



RE: Maine Match Families

Dear Sponsor:

While the rural poverty situation in Maine is very real; it is not at all like the Delta or Appalachia. It is important to be aware of these differences to ensure good communications and a good match.

The Rural Community Action Ministry (RCAM) is our primary source of referrals from Maine and covers 13 very rural towns in the central Maine region. The unique challenges there are that the elderly, disabled and low-income people live in sparsely populated and remote areas and often the nearest grocery store is 25 + miles away. The only mode of transportation is by car, either your own or a friend or family member's. Because of this and the fierce brutality of the winters, most families get the very best car they possibly can—even if it means not having other things we would normally consider “essential” in other states. For them, it's a matter of survival. Without reliable transportation, they cannot access health or other services, and they can't get to the grocery store or to a hospital.

Maine people are proud and independent. They usually want to work if they can and they are resourceful enough to survive some pretty harsh living. There are few skilled, year-round jobs to be had in the rural areas, and most unskilled jobs are seasonal. People work at whatever they can find when the weather allows. The Center for Economic Policy's last report on Maine concluded that many Maine people are considered the “working poor” and it often was not possible to earn enough, even if working full time, to pay for rent, medicine, food, the car, essential household supplies and HEATING.

Heating costs are incredibly high even for just a small home. Because people are proud and have a hard time asking for help, several people literally freeze to death inside their own homes each winter. With the rise in fuel prices, there is real concern that this problem will only get worse over time.

Due to their fierce independence and pride, many of your Maine families may find it difficult to ask for things, or tell you exactly what they need. You may just want to start by writing back and forth and getting to know each other. Then you can move to sending things you think they can use, and asking them to tell you what they liked best, would like more of, or don't think they can use. Often a checklist can be a helpful guide.

The issues of rural poverty in Maine are very different from other areas. Please do not be surprised if your family is trying to work, or has a good car. They have been carefully screened and do need your assistance. Our goal is to help them achieve self-sufficiency. You can find great satisfaction in helping someone who also wants to help themselves. After all, our goal is to increase self-sufficiency, and the active participation of your family is a key factor in their success. We hope you will get to know these special families and learn more about the unique situations and problems they face.

If you do have any questions or concerns, the RCAM (our referring agency there) is a great resource to us for addressing any challenges or concerns that arise. They make a point of having regular contact with their match families and are ready and willing to help when we call on them.

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[Our Mission: To encourage and enrich the lives of families and individuals living in poverty in rural America by establishing meaningful relationships, promoting education, and offering material aid.](#)

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[Our Mission: Encouraging families and individuals living in rural poverty in America to become self-sufficient and overcome the cycle of poverty by offering them friendship, education, and material aid.](#)