



HANNAH CHUNG CREATES TOY THAT EMPOWERS DIABETIC CHILDREN

BY BRIAN JUSTICE

Jerry, the diabetic toy bear, helps children manage their disease.

Hannah Chung is the founder of [Sproute!](#) and inventor of [Jerry the Bear](#). Jerry is a plush toy with Type I diabetes who teaches his young owners how to manage and control their own disease. By monitoring Jerry's blood sugar levels, they manage his diabetes and educate themselves, and everyone around them.

Jerry comes with food cards that kids feed him, keeping him on a healthy diet and his blood sugar level in a good range by counting carbs and matching insulin doses. When Jerry's blood sugar level goes high or low, Jerry describes his symptoms and teaching kids to recognize their own.

Inspiration came, originally, from Hannah's own experience. Her grandparents and father all had diabetes, and "I realized that it was a disease that affects the whole family," she says. "I wanted to support my dad and translate that into support for other people and families with the condition."

Chung says, "Because kids were being diagnosed so young, at two or three years old, the parents would be educated about care and they would disseminate the information to the child. But that process is really overwhelming."

When visiting diabetic children, Chung noticed that they mimicked their treatment during play.

"They were actually injecting their plush toys. They wanted something that mirrored what they were going through, themselves," she remembers. "It was the biggest insight because we wanted to incorporate the children's play pattern, but relate it to their own therapeutic experience. Jerry the Bear came out of that."

Surveys conducted about six months after receiving Jerry showed that kids were still playing with him for an average of one hour a week.

"That's a long-term playtime," she says. "Other toys last for about two or three weeks. Jerry has also made kids less afraid to talk about diabetes because they understand it, now. Kids see themselves as Jerry's caretaker."

What's Jerry's future? Plans include making him more affordable and creating app and tablet applications. Hannah and her partners are also working on creating bears with food allergies, asthma and even cancer.

"Jerry changed our lives," says mom Crista Gibbons. "He's a learning tool to engage the village, the community, and the kids around us. I wish that we had had him from day one."