



Malta House of Care
Mobile Medical Clinic

Wonder Women Class of '18

Mikaela Nelson '19

University of Hartford College of Education, Nursing and Health

Growing up in Buffalo, NY, Mikaela Nelson loved science, math, and art, and knew she wanted to pursue a career in which she could work with her hands. Through her uncle, a military veteran, she became acquainted with several amputees, and so she settled on the field of prosthetics and orthotics.

That brought her to the University of Hartford, where during her sophomore year – in between working as an RA and serving as president of the Ultimate Frisbee Club – she had an idea: What if she could [make dolls with prostheses, to help kids with disabilities feel more comfortable about their bodies and have a way to practice using their own prostheses?](#)

[So she bought a doll on eBay and began experimenting with putty, clay, felt, and hot glue, fashioning a prosthetic leg for a repurposed American Girl doll.](#) Now, however, she makes her dolls with a 3D printer, enabling her to truly customize each doll to its recipient – much to the delight of the parents who order them. Some dolls have prosthetic limbs; others have scarred skin; still others come outfitted with hearing aids or walkers. She promotes her dolls through [“Mickey’s Mission” on Facebook](#) – and lots of word of mouth.

Mikaela says her connections with her customers last long after the sale is complete. “I have received so many wonderful words about how my dolls have truly helped a child and their family go through these difficult times,” she says. “I never imagined that when I started making dolls that I would have such an [influence with families and create bonds that last a lifetime.](#)”

Mikaela will complete her five-year program at the University of Hartford in May 2019, having earned a bachelor’s degree in health science and a Master’s degree in prosthetics and orthotics. And eventually, she’d love to start a company that would be able to produce – on a much larger scale than Mickey’s Mission – dolls customized to the children who will own and love them.