HEROES
Fighting Hunger

Millions of Americans worry about going to bed hungry each night. Meet five inspirational people who are working to change that—their passion and generosity may spark you to make a difference too.

BY PAULA DERROW
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID TSAY

THE POWER PAIR
Alexandra “Finn” McFarland, 18, and
Anna Ramsey, 18 • Woodstock, VT

Anyone who assumes teenage girls would rather spend their time taking selfies than helping others hasn’t met Alexandra “Finn” McFarland and Anna Ramsey. In 2011, as ninth graders, Finn and Anna volunteered to deliver produce to Woodstock’s local food pantry through the nonprofit Change the World Kids. In 2011, as ninth graders, Finn and Anna volunteered to deliver produce to Woodstock’s local food pantry through the nonprofit Change the World Kids. In 2011, as ninth graders, Finn and Anna volunteered to deliver produce to Woodstock’s local food pantry through the nonprofit Change the World Kids. In 2011, as ninth graders, Finn and Anna volunteered to deliver produce to Woodstock’s local food pantry through the nonprofit Change the World Kids. In 2011, as ninth graders, Finn and Anna volunteered to deliver produce to Woodstock’s local food pantry through the nonprofit Change the World Kids. In 2011, as ninth graders, Finn and Anna volunteered to deliver produce to Woodstock’s local food pantry through the nonprofit Change the World Kids.

“Most people think that teenagers won’t follow through, so we learned what to do to be taken seriously.”

The girls researched ways to store produce during colder months, and by tenth grade hit on the idea of constructing a root cellar like the ones used before the advent of electricity: a structure built into the earth that keeps food fresh for months. “But getting the project approved by the town—it seemed daunting,” Anna admits. Still, the duo formed a committee with other Change the World Kids, did research into how cellars were constructed and what permits they’d need to build, then found a site behind the town’s elementary school. In 2012—with a volunteer contractor, a structural engineer and an excavator—the determined crew began building. The root cellar officially opened on October 6, 2013. The community donated produce throughout October, and some local farmers set aside plots specifically for the food bank or gave the cellar their leftovers, which included apples, onions and other vegetables. “We ended up with enough to sustain the food bank all winter!” Finn says.

Now freshmen in college (the two split a $5,000 scholarship through the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes), Finn and Anna still brainstorm with the kids who run the cellar about ways to expand. “I can’t wait to visit during vacations and see it stocked with vegetables,” says Anna. “That’s a huge feeling of accomplishment.”

To find out more about the root cellar project, go to changetheworldkids.org.

MOM WITH A MISSION
Pam Komer, 63 • Hastings-on-Hudson, NY

When Pam Komer read an article in 2002 about Pembroke, IL, a deeply impoverished community where families lived in shacks with dirt floors or rusted trailers, “it was like being tapped on the shoulder,” says the mother of two girls. Her family had never done much volunteering, but “it struck me that we had so much and those families so little.” So Pam picked up the phone and called a pastor in Pembroke. “I said, ‘Tell me what you need.’”

What Pembroke needed, it turns out, was food. By the end of the month, Pembroke’s residents, like many families across the country, were going hungry. Some 90% of food stamp recipients have redeemed their $133 average food allotment by the third week of the month, according to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Food pantries also tend to be empty by then. So Pam reached out to other parents, friends and neighbors, and said, “If each one of us ‘adopted’ a family in Pembroke and sent them food near the end of every month, we could tide them over.”

Seventeen families sent out 17 boxes of food that month. “And we tucked notes among the cans and jars,” says Pam. “The families wrote back and we connected—when someone needs that box, you can’t let them down.” Pam asked FedEx to cover shipping, and when the company agreed, her basement turned into a clearinghouse for food, books and clothes headed to Pembroke. In a year, the project became the nonprofit Family-to-Family, which now has 2,000 monthly donors and serves 23 communities. The most amazing moment was when Pam met her “adopted” family. “The mother and I ran into each other’s arms,” Pam recalls. “We all cried. It was a powerful experience.”

To sign up to feed a family, go to family-to-family.org.
You wouldn’t think that a homeowner who worked as a budget analyst for the federal government would find herself applying for food stamps. But that’s what Gail Womack-Murray did in 1987 when, after a divorce, she had to support her family on a single income. “I had three boys under age 6. My mortgage, car payment and childcare took up most of my salary. When I added up the numbers, there was no money left for food. I was one of the working poor.”

So Gail filled out food stamp forms. But, like 26% of Americans struggling to buy food, she earned too much to qualify. “I was denied, and it broke my heart. I thought it was my last resort.”

“We teach gardening, too,” says Gene, who shows kids of all ages and walks of life how to plant and grow vegetables. “I love being able to do this for others.”

Gene Gumfory is a man who believes in signs. Back in 2009, a friend mentioned that he wished he had a place to garden. A few days later Gene read a Bible passage referring to God planting a garden, “and it struck me—Hey, if I could find just one acre, I could share it with others.” Gene, who had grown produce with his father as a boy, put the word out that he was looking for land and soon found a man willing to donate 14½ acres to Gene’s church. The Shiloh Field Community Garden was born. Today, the garden produces more than 24,000 pounds of food each year and helps hundreds of hungry people each week with deliveries to The Salvation Army, local food banks, churches and a daycare center. “When the kids hear that Farmer Gene is coming, they all cheer,” he says with a laugh.

“We teach gardening, too,” says Gene, who shows kids of all ages and walks of life how to plant and grow vegetables. “I love being able to do this for others.”

I felt called to do this. And now, to my knowledge, Shiloh Field is one of the largest community gardens in the country.