

CRAIN'S

NEW YORK BUSINESS

20 Under 20



Photo Credit: Buck Ennis

Lillian PRAVDA

15 | Vision For and From Children,
Manhattan, Founder and CEO



Only nine weeks after she was born, Lillian Pravda underwent surgery to remove a congenital cataract from her left eye. At age 5, she returned to the operating room to repair a lazy eye. Instead of setting her back, the two surgeries inspired her to give the gift of sight to underprivileged children the world over.



THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Youngster With a Vision

Ralph Gardner Jr. Meets 14-year-old Lillian Pravda, Founder of Vision For and From Children

By RALPH GARDNER JR.

Jan. 27, 2014



Lillian Pravda started her charity Vision For and From Children when she was 8 years old. She'd had two eye surgeries by the time she was 5. *Natalie Keyssar for The Wall Street Journal*

The Barnes & Noble on 86th Street and Lexington Avenue has a clever holiday-season program: It invites representatives of local charities and literacy and arts organizations to gift-wrap customers' purchases, thus exempting its own employees from having to do so. The groups get to keep any tips and, more importantly, to spread the word and drum up support for their good work.

That's how I met 14-year-old Lillian Pravda last month. Lillian cheerfully—and I might add quickly and expertly—wrapped several books I'd bought as Christmas presents while telling me about her charity, Vision For and From Children.

Because of her youth, I assumed Lillian was merely a volunteer for the organization. But her seriousness of purpose and practiced spiel soon made it clear that Vision For and From Children, which raises funds to provide eye surgery for children in the U.S. and in the developing world, was entirely her baby.

Being a cynical Upper East Sider, I assumed her group had to be a carefully crafted ploy to buff her brag sheet and get her into her first-choice college. I'd seen it before.

But when we reconnected last week at Barnes & Noble—meeting in a downstairs event space—she pointed out that she's still a bit young to be plotting her college admissions strategy.

"College is a few years away," Lillian explained sensibly. "I like to live in the now."

The sentiment might sound as if it emerged from the mouth of someone in her 30s, 40s or 80s. But Lillian seems nothing if not wise beyond her years, her slightly gangly adolescent grace and the sparkly blush on her cheeks notwithstanding. She started Vision For and From Children when she was 8. And that merely formalized something she'd been doing since she was 6 years old—providing moral support and toys, such as teddy bears and Magna Doodles, to children at local hospitals who were about to undergo eye surgery.

Lillian had no trouble empathizing with the patients, some of them infants. She'd had two eye surgeries of her own by the time she was 5. The first was at nine weeks, to remove a congenital cataract in her left eye. The second was for strabismus, commonly known as lazy eye.

"It was then I realized a lot of children were nervous," as she'd been, Lillian told me. "I started giving toys to the children at the hospital to ease their minds. A few years later, I wanted to reach more children," and thus Vision For and From Children was born. "The more time I spent at the hospital, the more I learned that not every child in need of care is as fortunate to have access to it."

Lillian diplomatically deflects questions about how much money her organization has raised.

"It's not about how much money you raised," she said. "It's about how many children get the gift of sight so they can see the sun and the moon and the stars."

She estimates that Vision For and From Children has helped provide eye care to 24,100 children in the U.S. and from countries such as Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Ukraine.

The newest fundraising campaign on her website,

visionforandfromchildren.org, aims to raise \$1 million in one-dollar bills to build ophthalmology clinics in developing countries.

Dr. Brian Campolattaro, who performed both of Lillian's surgeries, said he has done 200 surgeries pro bono on behalf of her organization.

"I partner with doctors in the host countries so they can get proper follow-up care," he said, referring to the child patients. "When we travel to these countries, we teach the doctors in those countries to operate."

Since locations in poorer countries often don't have proper medical equipment, Vision For and From Children also helps pay for children to come to the U.S. for surgery. Failure to operate on cataracts such as Lillian's can lead to blindness.

"I think she has a real sense of community and empathy," Dr. Campolattaro said. And she has had "such a wonderful result," he said, referring to Lillian's own surgeries, "that she wants the same result for them. She has 20/20 vision in an eye that would have been blind 20 or 30 years ago."

All of this sounded great, but it left one large question unanswered. Between running her charity, accepting awards, speaking at schools and appearing on panels, when does Lillian, an eighth grader, find time for homework?

"A lot of people ask me, 'Can you do it all?'" she acknowledged. "It fits. It's a good combination." She said she also dances and is on her school's basketball team.

"I play guard," Lillian explained modestly. "I'm there for defense. I don't do much of the shooting."

The teenager is finally old enough that this March, for the first time, she's been invited to accompany Dr. Campolattaro and his team to the Dominican Republic to watch the results of her dedication in action. "I fund that mission every year," she explained.

I assumed that, if her parents gave her permission, she'd be traveling on her spring break, but she said the four-day trip occurs before then. "I'm not going to be missing school," she said. "There are parent- teacher conferences that day."

—ralph.gardner@wsj.com

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2015 Caring Award Winners

International Caring Award Winner



Pope Francis

Preaching the Gospel of Caring

When Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Argentina became pope, he chose to be called after Francis of Assisi. The thirteenth-century saint was a man of poverty who loved all of creation. The first pope from the developing world has followed in his path by speaking out for peace and justice worldwide. Pope Francis has expressed a new view of Catholic gay rights, apologized for the Church's mistreatment of Native Americans, and pleaded for action on climate change, which he says affects the poor most. His moral vision of a “poor church, for the poor” inspires his impassioned critique of unfettered profits and demand that governments redistribute social benefits to the needy. This focus on poverty stems from his belief that sacrificing for the poor is the heart of the gospel, as St. Francis once preached.

30TH ANNUAL CARING AWARDS

LILLIAN PRAVDA

Age 14, New York
Founder, *Vision For and From Children*

Lillian lights up the world by helping kids see. Her sense of vision comes from having eye problems since she was born. By the time she was five, she'd had two surgeries, the first to remove a cataract, the second for lazy eye. When she was six, she realized a lot of children were nervous about undergoing eye surgery, so she began giving toys to kids at hospitals who were about to undergo surgery on their eyes. Then she began volunteering by reading to children in the waiting room, where she assured parents that their child would be just fine. “The more time I spent at hospitals,” the 14-year-old New Yorker says, “the more I learned that not every child in need of care is as fortunate to have access to it.” As she began meeting kids from around the world who came to the U.S. for care, she decided to do something to give needy children the gift of sight.

At age eight, she founded Vision For and From Children, which raises funds to provide eye surgery in the U.S. and developing world. Her organization has sent teams of ophthalmologists to places like Haiti, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, and Ukraine. Since locations in poorer countries often don't have proper medical equipment, Vision For and From Children flies equipment there, besides paying for children to come to the U.S. for their operations.

In the past six years, Lillian has helped 25,210 children with assistance from Fortune 500 companies, businesses here and abroad, and the many doctors who volunteer for her group. “My surgeon connected me with doctors at first,” Lillian explains, “but getting doctors to donate is easy. They really want to help.”

One of the conditions they care for is lazy eye, and treatment includes wearing a patch on the dominant eye to strengthen the other. Lillian knows what this is like because she wore a patch for almost 10 years. “I had a great deal of time to reflect on lazy eye and what that means,” she says. “I ultimately began thinking about lazy eye a little differently. Lazy eye. Lazy I.”

Fortunately, there's a painless cure for lazy I, Lillian points out. Use the “power of one” to make the world

A color portrait of Lillian Pravda, a young girl with dark hair pulled back, smiling warmly at the camera.

a better place. “Helping even one person is an achievement,” she tells students in talks she gives at schools. Many of them have been inspired to start their own projects. Some have become “diplomats” who raise funds for her cause. And one class who supported Lillian's mission got to see the people they were helping when Lillian skyped them on her yearly trip to meet patients overseas. “Making that personal connection,” she says, “gets them more engaged in public service.”

Interacting with patients also inspires Lillian and she was moved by a girl she met in the Dominican Republic this year. “She looked like me,” Lillian recalls “and told me she had three wishes: to get her eyes fixed to get braces, and to be a doctor so she could help other children. I was with her every step of the way through surgery. I was with her when she could see, and now she can be the doctor she wants to be.”

Perhaps that girl will someday work in one of the ophthalmology clinics Lillian wants to build in developing nations. Lillian's now raising the funds by asking for “one million \$1 bills.” But no matter how much her project grows, she'll never get over the thrill of helping someone see the sun, moon, and stars. She loves knowing “I helped give someone sight.”

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By Betsy Fast & Jelani Addams Rosa

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2 of 19

8-Year-Old Starts Global Organization To Help Children Get Access To Eye Care

WHY SHE'S AMAZING: At just 8 years old, Lillian Pravada founded [Vision For And From Children](#), an organization that helps vision-impaired children around the world get the care and resources necessary to undergo eyesight surgery.

Lillian was born with a cataract and had it removed at nine weeks old. After undergoing multiple surgeries throughout her childhood to restore her vision, Lillian realized that she was one of a few children fortunate enough to have the access to these expensive treatments.

"The more time I spent in the hospital, the more I learned that not every child in need of care is fortunate to receive it," she said. "Many children in the United States and around the world do not have access to doctors, hospitals, medicine, glasses, and vision therapy or if they do have proximity access, their family and relatives may not have the necessary financial resources."

WHAT'S NEXT: Now, at age 14, Lillian's organization has helped more than 24,000 children get eye care. She plans to continue to grow the org and reach out to more children in need.

"I realized that while there are many children in need of eye care, there are also so many generous people in this world who are willing to help others," she said.

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VISION FOR THE FUTURE

LILLIAN PRAVDA ■ VISION FOR AND FROM CHILDREN FOUNDER

Meet the Young Entrepreneur With a Vision for the Future

6:00 PM EST
February 18, 2015



Feb. 18 -- Lillian Pravda, founder of Vision For and From Children and 2014 National Jefferson Awards recipient, discusses her charity with Bloomberg's Trish Regan on "Street Smart." Hillary Schafer, executive director of the Jefferson Awards Foundation, also comments.

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2016 Nickelodeon HALO Awards - Show

In This Photo: [Lillian Pravda](#)

Nick Cannon and HALO Honoree Lillian Pravda speak onstage during the 2016 Nickelodeon HALO Awards at Basketball City - Pier 36 - South Street on November 11, 2016 in New York City.

(Nov. 10, 2016 - Source: Craig Barritt/Getty Images North America)



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In This Photo: [Lillian Pravda](#)

Nick Cannon and HALO Honoree Lillian Pravda speak onstage during the 2016 Nickelodeon HALO Awards at Basketball City - Pier 36 - South Street on November 11, 2016 in New York City.

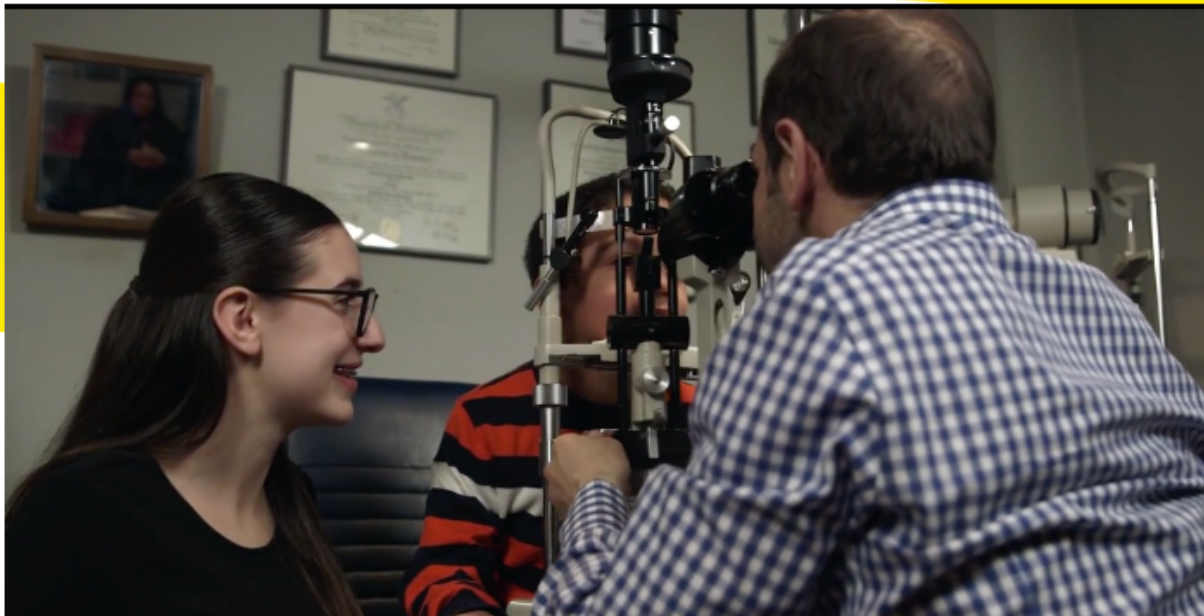
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“Watch Lillian receive her honor at the must-see concert event of the season, the *2016 HALO Awards*, hosted by Nick Cannon and featuring special appearances by top music artists Jason Derulo, Hailee Steinfeld, Zedd, Alessia Cara, Daya, Jake Miller, Jacob Whitesides, *Dance Moms* star JoJo Siwa, and stars from the Nickelodeon hit shows *The Thundermans* and *School of Rock*, premiering Sunday, Nov. 27, at 7 p.m. (ET/PT), across Nickelodeon USA, TeenNick and Nicktoons! For more information about the *2016 Nickelodeon HALO Awards* and Vision for and from Children, visit nick.com/halo16 and visionforandfromchildren.org. Congratulations on your award, Lillian!!”



How A 15-Year-Old CEO Is Bringing Eyesight To Those In Need

What were you doing when you were 15?



Lillian Pravda is the CEO of Vision For and From Children, which helps people without access to vision care. Pravda is also just 15 years old, and her organization has already provided eye care to more than 24,000 people.

“With respect to the concept of ‘paying it forward’ or ‘giving back,’ I like to say: ‘Just give,’” she says. “And even if you only help one person, it sure makes a difference to that one.”

2014 Jefferson Awards Foundation National and Global Service by a Young American

Lillian Pravda was a **2014 JEFFERSON AWARDS FOUNDATION WINNER for National and Global Service by a Young American** (March 2014, presented in NYC at The Pierre Hotel with other winners: Mariano Riviera/NY Yankees and Tom Brokaw/NBC) and she won Best Speaker Award at the age of 13 at a NYC-run Bootcamp Leadership Program, which included students through seniors in high school.

Background on **The Jefferson Awards** (www.jeffersonawards.org)

- Started in 1972 by Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, U.S. Senator Robert Taft, Jr. and Sam Beard to create a ***Nobel Prize for public service***.
- The strength of the Jefferson Awards is its 43 years of being non-partisan with a brand of excellence. For many years, the awards were presented in the U.S. Supreme Court.
- The Board of Selectors includes: Laura Bush, Teresa Heinz, Michael Douglas, Chris Wallace, Whoopi Goldberg, Lesley Stahl, and many others.
- Past national winners are a “Who’s Who” of American history makers: Five Supreme Court Justices – e.g., Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Thurgood Marshall and Sonia Sotomayor, **one of the 2015 Winners at the June '15 National Ceremony, at which Lillian was a presenter**; seven Secretaries of State including Colin Powell and Cyrus Vance; other winners include: Oprah Winfrey, Paul Newman, Ted Kennedy, Steve Jobs, and Elie Wiesel.

2014 National Winners Jefferson Awards for Public Service

Lillian Pravda, Founder & CEO (Chief Eyesight Optimist)
Vision for and from Children



Mariano Rivera, NY Yankees



Tom Brokaw, Television Journalist & Author



Andrew Shue, Actor & Co-founder DoSomething.org



2015 World Congress of Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus
Barcelona, Spain
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2015 United Nations Global Summit
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Young Girl Bringing Gift Of Sight To Children Around The World

January 5, 2012 8:08 PM

NEW YORK (CBSNewYork) — Cataract surgery gave 12-year-old Lillian Pravda the gift of sight, and she's since made it her mission to help other others who need eye surgery, through a foundation she started three years ago.



Lillian Pravda (credit: CBS 2)



"If I didn't have that surgery, didn't take care of it, I would be blind in my left eye," Pravda told CBS 2's Christine Sloan on Thursday. "It occurred to me when I was 9 that a lot of people around the world didn't have the same access as I did."

Maribel Pomavilla is one of those people. The 15-year-old who lives in Ecuador was accidentally shot in the head. The bullet lodged in the back of her eye.

Pravda is trying to get her to the United States.

"It's so important. It's amazingly important because when she comes here, she'll get the gift of sight," Pravda said.

Dr. Brian Campolattaro with the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary has offered to perform the surgery for free, thanks to Pravda.

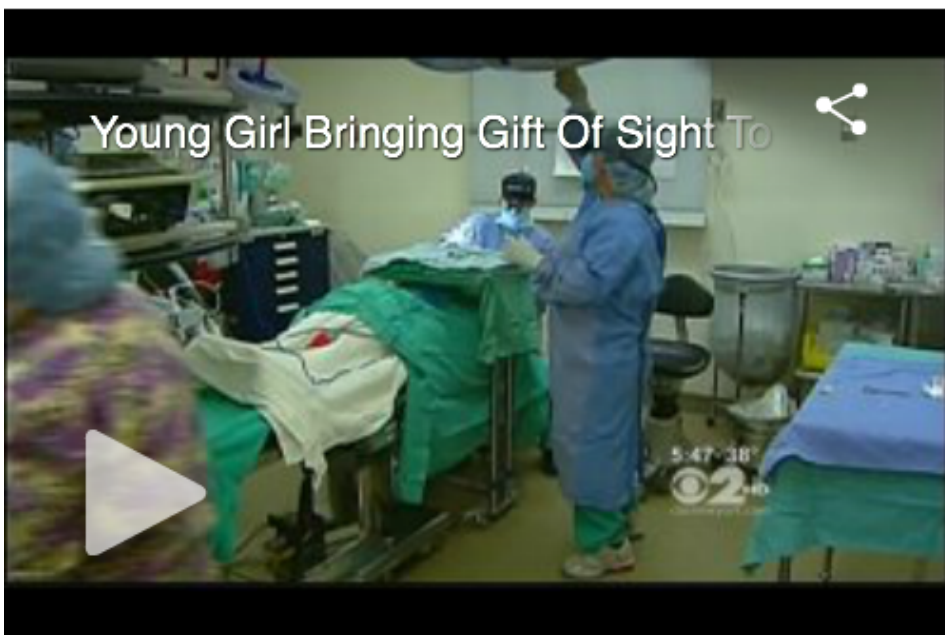
“People are starting to find her from all over the world based on her ability to motivate surgeons,” he said.

Joe Occhipinti with the National Police Defense Foundation reached out to Pravda about the Ecuadorian girl’s plight.

“I plan to travel to Guayaquil, Ecuador in next two weeks, hopefully to do whatever we could to secure this child an immediate visa,” he said.

The Infirmary is at the forefront when it comes to pediatric surgery, so if there is a place that can help this 15-year-old, it is it.

“He gave me my sight. That’s why I was inspired to go do this for other people,” Pravda said.



In just three years, her foundation has helped thousands of children. She hopes Pomavilla will join that list.

The Infirmary recently named Pravda an ambassador for the hospital. Pravda’s foundation can be contacted

at Lillian@visionforandfromchildren.org.

Powered by CBS

TEN BY TEN

10 EXTRAORDINARY PEOPLE * 10 RANDOM QUESTIONS

The following 10 individuals share a distinct love of humanity and are dedicated in various ways, to increasing the quality of life of people around the globe. These unsung heroes share a core ethic rooted in giving and in this issue we recognize their extraordinary contributions.

TEN BY TEN

LILLIAN PRAVDA

The Visionary

Eye surgery is certainly not the most pleasant experience, especially for young children who may be frightened of intimidating hospital operating rooms. Lillian Pravda sympathizes with young patients, having had two eye surgeries in her youth as a result of a congenital cataract. They both were successful, but upon learning that not all children are as fortunate to receive quality vision care, she created Vision For and From Children. The charity raises money to pay for pediatric ophthalmologic surgeries, along with specialized equipment and supplies. She is a frequent visitor at The New York Eye and Ear Infirmary, distributing toys to young patients (providing a welcome distraction from eye-related challenges) and talking with parents to ease their minds. Last year, through her ingenuity and leadership, she led a fundraising drive at a local New York City school to support a medical mission following the Haitian earthquake. It's refreshing and inspiring to see someone as committed, concerned and proactive as Pravda — especially since she's only 11 years old.

What is your most cherished possession?

My most cherished possession is my sister, Maxine. She may not be a "thing," but she is mine and I am hers.

Which cause do you most identify with?

I most identify with my charity called Vision For and From Children. I know how fortunate I am to get vision care, and since I have had a few surgeries myself, I also know what the children are going through.

What is the best advice you've ever received, and who gave it to you?

The best advice I ever received was about bullies. Bullies have a problem with themselves. If bullies see that they have bothered you, it gives them power, so the best thing to do is to ignore them. My mom gave me this advice, and it has helped me through all of my school years so far.

What is your favorite ...

Food: mint chocolate chip

Feeling: the feeling I get when I am with my bubble.

Woody Allen movie: I have no idea who that is. Is a Woody Allen movie worth watching?

Contemporary Artist: I have had the privilege of meeting Yaacov Agam. I even went to his studio where he creates his masterpieces. His art is never what it appears to be at first. When you look in one direction, you see one thing, but when you look in another you see an entirely different idea. It amazes me how someone can visualize that in their mind and create from it. He is truly brilliant.

Historical figure: There are several, including Christopher Columbus and Rosa Parks, but they all had some things in common. They had the drive, courage and determination to do what they believed.

80's TV show: Well, I can tell you that my favorite show from the '50s is *I Love Lucy* and my favorite shows from the '60s and '70s are *The Brady Bunch*, *The Partridge Family*, *Bewitched* and *That Girl*. As for the '80s, I haven't seen any of those yet, but my favorite '80s movie is *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. I don't have a television in my home, so I only get to watch shows that are available on DVD.

What do you consider your most notable personal fault/professional success?

My most notable personal fault is that whenever someone does something to intentionally upset me or purposely hurt my feelings, I automatically forgive them — even if they never apologize. Since I am only 11 years old, it is difficult to answer a question about professional successes — although I did start my own charity, I considered that a personal goal, not a professional success.

What is your favorite/least favorite use of modern technology?

My favorite is "i" anything! I don't have a least favorite. The only modern



technology I am permitted to use is a toaster, and if I am lucky — on occasion — a computer.

List three things you cannot live without:

My family, music and guacamole with chips.

Which artist (musician, poet, painter, etc.) has had the greatest impact on your life and how? Feel free to name more than one.

Diana Byer, Artistic Director of New York Theatre Ballet, has had a great impact on me. I have been dancing with the company since I was 5 years old. I have gained so much more than ballet skills. Through the classes, rehearsals and performances, I have gained confidence, self-esteem and discipline. These are qualities that are important in every life situation.

I have always loved to write poetry, but when I read Emily Dickinson's "Tim Nobody! Who are You?" it spoke to me. I sat and analyzed that poem for hours.

If you could change one thing about our world, what would it be and why?

There are many things that I would like to change about the world: Cures for all diseases (actually, no more diseases whatsoever), no more hatred, no more wars, no more hunger, no more homelessness, no more reasons for people to ask each other what they would change about the world — it would just be perfect!

How would you like to be remembered?

I just hope to make a difference in at least one person's life. Even if it is just one person, hopefully it makes a difference to that one.

NEW YORK OBSERVER

Early philanthropists with a passion share their tips on how to make it

By Anna Sanders

For a few young New Yorkers, getting involved in philanthropy is second nature. For 11-year-old Lillian Pravda, founder of Vision For and From Children it's a passion. Pravda started giving away toys and books at the New York Eye and Ear Infirmary when she was just six years old. But for the rest of us with time and money to spare, deciding where to start can be difficult. Luckily, four young philanthropists have donated more of their time to provide tips on how to make it in the giving world.

Though Elspeth Gilmore, 33, inherited money when she was 21 years old, most of her original giving involved writing checks to various charitable organizations. When she was 26 years old, a friend introduced Ms. Gilmore to Resource Generation, an organization of wealthy young people hoping to transform philanthropy.

"A friend dragged me to it," Ms. Gilmore said. "Which I think is a pretty common story for Resource Generation. Looking at wealth and class and giving can be pretty tough subject on a whole bunch of different levels."

Ms. Gilmore said Resource Generation, a group she now co-directs, got her directly

involved in organizations she supported financially. Since joining, she said a highlight has been working with Gulf South Allied Funders, a group of nine wealthy young people who met through Resource Generation and raised \$1 million a year for three years following Hurricane Katrina. The group gave \$3.5 million to the Twenty-First Century Foundation, an organization focused on black communities, who then donated the money to grassroots organizations in the south.

"It was getting to work with a group of people where we actually pooled our money together and had conversation with other organizations," she said.

Ms. Gilmore emphasized the importance of getting involved in a philanthropic community.

"The most important thing for me has been having peers in a larger community that supports me in grappling with the bigger questions that come up in philanthropy," Ms. Gilmore said.

Ms. Gilmore said young people interested in philanthropy should try to find a community of peers to help them work through questions about where to give and how much.

"That I can actually have elders and mentors that I can hash all of this

out with has I think been my biggest recommendation," she said.

For the last 15 years, Jason Franklin, 31, has worked in the nonprofit field. When he moved to New York to study nonprofit management at the Milano Graduate School at the New School, Mr. Franklin became involved with his family's small foundation—Franklin Weinberg Fund—and other organizations in the city. But his passion for community work began in high school when he started a group called Oregon Students Supporting Education.

"[It] grew from four students to 10,000 students in six months and helped turn back the tide against budget cuts in Oregon public schools," said Mr. Franklin. "So I guess I started early and realized the possibilities for change."

Right now Mr. Franklin is the head of Bolder Giving, a group that works to inspire people to take more risks in their giving. He's also an adjunct professor at NYU's Wagner School for Public Service and serves on the board at North Star Fund, Proteus Fund, 21st Century School Fund and Resource Generation.

When it comes to getting started in philanthropy, Mr. Franklin said perfection isn't important.

Observer Philanthropy – Fall 2011
