

SPARGEL PRODUCTIONS KARTEMQUIN FILMS and the INDEPENDENT TELEVISION SERVICE (ITVS) present

# THE HOMESTRETCH

a film by ANNE DE MARE and KIRSTEN KELLY



Executive Producers **JUSTINE NAGAN** **GORDON QUINN** and **ANDREW W. SCHWERTFEGER**  
Executive Producer for ITVS **SALLY JO FIFER**



89min / Documentary / USA / English / Color / 2014



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## LOGLINE

Three homeless teenagers brave Chicago winters, the pressures of high school, and life alone on the streets to build a brighter future. Against all odds, these kids defy stereotypes as they create new, surprising definitions of home. Can they recover from the traumas of abandonment and homelessness and build the future they dream of?

## SYNOPSIS

*The Homestretch* follows three homeless teens as they fight to stay in school, graduate, and build a future. Each of these smart, ambitious teenagers - Roque, Kasey and Anthony - will surprise, inspire, and challenge audiences to rethink stereotypes of homelessness as they work to complete their education while facing the trauma of being alone and abandoned at an early age. Through haunting images, intimate scenes, and first-person narratives, these teens take us on their journeys of struggle and triumph. As their stories unfold, the film connects us deeply with larger issues of poverty, race, juvenile justice, immigration, foster care, and LGBTQ rights.

With unprecedented access into the Chicago Public Schools, The Night Ministry's *Crib* emergency youth shelter and Teen Living Programs' Belfort House, *The Homestretch* follows these kids as they move through the milestones of high school while navigating a landscape of couch hopping, emergency shelters, transitional homes, street families and a school system on the front lines of this crisis. The film, a co production between Spargel Productions and Kartemquin Films, examines the struggles these youth face in obtaining a high school level education, and then follows them beyond graduation to focus on the crucial transition when the structure of school vanishes and homeless youth struggle to find the support and community they need to survive and be independent. A powerful, original perspective on what it means to be young, homeless and building a future in America today.

## DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As directors, we had been searching a long time for a project that would speak to both our hearts. We found this film when a young high school student that Kirsten was working with on a theater project revealed to her that he was homeless and completely on his own. It was one of those moments in life when everything just stopped -- How could this be? This kid was bright, talented, funny, and ambitious. He was going to school, attending rehearsals and seemed so normal. But each night he didn't know where he was going to go. He was working hard to make something happen for himself while being alone in an impossible situation, and he was going to great lengths to hide his circumstances. For us, he put a completely unexpected face on homeless youth.

We started digging into the stats, talking to teachers and principals, and spending time with lots and lots of homeless kids. We spent time with them at school, riding the trains and buses, in open-door emergency youth shelters, and innovative transitional homes. Each one of the many kids we talked with has had an enormous effect on this film – their experiences, advice, traumas and humor are woven deeply into the fabric of *The Homestretch*. But when we found Kasey, and then Anthony, and then Roque, we were blown away by their powerful journeys and knew we had found the center of our film. And they, we soon learned, were eager for the chance to be heard, to let others know that they weren't alone. So many of the kids we encountered along the way were fierce survivors, escaping the horrors of violence, drug addiction, broken family structures, poverty and crime. They were often thrown out of the house because of sexual preference, abandoned by parents who were unable emotionally or financially to care for them, or chose to leave because of physical or sexual abuse. We wanted to empower them to tell their own stories.

It is our hope that, through the deeply personal journeys of Kasey, Anthony and Roque, this film can shine a much needed light on one of the most hidden and exploited populations in America – unaccompanied homeless youth. Meeting Kasey, and learning how she was kicked out because she was gay broke our hearts, but her resiliency and charm were absolutely magnetic – everyone wanted to hang out with her. And so did we. Kasey introduced us to Anthony, whose wisdom floored us and whose writing and connection to words gave us a new, deeper perspective on these stories. Finding out how long he'd been bounced around through the foster care system before choosing life on the streets made us look hard at 'the system' through his eyes. And Roque and Maria taught us how deep joy and community can grow out of a rough situation. As we watched Roque move from feeling invisible towards becoming a confident, eloquent young man, we knew he belonged in this film.

We saw how all the kids we met fought hard against harmful stereotypes of homelessness, and as we listened and spent time in their worlds, we saw the surprising ways that they created temporary homes, fly by night communities and reached out for support. We were less interested in depicting 'how homeless they were' or in blaming the adults who abandoned them and more interested in capturing them moving forward, putting one foot in front of the other. We were inspired by their search for relationships and deep drive to build a future. In short, we sought to make an inspiring film about a devastating crisis.



## FEATURED SUBJECTS

### KASEY

Born and raised on the south side of Chicago, **Kasey** spent over a year bouncing around between friends, family members and sleeping on the street, ultimately dropping out of high school her senior year. We meet Kasey in the film as she just enters a new transitional home and is re-enrolled in school. Kasey is a poet, a painter and is a tremendous source of support for her huge network of friends.



### ANTHONY

**Anthony** spent his childhood in foster homes and went out on his own at the age of 14. After years of jumping from school to school and being homeless, he is proud to be self-taught. He recently passed his GED and was accepted into the Year Up Chicago Program where he has an internship in telecommunications. A talented poet, rapper and entrepreneur, Anthony never stops planning and working for success.

### ROQUE

Due to immigration complications **Roque** was forced to separate from his family and fend for himself on and off, beginning his sophomore year of high school. With an unstable family and housing situation, Roque spent several years bouncing around. One of his teachers introduced him to Shakespeare and acting and he became inspired to finish high school and go to college. With his teacher's support, he hopes to go into theater and psychology and help others through some of the challenges he has faced.





## MARIA

**Maria** is a mother, wife, public-school teacher and writer who currently lives on the southwest side of Chicago. Born and raised in and around Detroit, Michigan, Maria came to Chicago in the early 1990's with her brothers, in pursuit of an education and a better life. She works as an educator in the Chicago Public School system and with many educational partner organizations such as Chicago Shakespeare Theater and 826CHI.

## THE NIGHT MINISTRY – THE CRIB

**The Night Ministry** has been a national leader in providing housing and conducting street outreach to Chicago's homeless youth. It opened *The Crib* in January 2011 to provide 20 overnight emergency shelter beds for homeless young people ages 18 – 24. During the four-month pilot period, *The Crib* provided shelter to 138 young people. Encouraged by *The Crib's* success at building relationships with Chicago's street-based youth, the City of Chicago provided funding for The Night Ministry to operate the program seasonally until 2013 when funding from the City of Chicago and private funders made it possible to operate the program year-round.



## TLP - BELFORT HOUSE

**Teen Living Programs** builds community, hope and opportunity for youth who are homeless by addressing their immediate needs and helping them achieve independence and stable housing. TLP intensively serves over 500 young people a year through a continuum of services that includes outreach, prevention and supportive services, along with three residential programs: a 4-bed emergency shelter for minors; Belfort House, a 24-bed transitional living program; and CaSSA, a 10-apartment independent living program.

## IMPACT

We can't "solve" homelessness. But *The Homestretch* can spark an intensive, inspiring dialogue about how we, as a society, are addressing this complex problem and how we can do better. Through the filmmaking journey and our early advocacy meetings, we've focused in on four areas that can help:

**1. The #1 obstacle for many homeless youth is negative stereotypes.**

We can't wait for you to meet Kasey, Anthony and Roque. Their powerful stories will change the way people think about homeless youth.

**2. Youth service organizations need more support.** There are amazing people doing great work to help homeless youth, but they don't have the capacity to handle the scope of the crisis. They need more support! The film will target bringing additional volunteers, mentors and donations towards these organizations.

**3. We need more school-based interventions.** Our public schools are on the front lines of this crisis and often the first ones who can identify the homeless students who need help. The film will help bring support to teachers, principals and administrators.

**4. Political pressure – we need to highlight this crisis for policy makers on a local, state, and federal level.** By bringing these stories to audiences around the nation, we can build urgency, awareness, and increased bi-partisan support for this issue. *The Homestretch* will bring a much-needed human face to this crisis and help focus empathy around proposed policy.

The power of documentary film lies in its ability to tell complex stories that serve as catalysts for organizing, network-building and civic action. *The Homestretch* will leverage this power through policy briefings, targeted screenings, community events, and ongoing coalition building in order to address these four obstacles.



## TEAM



**ANNE DE MARE**  
Director / Producer

Anne de Mare is an award-winning playwright, director, professional video artist, and filmmaker. She completed her first documentary feature, *Asparagus! Stalking the American Life*, which broadcast regionally on PBS in 2009, in collaboration with Kirsten Kelly, her partner at Spargel Productions. Anne's original plays have been presented in Chicago, London and New York, where she was a five-year resident artist with Richard Foreman's legendary Ontological-Hysteric Theater. She is a founding member of The Independent Theater Company, The Nevermore Theater Project and Theaters Against War. Her video work has been seen on stage at Lincoln Center and at The Park Avenue Armory, and she is currently working with Innovative Music Programs to develop the film component of *Accidental Heroes*, a multi-media performance work based on the lives of eastern and western European artists coming of age during the Cold War.



**KIRSTEN KELLY**  
Director / Producer

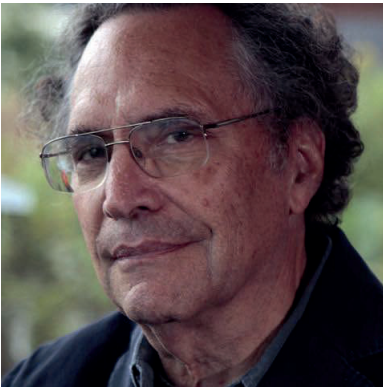
Kirsten Kelly is an award-winning documentary film and theater director who lives in Brooklyn, New York. She and filmmaker Anne de Mare founded Spargel Productions in 2002, to make their first feature documentary, *Asparagus! Stalking the American Life*, about Kirsten's hometown. The pair is currently in development for *The Girl With The Rivet Gun*, an animated new media documentary project on Rosie the Riveter. Her short film work has been seen at Juilliard and Lincoln Center. Kirsten is a two-time Helen Hayes nominated best director and has directed award-winning theater productions in Chicago, Washington DC and off-Broadway in New York. She is also an arts educator and is the director and co-creator of "CPS Shakespeare," which was featured on NBC Nightly News in 2010, a highly acclaimed program that works with Chicago Public H. S. students at the Chicago Shakespeare Theater. She is a graduate of Juilliard's Master Directing program where she received the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship and is a member of Rising Phoenix Repertory in New York.



### **LESLIE SIMMER** Editor

Leslie Simmer is Kartemquin's Director of Editing as well as Senior Editor on staff. For over twelve years Leslie has worked at Kartemquin in various capacities. In 2013, she began working on *The Homestretch*. Prior to her work on this project, Leslie edited and co-wrote the Emmy-nominated feature documentary *As Goes Janesville*, a co-production between Kartemquin and 371 Productions which screened on PBS in October, 2012. She edited with Steve James on the ESPN film *No Crossover: The Trial of Allen Iverson*; she edited the Emmy-nominated *In the Family* (for which she received the Best Editing prize at the "Best of the Midwest Awards"); and in 2005 Leslie was co-editor with Steve James on *The War Tapes*. From 2001-2004 she wore dual hats on the seven-part PBS series *The New Americans* as both Series Story Editor and Post Production Supervisor.

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### **GORDON QUINN** Executive Producer

Gordon Quinn, Artistic Director, is the co-founder of Kartemquin. He has been producing documentaries and mentoring filmmakers for five decades. A passionate advocate for independent media makers, he is a noted expert on issues of fair use, ethics, and storytelling in documentary.

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### **JUSTINE NAGAN** Executive Producer

Justine Nagan, Executive Director, has led KTQ since 2008, guiding strategic vision and daily operations while serving as the Executive Producer on new films. She directed *Typeface* (2009) and was Associate Producer on the Peabody award-winning *Mapping Stem Cell Research: Terra Incognita* (2007).

## ANDREW SCHWERTFEGER Executive Producer

Andrew Schwertfeger has been working in independent film for over 7 years, during which time he has worked on such films as *Happy Tears* and the Sundance hit *Teeth*. He has recently shifted focus to social issue documentary filmmaking and is a passionate advocate for underprivileged youth and education. He serves on the associate board of Chicago Scholars, which provides talented, academically ambitious, and underserved high school students from every neighborhood in Chicago with access and success through college and beyond.

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## ERIN SORENSEN Impact Producer

Erin Sorenson is a Principal at Third Stage Consulting, a firm that provides strategic impact planning, project management, and implementation. She brings 23 years of experience advancing the missions of documentary films and nonprofits to create long lasting social change. Erin has a master's degree in Social Service Administration from University of Chicago's School of Social Service Administration and a Certificate in Non-Profit Leadership from Harvard's Business School.

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## KATIE TABER Co-Producer

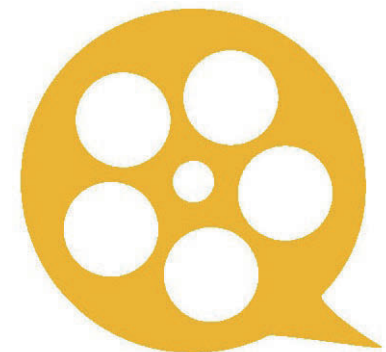
Katie Taber is a documentary film and television producer who founded Yellow River Productions in 2007. Taber has worked on many films for the award-winning PBS series *FRONTLINE* including "Life and Death in Assisted Living," "Dollars and Dentists," and "The Child Cases" and was a co-producer on the four-part PBS *NOVA* series "The Fabric of the Cosmos," based on the book by Brian Greene. Taber was also a founder of the award-winning Chicago-based theater company Division 13 Productions with whom she performed, wrote and directed numerous plays. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband and two children and she's recently started singing with a local rock band.

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## PICTURE MOTION Impact Partner

Picture Motion is a team of social impact strategists that use the power of stories to accelerate change. Picture Motion works with filmmakers, distributors, funders and non-profits with inspiring films and media. Building campaigns that raise awareness, educate and motivate audiences to think critically and be active, engaged citizens and harnessing the power of strategic partnerships, social media, web & mobile technology, community screenings, research and grassroots marketing. When the credits roll, we answer the question: "what can I do now?"







### **JENNIFER GREENFIELD** Associate Producer

Jennifer is a leading force in philanthropic management with twenty years of experience in all aspects of philanthropic giving and fundraising in the areas of health, education, the arts, economic development, prison reform, homelessness, and the environment. As Executive Director of the Richard Gere Foundation and Healing the Divide, she led strategic planning, marketing/PR, fundraising, and campaign management while producing a number of historic events featuring the Dalai Lama. These public forums drew distinguished and vast audiences, numbering in the hundreds of thousands while creating much needed awareness around the Tibetan Human Rights crises, launching it into US and European pop culture consciousness.

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### **ELIZABETH HEMMERDINGER** Associate Producer

Hemmerdinger, is the Producer of the hit documentary *Elaine Stritch: Shoot Me*. She a native New Yorker, began her career in theater and film as a playwright, winning the NYU Tisch School of the Arts Goldberg Prize for *We Can Do It!* which she is now adapting as a film. Her play *Squall* was the winner of the U.S. West Theatre Festival. Hemmerdinger is developing *The Girl with a Rivet Gun*, an animated documentary project with *The Homestretch* directors, Anne de Mare and Kirsten Kelly. She is currently Visiting Artist at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

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### **MARY JANE PORIES** Associate Producer

Mary Jane Pories is an award-winning actor, improviser, writer, and entrepreneur currently living in Grand Rapids, MI. She performed for two years as a main stage cast member of the famed comedy theater, The Second City. As founder of Fishladder Inc. in 1999, she trains and coaches clients nationally and internationally in applied improvisation.

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### **JULIE SMOLYANSKY** Associate Producer

Julie Smolyansky is CEO & President of Morton Grove based Lifeway Foods, Founder of Test400k, an organization dedicated to advocating ending the backlog of 400,000 untested rape kits in the United States and Associate Producer of the powerful new documentary *Honor Diaries*. She started her career as a family counselor supporting at-risk families in Chicago's Department of Children and Family Services system. She has traveled to Bangladesh, Kenya and Uganda to work with teens, mothers, refugees and entrepreneurs. Julie is a speaker, writer, leading human rights activist, a member of the United Nations Foundation Global Entrepreneurs Council, and frequently travels to the White House advocating on behalf of entrepreneurs, girls and women.

## PRODUCTION COMPANIES

### **KARTEMQUIN FILMS**

Kartemquin Films is a collaborative center for documentary media makers who seek to foster a more engaged and empowered society. With a noted tradition of nurturing emerging talent and acting as a leading voice for independent media, Kartemquin is building on over 47 years of being Chicago's documentary powerhouse.

Kartemquin sparks democracy through documentary. Their films, such as *The Interrupters*, *Hoop Dreams*, and *The New Americans*, are among the most acclaimed documentaries of all time, leaving a lasting impact on millions of viewers.

The organization has won every major critical and journalistic prize, including two Emmys, a Peabody, duPont-Columbia and Robert F. Kennedy journalism awards, Independent Spirit, IDA, PGA and DGA awards, and an Oscar nomination.

Kartemquin is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization. [www.kartemquin.com](http://www.kartemquin.com)

### **SPARGEL PRODUCTIONS**

Spargel Productions is a production company based in New York City that has been crafting documentary projects for 10 years. Their work takes viewers into the particular and unique circumstances of passionate individuals whose stories reflect significant national trends.

Spargel is especially committed to film and media projects that inspire advocacy and change. Their first film, *Asparagus! Stalking the American Life* premiered at The Full Frame Documentary Film Festival in 2006 and went on to win Best Documentary and Audience Choice awards in festivals across the country.

Current projects include *The Homestretch* and *The Girl with the Rivet Gun*.

More information can be found online at <http://www.spargelproductions.com>



PRODUCED AND DIRECTED BY  
ANNE DE MARE AND KIRSTEN KELLY

A CO-PRODUCTION OF  
SPARGEL PRODUCTIONS KARTEMQUIN FILMS AND INDEPENDENT  
TELEVISION SERVICE (ITVS)

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[i]NDEPENDENT LENS

*Incubating and Hatching – all at once.*



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