

A Peek Inside The Box Project

Distinctive Non-Profit

The Box Project is a national, non-profit organization that has been matching volunteer sponsors, from across the United States, with recipient families living in poverty in rural America since 1962. Currently, the organization serves carefully selected areas of poverty including: the Mississippi Delta and rural communities in Maine, Appalachia (including West Virginia, Virginia, and Kentucky), and the Native American reservations of South Dakota. They are currently looking to expand their family match and other programs into poverty-stricken areas of rural Florida. With the National office located in Ormond Beach, Fla., The Box Project relies on the contributions of memberships and donations to provide basic operations.

The Mission of The Box Project is “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.”

Unique Opportunity

Unique among most relief organizations, The Box Project provides the opportunity for sponsors to build personal, lasting relationships with the families they are helping. Acting as matchmaker, The Box Project brings together sponsors with carefully-screened individuals or families that need assistance. The program promotes direct communication between the sponsors and recipients through letters or phone calls, but allows sponsors to control the amount of time and material resources they contribute to their matched family.

At a minimum, sponsors agree to send boxes of food, clothing and supplies directly to the families approximately once a month and stay in touch through regular correspondence. As they come to know each other more, trust and friendships grow, providing a positive, valuable experience for both the sponsor and recipient family.

Noteworthy History

In 1962, Virginia Naeve, a homemaker in Vermont, met Coretta Scott King, the wife of Martin Luther King Jr., during their flight to the Disarmament Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. Although Naeve’s primary plan at the conference was to speak with U.Thant, then head of the United Nations, her talk with King proved far more lasting. They spoke about the depth of rural poverty in America and what might be done to help the families in those areas. King gave the name of one specific family in Mississippi who she knew needed assistance.

Noteworthy History (Continued)

Naeve returned home and began writing letters and sending boxes of clothing, food, and supplies that the family desperately needed. Soon neighbors and friends asked to join her efforts. Additional families in poverty were added to the mailing list. Soon Naeve had the simple idea to begin matching those who wanted to help directly with the families in poverty. The Box Project was born and has helped more than 15,000 recipient families over the past 40 years.

Life Lessons

Many sponsors are young families who see their family match through The Box Project as a way to teach their children the value of unselfish giving, often requesting to be matched with a family of similar size and with children similar in age to their own. In a society where children are consumed with the latest fashions, video games and electronics, this experience offers a better understanding of the significance of having basic necessities vs. having luxuries. Children from sponsor families establish a relationship with children from a recipient family in a different area of the country. They learn about different cultures, geography and lifestyles and each family teaches the other. Because The Box Project is not directly involved in the match as a pass-through of goods or funds, the relationship between the families is direct; up close and personal.

The Box Project provides guidance and support for sponsors unfamiliar with the unique challenges of rural poverty, helping them to understand the culture and norms of the region where their family lives and what they can appropriately do to help. Sponsors frequently express shock when they cannot get answers to simple questions such as what size shoes or clothing recipient family members wear, not realizing that most families living in extreme poverty have never been shopping in a regular store—ever – and for these families such a question is impossible to answer. The Box Project offers solutions such as sending the family a tape measure to estimate waist size, leg length, etc., or asking family members to draw an outline around their hands and feet to help establish correct sizes.

Make a Difference

The Family Match program is not the only way The Box Project assists those living in poverty. There are several other programs that allow individuals to make a difference. For those interested in a short-term commitment, The Box Project offers a Holiday Match sponsorship that allows sponsors to make the holidays brighter for one winter holiday season. Another option is the Community Center Match program, in which sponsors are matched to a Community Center or small facility in the target rural area.

The Box Project also provides much-needed education to increase self-sufficiency and break the cycle of poverty. It is committed to removing the barriers to education and making significant strides in the areas of rural poverty that are served.

Make a Difference (Continued)

There are several Special Programs available that assist the education initiative.

Educational Fund: Provides scholarships to help individuals overcome the obstacles to acquiring higher education and vocational training.

Back-to-School Fund: Contributes funds for school supplies or uniforms to ensure students of families on the waiting list can start school on the first day of classes with the supplies and clothing they need.

Emergency Fund: Distributes limited funding to our recipient members for unexpected emergencies.

Tools of the Trade

The Box Project offers various materials to promote education and enhance the relationships with those involved in the organization.

The News Box is a quarterly newsletter designed to provide sponsors and recipient families with information they need to establish a successful relationship. It includes tips/ideas for sponsors, resources to assist poverty-stricken families overcome challenges, stories from sponsors, recipes and much more.

An online discussion group, named Chatterbox, is available free of charge. It is place where individuals can communicate with other sponsors to ask questions, get advice, pick up great box ideas and even hear about savings other sponsors have found for boxes they're sending to their match families. Access to Chatterbox, allows participants to look through the online archive of messages, files, and photos, as well as sample checklists of materials to send their family.

For more information on these tools and The Box Project, please visit www.boxproject.org.

Cold, Hard Facts

- Right now, in the richest country in the world, 37 million Americans are living in a state of poverty, hunger and hardship.
- Since 2000, the number of poor Americans has grown by more than 6 million. 77% of people in poverty live in a rural area.
- 15.6 million Americans live in severe poverty - with incomes below half of the poverty line.
- The child poverty rate in the U.S. is two-to-three times higher than any other major industrialized nation.
- One out of every 6 children in America lives in poverty.
- Living in poverty robs children of their sense of security and adversely affects their ability to learn.

Cold, Hard Facts (Continued)

- 11.6% of all people in the Midwest and in the Northeast live in poverty.
- In the West, 12.6% of all people live in poverty.
- In the South, the percent of poverty for all residents is highest of all regions at 14.1%.
- Most Americans living in poverty are too young, too old, or physically incapable of working due to illness or disability. Nearly two-thirds of all Americans living in poverty have to depend on someone else in the household to bring in money to live.
- The federal government puts the poverty threshold at \$19,307. However, a 2000 poll revealed that a majority of Americans believe it takes at least \$35,000 annually to provide adequately for a family of four.
- The Box Project currently has more than 1,600 recipient families matched across the country. But with a waiting list of approximately 285 families in poverty and the numbers growing daily, there remains an urgent need for sponsors.

Source: www.povertyusa.org

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