

Yay!

These kindness heroes are changing the world in surprising ways

HUMANS

Reporting by
Melody Warnick

Some people just light up their corners of the world. You know the ones. Handling hard stuff with grace. Confidently living their truth. Creating a little more joy whenever you're around them. *Woman's Day* Editor in Chief Meaghan Murphy calls them Yay Humans, because they make you want to stand up and cheer. As she explains in her new book, *Your Fully Charged Life*, "Every day, every hour, sometimes moment to moment, you can consciously choose to act in a positive way or look for the positive in situations. When we do, the good energy is contagious." Follow the lead of these Fully Charged folks.



The Empathy Coach

Brandon Farbstein
RICHMOND, VA

High school is tough. But try doing it when you're 3'9" tall, as Brandon was as a freshman, due to a rare form of dwarfism. Bullies at school set up an Instagram account to mock him, posting videos of Brandon with cruel captions like *Nobody is ever going to love this ugly midget*. Yet during high school, a chance encounter with an organizer for TEDxRVA in Richmond, VA, led Brandon to speaking onstage to 2,000 people about his struggles. It was an aha moment for him. "That was truly the first time I felt seen and heard and validated for my experience," he remembers. "I'm not saying everybody can know what it's like to be the size of a 7-year-old, but we can all relate to not feeling enough." Elevating empathy became his mission.

In 2018, Brandon, now 21 and a public speaker, helped Virginia state legislators pass a law requiring all public schools to teach empathy and emotional intelligence as part of their curricula. Recently he practiced what he preaches when a few of his tormentors apologized and shared their own stories of being abused or bullied. Brandon tried to understand their pain, because he sees it as the only way to stop future cycles of cruelty. "Empathy really is something that I believe is going to make a transformational dent in society, especially for my generation," he says.

THIS PAGE: FARBSTEIN: COURTESY OF SUBJECT; MORRIS: SHAWNA DIMATTINA. OPPOSITE PAGE: FARBSTEIN: JUSTIN ROTH.



Check out Brandon's book, *Ten Feet Tall: Step Into Your Truth and Change Your Freaking World*.



The Daily Delighter

Kathleen Morris
VAUXHALL, NJ

About 10 years ago, Kathleen, 62, a Home Depot employee, started painting the front bib of her work apron with colorful scenes each season—snowmen, deer, flags, a pale pink cherry blossom tree (*above*).

Kathleen's aprons now look like the work of a pro, but she only started drawing and painting in her 50s. Once she realized she had a knack for it, she began to experiment with her aprons, first with markers and then with acrylic paints. She painted a stork holding a diaper for a pregnant coworker and the Grinch emerging from a pocket for another coworker's Christmastime apron. It's enough to stop busy customers like interior designer Shawna DiMattina in their tracks. "I was just so elated by the experience of working with Kathleen," Shawna remembers. "I was like, 'Look at your apron!'" It's the spark of joy Kathleen goes for every day in her job. "I'm proud of it," she says.

Be a Yay Human!

Wear things that make you happy, no matter how "loud" or funky they may be. Chances are they'll spark joy for someone else too! And, like Shawna, take photos of people and places that make you smile. A folder of them on your phone can lift a sour mood.



Simone's efforts have led to partnerships with PayPal and the Oprah Winfrey Network (OWN).

The Tireless Activist

Simone Gordon
EAST ORANGE, NJ

Some eight years ago, Simone, 34, approached nonprofit agencies for help getting diapers and formula for her now 10-year-old son, who has severe autism. She had no success, but then four strangers on Facebook not only bought her diapers but also enabled her to enroll in nursing school by paying her tuition, an act of kindness that made Simone tell the women, "I want to do the same thing for other women that you did for me."

So she started an Instagram account, @TheBlackFairyGodmotherOfficial, with one request for \$1,000 in rent money for a single mom at risk of eviction. It worked—and with shout-outs from the likes of famed author Elizabeth Gilbert, her Instagram exploded. During the pandemic, so did the need. In 2020, Simone, her team of volunteers, and her social media followers helped house 121 families and raised nearly \$500,000 to care for people about to slip through the cracks—often BIPOC single moms like Simone herself.

Not even a battle with COVID-19 late last year could stop Simone from using her platform to encourage people to donate. She says: "When families send me videos of their children eating dinner, or they go, 'My lights are on, my water is on'—that's what keeps me going."

Follow @TheBlackFairyGodmotherOfficial for ways you can pitch in and help!

The Compassionate Healer

Martha Phillips
BELLINGHAM, WA

Martha, a 41-year-old emergency room nurse, regularly meets people on some of the worst days of their lives. She and her forensic nursing team may treat around 150 sexual assault victims a year, offering support and services ranging from physical exams to STI prevention.

In 2019, a nurse colleague mentioned that an assault survivor had been visibly embarrassed about having to leave the building without a bra. Horrified, Martha thought, *I never want this to happen again*. She bought a supply of sports bras and cotton underwear that same day. Later she posted a picture of them on Facebook, writing, *This is the underwear that no woman wants to wear...But here's the kicker: That boring sports bra is WAY way WAY better than what some survivors get when they're discharged*. Her post started going viral, ultimately being shared 115,000 times, and donations of bras and underwear began pouring into not just her medical center in Bellingham, but hospitals around the country.

Now Martha's team stocks pants, shirts, and shoes, along with bras and panties,



in a full range of sizes. She believes it's a small act of kindness that is "a way to tell survivors that someone, even if it's just me, cares about them."

To find out how you can help survivors in your area, contact the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network.

The Positive Thinker

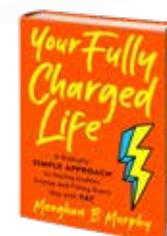
Molly Luppino
PHILADELPHIA

After special education teacher Molly, 27, learned that she had a brain tumor, she cried herself to sleep every night. That is, she did until, during one well-justified pity party, something shifted. "I don't want to feel miserable," she decided. "I want to feel happy."

Her approach: consistently reframing negative thoughts. "I'm only 24!" became "Thank God I'm young, so I can endure the surgery!" She even named her tumor Ted ("He was like a bad boyfriend") to make the process less scary. Through months of therapy after doctors removed the (thankfully benign) tumor, Molly practiced gratitude: for parents who helped her practice walking and for exercises like yoga that calmed her enough to carry on. Even when she could handle working on her master's thesis for only five minutes at a time, she used tactics she'd learned teaching special ed and persisted.

Some post-Ted issues remain, like peripheral vision loss and a foggy memory. But so do the happy changes Molly made after her unexpected wake-up call. "Before, everything was about work, and I would put off family and friends," she says. Now, she prioritizes relationships over future worries. For that she's grateful to Ted. "That tumor was the best thing that ever happened to me," Molly says cheerfully. "It's changed my life for the better."

Molly's sister encouraged her to document both the good and the hard parts of recovery.



Meet even more
awesome humans

Pick up a copy of *Your Fully Charged Life*, out now.

BROWN: COURTESY OF SUBJECT, LUPPINO: EMILY LUPPINO



"Hello,
my name
is Pete."

The Superconnector

Pete Brown
WESTFIELD, NJ

I'm the kind of guy who likes to go to a party where he doesn't know anybody," says Pete, 44, a data systems designer for financial companies. In five minutes, Pete will figure out where you went to college, what your weird hobby is, and all the people you both know in common. It's a skill he honed while touring as a member of the band Wheatus in the early 2000s, and now he's quick to deploy it at his kids' lacrosse and basketball games, where his never-met-a-stranger vibe comes across like a Yay Human superpower. "I'm fascinated with finding out what connects us," Pete says.

⚡ **Be a Yay Human!** ⚡

When you meet someone new to the group (whether it's a neighbor or a PTA member), make it a game to figure out what places, people, hobbies, or favorite things you have in common. It's a fun way to make someone feel welcome!