

Message of Hope and Healing

*Local organization
creates hand-crafted
cards to lift spirits
of cancer patients*

By David Baugher • Special to the Light

When Aleeza Granote was going about her social work duties at Barnes-Jewish Hospital, she kept seeing a problem that bothered her.

“Every day there were patients that had no support and no family,” she said. “No one came to visit them. It just really broke my heart. There was no one to pick them up when they went home.”

So, she figured that everyone likes to receive a card. Now, thanks to her they do.

“There were so many people who were lonely and suffering and I wanted to do something to lift their spirits during a very difficult time,” she said. “I envisioned these people going to their mailbox and getting this card showing that people care about them.”

That was the idea behind Card Care Connection, which Granote, 32, put into practice in 2011 to help cancer patients with limited support systems. Now some 30 to 50 handmade cards go out every month, personalized with individual messages. Dozens of volunteers and partnering organizations participate in the effort.



ABOVE: Aleeza Granote (right) works with Sarah Cohen at a Nishmah event earlier this year to create hand-crafted cards (see opposite page) to send to cancer patients with personalized messages. That was the idea behind the organization Granote founded in 2011: Card Care Connection. Photo: Yana Hotter





“My mother recently received a beautiful card from your program,” read one message from a family member. “It made her feel so special and added a bit of sunshine to her day. Thank you for everything you do.”

But it’s not just the patients or their families who appreciate the gesture. Sometimes the volunteers themselves express gratitude.

“We get a lot of thank yous from the people that are making the cards who send in their packages and they say thank you for allowing me to provide the service,” Granote said.

There can even be a personal reason why someone gives their time – and why it makes them feel so good to do so.

“I’ve been looking for a way to celebrate my 10th anniversary of my own cancer,” read one message. “Cards are so important for encouragement which I know firsthand. Keep up the great work. It just provides an outlet for people to give back.”

Granote tries to make the program as broad as possible and it does not have income, age or geographical requirements.

“When I made the program, I made it very easy to make a referral,” she said. “A lot of non-profits are specific zip code, specific income qualifications. I made it so this program could reach anyone... As a social worker, I know that so many programs have so many restrictions. I just wanted to make this as simple as possible. If there is someone who could benefit we’ll be happy to

send them a card.”

Card Care Connection often partners with other groups as well, including those in the Jewish community where synagogues like Temple Israel and Shaare Emeth have tied it into mitzvah-themed events.

It was part of the mitzvah day fair last year at the former Brith Sholom Kneseth Israel (now Kol Rinah). Beth Dubro, a fifth-grade teacher with Shaare Shalom, Kol Rinah’s religious school, said the kids loved having Granote at the event so much they chose to have all of their *tzedakah* donated to Card Care Connection.

“There are a lot of mitzvah projects out there and a lot of times, the kids don’t really get to do much of anything,” said Dubro. “But this, when they create it, is just incredible. They really are proud of it because it is so professional and so unique.

Dubro said the hands-on nature of the work personalizing a card is what makes it so special.

“They can really understand what the mitzvah is, that these



See **CARDS**, page 92

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CARDS

continued from page 24

cards are really going to cancer patients and they are doing something good for the community," she said.

Dubro described Granote as a very genuine person.

"Her personality speaks of social work and you don't meet too many people like that," she said. "She talks the walk and walks the talk. She is what she does."

Sarah Colby, program coordinator for the Arts + Healthcare program at Barnes-Jewish Hospital said she's been deeply impressed by Granote.

"She would sit down and make the most beautiful things and she would stop, sit for awhile with patients and family members," said Colby. "She has this wonderful understanding that these beautiful, light-touch things can really have a profound effect on people so I was really delighted to see she's doing this."

Simone Picker, Banot program coordinator for Nishmah at the Jewish Community Center, said that Granote sparked her interest when she talked about her project during a Shabbat dinner.

Picker immediately thought it would be a great fit for the teen girls with whom she works.

"She's very calm but very passionate at the same time," she said. "She's very eloquent in explaining what she does and the reasons why she started it. It seems like she can connect with different age groups and all different people."

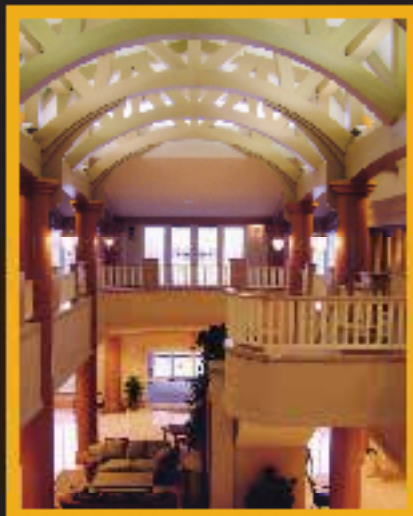
Granote feels that her Judaism plays a key role in that process. Her father is an Israeli native, and she is a graduate of a Jewish day school, the Minnesota native loves to do her part for *tikkum olam*.

"Everything from the Jewish community goes back to *mitzvot* and giving back and serving other people," said the Temple Emanuel congregant. "I think this ties 100 percent back in."

For more information about Card Care Connection, call 314-477-0084, email aleeza@cardcareconnection.com or visit www.cardcareconnection.com. ■



Aleeza Granote cuts paper for cards being created by teen girls at a Nishmah event earlier this year. Samples of cards created by Card Care Connection, the group she founded, are below. Photo: Yana Hotter



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