

● Doing Good

"This just proves: Kindness is addictive!"

17,500 and counting. That's how many wishes regular people like Jamielynn Storch and Bre McGloughlin have helped make come true. Because when you do something special for someone else, you feel great, too!

If only there were something I could do. How many times have you wondered that after reading about a family devastated by illness or seeing a town ravaged by a tornado on the news?

Dave Girgenti often found himself wondering that, too. And little did the Cherry Hill, New Jersey, graphic designer know, this thought would be the start of something amazing, making dreams come true...

Dave was lucky; that much he knew. He wasn't in New York City on 9/11, nor had he lost anyone dear. But as the towers crumbled amid sirens and smoke, he longed to help those who had.

So he donated to families of the fallen. But he couldn't stop thinking: There's got to be a way for people to connect at times like this.

Then Hurricane Katrina struck—and once again, Dave watched in horror as thousands were left devastated. And suddenly, he had an idea: Why not create a website where folks could make—and grant—wishes? Because everyone needs help sometimes. Because everyone has a gift to give. And because nothing is more healing than giving.

The wish granters!

So Dave logged on to his laptop—and, along with a computer programmer friend, created WishUponAHero.com. And as word spread, people began making wishes. For big things, like help finding a missing loved one. And for simple ones, like get-well cards for a sick child.

What a beautiful idea, 27-year-old Jamielynn Storch thought when she heard about the site. She'd contributed to fund-raisers before, but this was more than writing a check. This was the chance to be someone's hero!

So, clicking on the site, Jamielynn registered herself as

"WishUponAHero.com is like Random Acts of Kindness meets Pay it Forward," says Dave, inset. Just ask wish granters Bre, and Jamielynn, far right, who along with dozens of other wish ambassadors, have become Emmie's Heroes, raising \$1,256 in just a week to help a little girl with congenital heart and lung defects.



"AmazingGrayce." Then, scrolling through the wishes, her eyes fell upon one that said: *I wish to buy my son a game set. He has autism and loves games...*

Jamielynn scraped together \$25, and with three other "Wish Ambassadors," she made the mom's—and boy's—dream come true! And when the mom posted a picture of her son playing his game with the message *Thank you!* Jamielynn couldn't stop smiling.

Soon, she was granting more wishes: helping Shorty the dog get treatment for parvovirus; contributing to a fund to fix a family's minivan so they could bring their baby girl, Madison, to chemotherapy. And each time, Jamielynn got that warm glow you get from making a difference for someone else.

Someone like the young single mom who'd stumbled upon Wish Upon a Hero when she was desperate. Though it pained her to type it, for her son's sake, she did: *I wish I could buy groceries for my little boy.*

Almost instantly, Wish Upon a Hero members were reading her plea. What if that were me? they asked themselves, sending what they could: \$3 here, \$5.25 there... and soon, she had \$21!

They're angels! she wept with relief. It was enough to tide her over until her next paycheck—and to inspire her to pay it forward by signing up to grant wishes, too!

"Anybody can be a hero!"

Soon, she was sending a card to a young man graduating from the firefighters' academy. Giving a few dollars to a Houston mom whose son needed shoes. And it struck her: Alone, we may struggle. But together, we can get through anything!

That's why Oregon mom of three Bre McGloughlin tries to grant a wish every day! Wishes for everything from fuzzy slippers to an air hockey game for soldiers in Iraq to collecting pennies to save the rain forest.

"Sometimes my kids and I pick a wish together," she says. "It's taught them that nobody's too small to make a difference!"

And all those dreams-come-true add up: A year after Wish UponAHero.com was born, more than 17,500 wishes have been granted, transforming regular people into superheroes! Like the eighth-graders that rallied behind a classmate whose home was lost in a fire. The folks from New Jersey who are sending a World War II vet to visit Pearl Harbor for his 90th birthday.

And the dozens of wish ambassadors helping the family of a little girl named Emmie, adopted from South Korea, who's undergone seven open-heart surgeries.

"Everybody has a wish, and anybody can be a hero. All we have to do is open our hearts—because kindness is addictive!" Dave says.

4 simple things you can do to Make someone's day better!

Try these free (and almost-free) ways:

1 Send a handwritten note. Cards and notes are one of the most-requested wishes at Wish Upon a Hero. "Handwritten notes show you cared enough to take your time," explains Kirk Wilkinson, author of *The Happiness Factor* (thehappinesfactor.com).

2 Stop by with their favorite food. "Knowing someone's favorite dish—and taking the time to bring it—is a gift that shows you really know the person," says Wilkinson.

3 Offer to do an errand for them. "We're all overloaded. Stopping to pick up their dry-cleaning, for instance, could improve their whole day," suggests Wilkinson. "It says they're worth your trouble."

4 Call just to say hello. "We all tend to call when we have a reason, but everyone loves calls that just say, 'I was thinking of you,'" says Wilkinson. "They show you're really interested in them."

Did you know? You can get ideas for spreading kindness in your community at actsofkindness.org.



Photos: Paul Schiraldi Photography (2); ZZVe Illustr/Media Bakery.