

Family helps mother, daughters in Kentucky

By NAOMI ULICI
IRVINE WORLD NEWS

Shopping has taken on a new meaning for Elizabeth Carlsson. She and her husband, Dan, have been sponsoring a needy family of four in Kentucky for over a year, in addition to caring for their own family.

"Now when I go shopping for us, I always have an eye out for my family in Kentucky," she said, enlisting the services of 21-year-old Christy, the youngest of their three children, to help her shop. Together, the two find the right sizes of clothes and practical items to send to their match family, a mother and her three daughters.

"I grew up in the East and we would drive through Appalachia to visit family in Tennessee. It was beautiful but there was so much poverty," Carlsson said, about why she requested a match family from that area. She also liked the fact that she was helping a family in the United States.

"There are some really poor places in this country that people on the East Coast and West Coast just don't think about. There isn't much help for people in rural areas," including the small town of 4,000 where the Carlssons' match family lives.

Working with a national, non-profit organization called the Box Project, the Carlssons were paired up with a family two months after signing up for the program, and began sending boxes to them at the beginning of each month.

"They are wonderful people, I feel very attached to them," Carlsson said, adding that she is especially close to the mother, Peggy. She says they talk about life, where it's going, and how the girls are doing.

"She writes me every month, and is so extremely grateful and happy," Carlsson said, who says the family has never asked for anything, and that she has to pry their needs out of them.

"Whether it be a bar of soap or hand lotion or a gift certificate to the grocery store, it gives people



MIGUEL VASCONCELLOS/IRVINE WORLD NEWS

Dan and Libby Carlsson are involved with The Box Project, a charity that put them together with a family in need from Kentucky. They send boxes monthly to the family; in the foreground are pictures and letters sent back to the Carlssons.

hope for another day," said Susan Patneau, executive director of the Box Project.

Carlsson began compiling all the letters and pictures she receives into a scrapbook. She decided she was uncomfortable with phone contact, so the two families mostly communicate through letters, e-mails and pictures.

"People truly care for each other, and they don't have to live near each other to help. The distance is actually comfortable, and creates more of a bond," Patneau said.

One of the last

boxes the Carlssons sent was full of party decorations, cake mixes, prizes, and gifts – all the items needed for the 6-year-old daughter's birthday party, including disposable cameras so that they

could take pictures. Sometimes the boxes have themes; one had only pajamas, and another was packed with back-to-school supplies.

"I was raised by parents that did a lot of volunteer work and it sunk in. It makes me happy," Carlsson said about volunteering. A 13-year member of the Assistance League of Irvine she said she loves the personalization of the Box Project, getting to directly communicate with the people she's helping.

Living on a one-income budget from the public relations business she and her husband run, Carlsson says she usually spends around \$200 on each box, depending on the monthly finances. Some months, she'll send a Wal-Mart gift certificate if she senses that financial need is greater.

"I want to do more than just mail things or send gift certificates," Carlsson said, as she learns more about her match



Box Project recipient Faith shows off her birthday cake.

Box Project: Family to family

FROM / B9

family's situation. She says Peggy has a lot of health problems and has to walk long distances to get to a doctor. But the cycle of poverty seems to be hopeless, she said. The family was born and raised in the poor area and is unlikely to leave.

"I hope that the two older girls will go to junior college or get some occupational training, even though they don't have a car," she said.

Carlsson found out about the Box Project in the '80s when she saw an advertisement in a magazine. After clipping it out and sending it in, she

received a brochure, but never got involved until she saw the organization featured on "Oprah" last year.

The Box Project has been pairing sponsors with families or individuals in need since 1962. The goal of the program is to target areas in America that have the highest percentages of poverty and help recipients become self-sufficient and overcome the cycle of poverty.

While more than 5,000 families have been matched, 500 are still waiting for sponsors. For more information about the Box Project, visit www.boxproject.org or call (800) 268-9928.