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Fighting poverty with boxes to Mississippi

By: Jeff Milgram , Staff Writer

05/04/2004

Area family joins The Box Project.

Two years ago, Nancy Goodstein was leafing through a magazine in her doctor's waiting room when she came across mention of The Box Project, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1962.

The artist and antique dealer liked what she read.

The Box Project acts as a matchmaker, pairing sponsors with carefully screened individuals or families that need financial help. The goal is to help them become self-sufficient and overcome the cycle of poverty.

Ms. Goodstein and her husband, Barry, who own Princeton Supply in Rocky Hill, were paired with a grandmother and two grandchildren in a rural Mississippi trailer park. Every month, Ms. Goodstein shops for nonperishable food, soap, toilet paper and clothing and sends it to Mississippi.

They also send special clothing, such as sneakers.

It costs about \$40 a month, Ms. Goodstein said Monday.

In return, the Goodsteins get letters from the family.

They have spoken by telephone, but have never met in person, Ms. Goodstein said.

"It's a direct contribution," Ms. Goodstein said. "There's no bureaucracy."

After being paired with the family, The Box Project plays no active role in the relationship.

The sponsors offer long-term friendships, including encouragement, advice and boxes of needed supplies about once a month. Sponsors and recipients communicate directly with each other through letters or phone calls. They send boxes of food, clothing or supplies directly to the families. As they come to know each other more, trust and friendships grow — providing a positive experience for both the recipient and the sponsor.

"I feel like I know them personally," Ms. Goodstein said. "I'm a grandmother — we chat back and forth about what's going on with the kids."

The Box Project sponsors are matched with families in rural areas of Maine, West Virginia, Virginia, Mississippi and Kentucky, as well as Native Americans on reservations in South Dakota.

Currently more than 450 families have been screened and are on a waiting list for a sponsor and friend. The Box Project also offers limited-time sponsorship matches during the holidays and welcomes donations.

For more information about how to get involved, call Ms. Goodstein at (609) 497-9114 or The Box Project at (800) 268-9928 or www.boxproject.org.

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