

## INSPIRATIONAL STORIES *from* ARCHITECTS of CHANGE

# MARIA SHRIVER

POWERED BY INSPIRATION

### ***Spreading Hope One Card at a Time***

By: Jen Rubino, *Founder of Cards for Hospitalized Kids*

In February of 2011, I was lying in the Intensive Care Unit(ICU) trying to recover from my thirteenth surgery to treat a chronic illness. The ICU is the hospital unit for the sickest patients and is a place where hope is often the strongest medicine.

I was in extreme pain and was away from everything outside of my hospital room—I felt forgotten and was close to losing hope. I had spent the last six years of my life fighting a chronic, serious illness and felt like giving up.

One day, a hospital volunteer dropped off a card while I was sleeping. The card said “Stay Strong”. This small gesture made an enormous impact on me by making me smile and showing me I wasn’t forgotten about just because I was ill. This gesture inspired me to do for other sick kids and teens what was done for me.

When I was released from the hospital, my friends started asking me if there was anything they could do to help me during my recovery from the surgery. I told them there was something they could do — they could make handmade cards with me for patients at the local Children’s Hospitals.

Soon, I began seeing that the cards we made were giving other patients that sense of hope and joy I had been given. This is why I founded [Cards for Hospitalized Kids](#), a charitable organization that aims to spread hope, joy & magic to sick kids through handmade cards.

By utilizing social media, I was able to turn my charity into a nationwide effort. People across the United States and even other countries — schools, teams, athletes, individuals, families and community groups — now make handmade cards for us to distribute to hospitals nationwide.

Celebrities such as Olympic Gold Medalists Aly Raisman and Nastia Liukin, Actress Lucy Hale and Singer Jesse McCartney have also gotten involved in the cause by donating autographs for the patients to receive with their cards and helping us spread the word. Through social media, our celebrity supporters have helped recruit hundreds of people to make cards.

Over 13,000 hospitalized kids in more than 130 hospitals across the country have received cards from my charity. [\\*40,000+ hospitalized kids have now received cards.](#)

Aside from the data, it is the individual stories from patients and their families that demonstrate the impact of Cards for Hospitalized Kids.

From a heart transplant patient who was so moved by her card that she now makes cards for others to a mother of a cancer patient that passed away who buried the card with her daughter, each card is truly making a lasting impact.

A card may seem simple, but it means so much to these kids and teens because of what they are facing. They are facing challenges no one should ever have to face and are missing out on many of the normal joys of childhood most kids take for granted.

The cards show kids that someone is thinking of them. The cards impact many of the families, as well, by showing them that someone is pulling for their child.

Messages such as "You're Amazing" and "I believe in You" grace the covers and insides of the cards rather than messages that focus on the child's illness.

An idea that began in my hospital room has turned into a nationwide movement that is impacting thousands.

Cards for Hospitalized Kids looks past all classifications and welcomes anyone who wants to use their time and creative skills to impact a sick child's life.

Using the instructions on our website, people of any age or location can make cards. All people have to do is send the cards to the address on the website and we take it from there. People can also host card-making events and the website has all the info on that, as well. It is a simple yet beautiful way to impact the life of a child who is suffering.

If people know a hospitalized child that could use a card, they can also let us know via the "Refer a Child to receive a card form" on the website.

In life, we can't choose what happens to us but we can choose whether or not to turn it into something positive.

My illness has plagued my life with so many insurmountable challenges and took so much away from me. But, I chose to make a positive impact as a result of the tragedy I've endured.

Lifting others up has truly allowed me to lift myself up, too, and, chronic illness or not, I know it will be the same for others who give back.

***CFHK Founder, Jen Rubino, wrote this piece for the "Architects of Change" series on Maria Shriver's storytelling website, MariaShriver.com. Maria Shriver is a journalist, author, advocate & the former First Lady of California.***