

INSPIRED LIFE

Teen gives 16,000 valentines to people who might not otherwise get one

Patrick Kaufmann, 14, has involved students across the D.C. area to make the cards for people in hospitals, nursing homes and other places



By [Cathy Free](#)

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Patrick Kaufmann made 30 valentine cards along with some friends as a youth volunteer at a D.C. food nonprofit several years ago.

His handmade cards were tucked inside home-delivery meal packages and sent to sick children and adults. Afterward, Patrick, then 10, said he couldn't stop wondering if there might be other people who would appreciate a valentine but wouldn't be receiving one.

"I kept thinking, 'Wouldn't it be great if I could find a way to give everyone a valentine who might not get one?'" he said. "I decided it wouldn't be much trouble to make a few more."

As it turned out, many more.

In the fall of 2020, Patrick asked students at his school to make 300 valentines to deliver on Valentine's Day 2021 with meal packages provided by [Food & Friends](#), a D.C. charity that helps people with cancer, HIV, AIDS and other serious illnesses.

Then in 2022, he upped his game, enlisting the help of students at several D.C.-area schools to craft more than 3,000 cards.

This year he supersized it: He organized making and delivering 16,000 valentines for people who otherwise likely wouldn't get one. They were created by students at 62 schools in D.C., Maryland and Virginia, said Patrick, now 14, who personally recruits the classrooms that volunteer.

He recently developed a website for his project, Valentines by Kids, where he encourages everyone to cut out colorful hearts, write messages of kindness and help spread some love.

In the days leading up to Valentine's Day, the boxes of cards are picked up at his home in Potomac, Md., by delivery drivers and are taken to about 60 organizations Patrick has coordinated with, including hospitals, hospices, nursing homes and Food & Friends, where Patrick has volunteered with his father for several years.

"With more than 16,000 cards to distribute, our house looks like a FedEx distribution center," said his father, Roy Kaufmann, a lawyer who works in D.C.

"We didn't quite anticipate just how successful Patrick's efforts would be," Kaufmann said. "But he has it all under control and we are very proud of him."

Patrick, with help from his father, got funding from two local nonprofits to pay for a driver to pick up the valentines and deliver them to the various groups that will distribute them.

"They mean a lot to people who don't have much family and are living alone," said Patrick, a ninth grader at Washington International School in D.C. "A valentine will also really cheer people up if they've been sick or are working a lot."

"I hope it makes them realize that somebody is thinking about them and cares," he added.

Carrie Stoltzfus, executive director of Food & Friends, said she is grateful for the boxes filled with valentines to hand out with the agency's home-delivered meals.

"It's wonderful that Patrick thought to bring so many young people together to send messages of kindness to those we serve who are living with serious illnesses," Stoltzfus said.

Patrick doesn't know any of the people who receive the cards, but he hopes his efforts will brighten their days.

“I love getting valentines, and I also like to make them,” he said.

His mother, Rosario Allauca Castillo, is a teacher at the [Easy Spanish 123](#) language program in D.C., and she asks her classes to help make valentines, Patrick said.

Students of all ages are excited to help, he added, and they go to great efforts to make their valentines stand out.

“Some cards are covered with glitter, and some have stickers or are full of tiny hearts inside,” he said. “No two are the same.”

Students at Washington International School say they look forward every year to spending an hour or two crafting valentines for strangers and putting them in envelopes addressed to “My Friend.”

“It makes me happy to know somebody gets a card if they don’t have anyone else to spend the holiday with,” said Max Rapaport, 10, who is in fifth grade at the school.

“The least we could do is give them a card showing that we care for them,” he said.

Max said he put large purple hearts on the front and back of his valentine this year, and he included a light pink heart in the middle with a poem: “Roses are red, violets are blue; We think you are amazing — you just have to know it too.”

“The biggest part is having empathy toward others and imagining what it would be like in their view,” he said.

One of his fifth-grade classmates, Liliana Fadakar, covered her card in pink and red hearts, saying she wanted to “brighten the day of somebody who is sick and might be suffering in the hospital.”

“The best part of making the cards was imagining how the people would feel when they receive a Valentine’s Day card they weren’t expecting,” said Liliana, 10.

Patrick said that’s what keeps him motivated to continue the project, which he wants to expand if can find enough volunteers.

He says he’s felt a sense of accomplishment looking at the stacks of heart-covered boxes that have taken over his family’s living room and dining room.

“My parents, my uncle and grandmother help me bundle the cards and put them in the boxes, but sometimes, it’s hard to keep up,” he said. “After Valentine’s Day, we’ll all be taking a little break.”