

good life guide

A BOOK AND A BLANKET

Two Texas girls are warming hearts and giving kids in need new reads By Lauren Harris

For sisters **Harper** and **Maggie Cunningham**, their love of reading is about more than just books—it's about settling into a cozy space and letting their imaginations run wild. For the past five years, the two have helped needy kids create a reading escape of their own.

It all started when they noticed some of their classmates didn't fill out their assigned reading logs (forms that track time spent reading after school or during holidays). Harper, now 14, realized it was because they didn't have books at home. Although kids can read at school, "when you have a few weeks off, it's even harder to have access to books," Maggie says.

She and Maggie, now 12, began building stacks of new and donated books in their home and pairing them with cozy blankets to give to low-income families in their College Station, Texas, community. As the need grew, the sisters created the nonprofit Books and a Blanket, which has distributed more than 52,500 books to 4,300 children in pre-K through sixth grade.

Volunteers deliver to each child a colorful bag packed with 15 books—like the sisters' favorites, the Harry Potter series—along with a new fleece blanket or quilt to curl up in and read.

"Studies show if you're on your reading level by third grade, you'll do better in school," Harper says. "We want kids to have books so when they get to high school, they're at that reading level."

Besides book donations, the organization raises funds with an annual Books and a Blanket dinner. Kids and adults volunteer to serve dinner, bus tables and help with a silent auction.

Kids in other communities are starting their own version of the project, which Harper and Maggie encourage. They are working with



Harper, above left, and Maggie Cunningham want every kid to have a cozy place to read, so they donate books along with a blanket.

organizations like Voices for Children, which benefits foster children; The Kimberly Moore Foundation, a relief program helping underprivileged kids worldwide; and Habitat for Humanity groups and food banks, expanding at home and abroad.

"I like seeing the kids' fac-

es when they get their bags and blankets because they're always so happy and excited," Maggie says.

"It always feels like it means so much to them and their teachers as well," Harper says. "And I've learned I can make a difference in the world."

A donation of \$23 funds a collection of 15 books and a blanket. Go to booksandablanket.com to help.

