**How did the project get started?**

Annie Yonas and Griffin Kerstetter, two elementary school students, have been friends forever. When they were in 2nd grade they each started thinking about how to help the homeless. Annie read a book about people walking on the street and wanted to help. Griffin heard the President’s State of the Union and worried about people without jobs and what happens to their houses and about the homeless. Independently they both told their parents that they wanted to help the homeless by helping people understand that homelessness is a problem.

Because many of the children in Annie’s class have allergies they are not able to bring in food to celebrate birthday and holidays. So she thought "I can bring ‘Sleep In for the Homeless T-shirts’" for her friends. Her dad often wears his T-shirt from the awareness and fund raising event to help the homeless and Annie thought her friends would like T-shirts too! So she told her Dad about her idea.

Griffin thought that it would be good to make quilts out of donated T-shirts. Griffin has many T-shirts that are too small and she wanted to use them to make something to help keep the homeless warm. So she told her Mom about her idea.

Annie and Griffin’s parents work together doing public health research. They work closely with a community organization called Community Human Services that works with the homeless and runs a shelter. Annie and Griffin’s parents arranged for them to meet with Adrienne Walnoha, the executive director of Community Human Services. At that meeting, the girls shared their ideas and decided to turn gently used t-shirts into quilts for the homeless. The HomeLost project was born! They set a goal of making quilts for at least 50 people. The girls are now finishing up 4th grade and their project has sewn over 25 quilts!

**What have we done so far?**

Griffin:

My grandmother can sew so we asked her to make the first sample quilt. Since then she has sewn many of the quilts. We also hold Sew-Ins where groups of people come together to all cut, pin and sew the quilts.

Annie:

We need to collect a lot of t-shirts! We have asked our friends and classmates to donate t-shirts and help us. Our parents talked to our elementary school teachers and every year since the start of the project in 2011 we have gone to the classes so that we could tell our classmates about the project. I talked and shared information about homelessness in Pittsburgh.

Griffin:

I shared information about the quilt and we showed the sample quilt. We asked everyone to donate t-shirts and put donation boxes in our classrooms. We also collected t-shirts from our summer camps and at the Sew-Ins. In 2013, we held two Sew-In events where we had many volunteers come to cut, pin and sew the t-shirt quilts. The first was in April at the University of Pittsburgh and the second was in December at United Way. It was fun to see everyone working on the HomeLost project and at the December event we made 8 quilts in one day!

Annie:

A student group at Griffin's mom's work heard about our project and asked if they could help. And people at my Dad’s work have donated. In April 2014 we collected tons of t-shirts as part of the Oakmont Chamber of Commerce Recycle Rama. We have received a lot of t-shirts and always need more.

Griffin:

People who want to donate t-shirts can send them to our post office box or let us know and we can pick them up. We LOVE getting donations. We also like help sewing. Please let us know if you want to sew a quilt.

Annie:

Ten years from now we hope that the project will be happening in other states and even in other countries. It makes me feel good to be helping other people.

**How has the project raised awareness about homelessness in the area?**

Stories about our project have been printed in the Herald newspaper (October 2012) and in the Post Gazette (Feb & April 2014). <http://www.post-gazette.com/local/region/2014/04/27/Volunteers-named-finalists-for-Jefferson-Awards-for-Public-Service/stories/201404270104>

We have participated in three sewing events where volunteers cut, pin and sew the t-shirts into quilts and learn more about homelessness in the area. In 2012 we held an event with Community Human Services and in 2013 we worked with undergraduate students from the University of Pittsburgh and United Way to hold two more Sew-In events.

In 2012 a video was made about our project <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ZCu54goblk>

We received the 2012 Community Human Services Community Youth Ally Award, the 2013 Elijah Straw Helping Hand Award and are finalists for the 2014 Jefferson Awards for Public Service.

.