each month. By August 2011, we launched a website and were hosting monthly card-making events. Now, people across the United States

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send in cards and help us fulfill our mission of giving hope, joy & magic to hospitalized kids, just as someone did for me a few months back. We've given cards to more than 4,500 hospitalized kids and counting.

Social media was very much key in starting Cards for Hospitalized Kids because it got the word out. People would hear about us on Facebook and Twitter and then they would get involved and tell their friends to do the same. Support from people like Lauren Conrad also really helped get it going. One tweet from her asking her fans to get involved resulted in over 500 additional people following us on Twitter and hundreds of additional people making cards. It's amazing what can be accomplished through Twitter and Facebook.

**Can you tell us about your illness and how you've overcome it, and used it in such a positive way to help others?**

When I was 11, I began experiencing chronic pain throughout my body and my doctors eventually discovered that I had a poorly understood connective tissue disorder. It was very difficult to deal with because I missed out on many of the normal joys of being a kid. At a time when my main concerns should have been going to school and having fun, my main concerns were dealing with surgeries, treatments and doctor visits. My illness really exposed me to what being a hospitalized kid is like and my illness also showed me that small acts of kindness mean the world to ill kids, which is why I founded Cards for Hospitalized Kids. Through Cards for Hospitalized Kids, I am able to use my pain to help others and do for others what was done for me. When you go through a tragedy, you have two choices: you can give up on life and feel sorry for yourself or you can choose to push on with life. I've chosen to push on with life and turn my pain into something positive.



**What has been the best thing/experience that you got through Cards for Hospitalized Kids?**

The best thing has been being able to give joy to hospitalized kids. It's an un-describable feeling to see a smile on an ill kid's face and know you put that smile there. Another great thing has been being able to inspire people to give back and stay strong in their own struggles. I get letters and messages from strangers telling me that I've inspired them to give back and stay strong in their own hardships, which is an amazing thing to me. After I was diagnosed, I

knew that I wanted to one day use my pain to help other people and inspire them, and it's incredible to know it is actually happening.

**I know you're a teenager, and it's so amazing that you're so young and manage to start your own charity as a teenager. But how do you manage school, social life, and having your own charity?**

I take things day by day, task by task and try not to let myself get too far ahead, which makes a big difference in being able to get everything done. If you look too far in the future, you will get overwhelmed and won't be able to balance everything. When Cards for Hospitalized Kids began reaching a national level, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to talk to other teen girls with charities who gave, and continue to give, me great advice on managing everything. Having a mom tell you that you made her hospitalized child smile or having a person tell you that you inspired them to give back makes all the hard work and long days worth it.

**You're an inspiration to a lot of people out there, who inspires you?**

Demi Lovato and Bethany Hamilton are two people that really inspire me. Both of them have endured very difficult times, but they are using their pain to help others, which inspires me a lot because that is what I aspire to do. The kids that I give cards to also inspire me because they are so strong despite everything they are facing. They are heroes.

**You've already accomplished so much, what dreams do you have for the upcoming years that are awaiting to be fulfilled?**

I have a couple dreams waiting to be fulfilled. I would like to write a book for young people about turning dreams into reality and overcoming adversity. Cards for Hospitalized Kids began with a simple idea on a piece of paper and it has turned into a national charity and I believe I can help others achieve their dreams by telling them how I achieved mine. I think my experience overcoming adversity can help people, as well. I had to learn how to stay strong throughout my fifteen surgeries and I think the lessons I learned can help others deal with their own hardship whether it's an illness, an eating disorder, a bully or anything else! We all

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face difficult times and we have all dreams, and I really believe I can help others, which is why I plan to write the book in the few years. I would also like to do motivational speaking for young people and share my experiences with them. A big goal of mine is to speak at a TED youth event. I also hope to continue to grow Cards for Hospitalized Kids and continue to reach more kids and hospitals. Additionally, I plan to attend college and continue my education. I'm excited to see what the future holds!

#### How can someone get involved with Cards for Hospitalized Kids?

The great thing about Cards for Hospitalized Kids is that it is very easy to get involved. All you have to do is make cards, mail them in and we take it from there. We distribute cards to hospitals around the country each month and we need as many cards as possible each month, to reach as many kids as possible. Our website, [www.cardsforhospitalizedkids.com](http://www.cardsforhospitalizedkids.com), has all the information on making cards, hosting a card making party and getting others involved. It only takes a few minutes to make a card, but the cards have a lasting impact on the hospitalized kids that receive them. People can also connect with us on Twitter ([@Crds4HosptlKids](https://twitter.com/Crds4HosptlKids)) and Facebook ([Facebook.com/CardsForHospitalizedKids](https://Facebook.com/CardsForHospitalizedKids)).

#### What do you hope for Cards for Hospitalized Kids in the future?

I hope that we continue to give cards to more kids and expand to more hospitals. This year, my goal is to give cards to 20,000 hospitalized kids. I also hope that more celebrities and athletes continue to get involved because the kids get so excited when they get a card or an autograph from a celebrity. We've been very fortunate to have people like Lauren Conrad, World Champion gymnast Aly Raisman, IndyCar racer Graham Rahal and other celebrities and athletes donate cards and autographs for the kids; I hope other celebrities and athletes will do the same because it means so much to the kids and brings them so much joy.



#### What advice do you have to other teenagers out there reading your story?

My best advice for teens reading my story is to not let other people tell you who you are or what you're capable of achieving. There's a lot of pressure these days from others who try to tell you who you are and whether or not you worthy of achieving your dreams, but you know who you are and what you can accomplish, even if others do not. When I started Cards for Hospitalized Kids, many people doubted me and told me I wouldn't be able to do it, but I didn't let them stop me from going after my dream and other teens shouldn't either. I believed in my dream when others didn't, and that is why Cards for Hospitalized Kids is what it is today. As young people, we have the whole world sitting before us and we just need to dream big and believe in ourselves.

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**Jen Rubino** 2012-01-17 02:18 #

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I am so honored to be featured in Differences Magazine! Thank you for having me!

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**Marissa** 2012-01-17 18:12 #

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