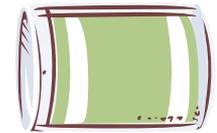


## FROM ONE FAMILY TO ANOTHER

Thanks to one woman's commitment, people in need get the support of parents and children across the country.



Pam Koner was sitting on her deck in Westchester County, New York, in 2002, when she read an article in the *New York Times* describing the dirt-floored homes and hungry children of Pembroke, Illinois. It was in such sharp contrast to her life—which included a thriving after-school arts business, two healthy daughters, and a full refrigerator—that it stopped her short. “There was a picture of a young girl lying on a bare mattress with a peeling wall behind her,” says Koner, “and as a mom, I found it incredibly distressing. I just felt that these kids were unacceptably poor and hungry.”

Koner put down the article and immediately started doing some research. She called a pastor in Pembroke to ask what his community needed most. His response: Families needed food, especially near month's end, when food stamps were gone and food pantries were bare.

She then reached out to the parents of the children enrolled in her arts programs and asked them to help. Sixteen other families jumped on board immediately and decided to send monthly boxes of nonperishable food, along with a personal letter, to 17 of Pembroke's neediest families. The boxes were shipped to arrive during the third week of the month.

Koner also recruited her then 15- and 12-year-old daughters to help pack boxes and write letters and encouraged other families to do the same. It worked so well that one year later, the nonprofit Family-to-Family was born. Its mission? To personally connect families who have “enough” with those living in profound poverty.

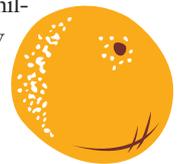
Family-to-Family's flag-

ship program, “Sponsor a Family,” was inspired by the first boxes the volunteers sent to Pembroke. The organization identifies communities in need through Census poverty data, then works with local schools, food pantries, and churches to match specific families in the area with donor families. “We try to link up families with the same-age kids so there can be a sense of connection,” says Koner.

Rather than spending money shipping food across the country, most donors now make a monthly monetary donation, which pays for food boxes that are assembled by volunteers at a local church or food pantry and then picked up by the recipients. To connect more personally, families then send other donations—like toiletries and outgrown clothes—along with personal letters and drawings from their children. Through this program, the organization connects more than 450 families in 17 states. Last year it provided 2,255 moms, dads, and kids with almost 200,000 meals.

The idea, says Koner, is to not only help others but also teach empathy to children by having them pack boxes and write letters and by making them aware that there are people in need. “We're trying to teach kids what I call ‘living empathy,’” says Koner. “It's powerful, knowing they can change the world of one person. I think the one-to-one connection changes everyone's life in this relationship.”

Koner has seen firsthand how much one family can affect the life of another. Several years ago, she flew to Pembroke to visit her “family,” Lily and Walter Davis and their five children. “As soon as I walked through the door, Lily grabbed me in her arms like I was her long-lost sister,” Koner says. “She told me that I changed her life—but the truth is, she also changed mine.”



### HOW TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- Visit [family-to-family.org/sponsor-a-family](http://family-to-family.org/sponsor-a-family) to learn how you can sponsor a family or start a group in your own community to sponsor several families.
- Look for a family in your own neighborhood that might need help. It could be as simple as baking cookies for an elderly neighbor and delivering them with your kids.
- Participate in one of Family-to-Family's programs that aren't related to hunger, such as the popular “One Book at a Time” program, in which families send a monthly book to a child in need. (Learn more at [family-to-family.org/literacy-projects](http://family-to-family.org/literacy-projects).)