

Teen Sends a Smile Worldwide

Creator of Cards for Kids Spreads Positive Message

By J.D. O'Gara

A few years ago, 17-year-old Haley Burgess was uplifted. Facing a difficult health and emotional struggle in her sophomore year, she had to be taken out of school. Her saving grace? The kindness of her friends, and since then, Haley has taken that kindness to an international level.

"I got lots of cards from people showing their support for me. One friend sent me a book of inspirational quotes," says Burgess. "(My friends) were just like saying, 'Haley, I support you and I want you to know that you're a really good friend of mine, and I'll always be there if you need me.' It put a smile on my face. I was really touched by it."

In November of 2009, Haley created Cards for Kids (CFK). As she puts it, "I wanted to help other kids facing a difficult struggle." Haley began by writing to over 20 different organizations around the world to ask if the children they served would like to receive cards.

"Our mission statement is that we send handmade and painted cards to kids around the world facing poverty, homelessness or a difficult situation," says Burgess. The goal of all of this – to simply brighten their day. Since CFK began in November 2009, over 13,000 cards have been made by



Haley Burgess: 17-year-old Franklin resident Haley Burgess has inspired thousands to spread a message of cheer to children in different areas of the world who are facing difficulty.

Cards for Kids volunteers from such places as the United States, England, Canada, and Australia.

Haley has since been featured by FOX and WCVB TV and the National Society of High School Scholars newsletter, was recognized as an Everyday Young Hero by Youth Service America and received an honorable mention for the Build-A-Bear Huggable Heroes Award.

Haley largely runs this organization herself, with the help of her friends, her father, Brett, and her sisters, Rachel, 19 and Carly, 14.

She now receives letters from college students, artists and community groups who are interested in making cards. A requirement of Cards for Kids (CFK) is that the cards be handmade. Sometimes, says Haley, "People will send them to me. I organize them all just to make sure they're appropriate and disperse them to the different organizations."

Among the organizations Burgess has sent cards to are Children's Hospital, The Starlight Children's Foundation, the New Life Children's Home in the Philippines, organizations in Ghana and the Ukraine. At times, says Burgess, she will send general messages, when she doesn't have specific names. Other times she has been able to address the cards to specific children.

"I really wanted to do something. I really want to be able to help people with a card and be able to put a smile on their face."

The response has been heartening. Burgess has received what she says are a lot of pictures of the children, including one of children from **Hearts in Unity in Tanzania, Africa**, who held up their cards for the photo and a similar picture of children from An Orphan's Bright Star in Ukraine. She has received thank-you cards from Ghana, and each child she sent cards to in the Philippines wrote back.



Children from Hearts in Unity, in Tanzania, Africa, display their handmade letters from CFK.

"I've learned that there are a ton of kids out there, and I had no idea that these places were third world countries. I've learned a lot about their different cultures. I've also learned how to handle a whole organization, from organizing the cards to setting up binders to organizing all the letters I get."

Also I just like knowing that there's community service opportunities out there."

Although Cards for Kids is not yet a registered non-profit, Burgess says that any monetary donations "all are used to send the cards off." The supplies she uses are "all donations really...all these stamps are donations, the stickers are donations, I've gotten donations of

construction papers," she says. "Stampendous (www.stampendous.com) has also been a great supporter."

Sending the cards can get expensive, so CFK welcomes donations. Haley estimates that she sends about three to seven packages out every two weeks. Anyone interested in making cards, donating supplies or monetary donations can contact Haley at CardsForKids524@gmail.com. Cards for Kids can also be found online at <http://www.wix.com/cards-for-kids/cards-for-kids>, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/cardsforkids and on the CFK Twitter page www.twitter.com/cardsforkids.