

10 Dedicated & Deserving Social Workers

By Lindsey Getz

Aleeza Granote, MSW, LCSW

Pediatric oncology social worker at SSM Cardinal Glennon Children's Medical Center in St. Louis and executive director of Card Care Connection

Aleeza Granote admits that her job is intense—even overwhelming at times. But she also says it's incredibly gratifying and she loves the opportunity she has to help families and make a difference.

"Take today, for example," Granote told us at interview time. "We have a teenager here who has her one-year anniversary with her boyfriend so we are making her a special dinner and have balloons and other fun things coming. I was also able to just help send a



4-year-old boy with a terminal illness to Sea World. He already had his Make-A-Wish trip but we knew that he really wanted to get to Sea World so we helped make that happen. The stories are unbelievable and it's such a joy for me to be part of them. The families are the heroes—I'm just there to help."

And that's what Granote has done her whole life. She's been there to help. When Granote was 12 she responded to an ad for volunteers at a nursing home. While other adolescents were going to the mall or playing video games, Granote was having her parents drop her off at

the Alzheimer's unit to spend time with the patients. She did their makeup and helped them bake.

"It just felt like the right thing to do," Granote says. "I never really thought about it being different. I did that for years and later found out I was the youngest volunteer to ever help there."

In college, Granote helped run trick-or-treating events for underprivileged kids on Halloween, volunteered at a soup kitchen, and helped plan other events for those in need. "Frankly I just felt fortunate to be able to have roles where I could organize events like these," she says. "I get excited about organizing events."

And that passion has carried through to today. In addition to the time and energy she gives to her full-time job, Granote has spent countless after-work hours developing her nonprofit organization Card Care Connection, which provides beautifully crafted cards with inspiring messages to patients with cancer nationwide. Since launching in 2011, Granote has collected more than 13,000 cards. She has also recently extended that organization's reach with the Bundles of Cheer program, which also provides care packages to those with cancer. Granote says that every day she is energized by her patients and their families.

"The stories can be so sad—so difficult," she says. "But the way the community comes together to help can also be so inspiring. And there are plenty of happy endings, too. Today we have a 4-year-old who is finishing his treatment for brain cancer. How amazing is that? It's incredible."