



Mississippi Sponsor Fact Sheet

Many of The Box Project recipient families live in the Mississippi Delta. The Mississippi Delta is the region between the Mississippi and Yazoo rivers. This region is stricken with poverty and is rich in culture. Families living in the delta are poorly educated and unable to meet the demands of the workforce. For these individuals, little work is available. They often work in catfish factories and casinos. About 55% of households have income less than \$15,000 per year. A large percentage of the unemployed receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Social Security, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), food stamps, and Disability Pension.

Typical TANF payments are \$96 for one child, \$120 for two children and \$24 for each additional child. Food stamp programs can start at approximately \$130.00 for one person and increase for each additional qualified family member.

Housing in the delta is substandard. Many people live in homes that would not stand up to any kind of severe weather and the furnishings are usually sparse. People "make do" and they do without some of the things many of us often think of as necessities. There are some public housing apartments in some of the more urban towns, but rural living is harsh. Habitat for Humanity has built homes for some lucky rural families allowing them to become homeowners for the first time, but there is never enough decent affordable housing. In the more outlying rural areas, families live on plantations and as sharecroppers. It is common for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th generations to live in the same home. The delta has the highest percentage of births to unwed mothers in Mississippi.

There is no public transportation in the delta. Some families own vehicles and can transport themselves to needed services, but families without vehicles must pay others for transportation to the grocery stores and to medical appointments. The average cost of a trip is \$5.00 to \$10.00 depending on the distance. If they don't take care of their business in one trip, it will cost additional money for an additional trip. Wal-Mart stores are available in the more urban areas, but in rural areas, there are only "Mom and Pop" stores that sell everything, but usually at a higher price than the big stores. Every day people make choices between food and medicine, and the value of making trips to far away stores versus paying higher prices locally.

The weather in the delta is hot in the summer, with temperatures getting up as high as 100 plus degrees. Most of the homes do not have air conditioning, but people usually cool their homes with electric fans. The winter months are cold and often the temperature falls below freezing. Sometimes there is snow and ice. Families use butane gas and wood to heat their homes. Most of the people have gas space heaters, wood heaters, fireplaces and some still have wood stoves. A load of wood could cost as much as \$50.00 per load (cord). A family may need 4 to 5 cords a winter depending on the length and severity of the weather. Some winters are longer than others and it usually starts the middle of October and runs into March. In the winter coats, thermal underwear, socks, sweaters, hats, and boots are needed.

Holidays are important to families. Martin Luther Kings' Day, Easter, July 4th (Independence Day), Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas are major holidays. On these holidays, families celebrate with a large family dinner. Usually parents like to buy their children new clothes for the holidays, especially the 4th of July, Easter and Christmas. Some of the popular foods during these holidays are: turkey, chicken, ham, duck, cakes, pies, dressing (stuffing), and potato salad (Christmas & Easter). An Easter egg hunt is common for Easter; and the 4th of July often includes a cook-out of ribs, chicken, hot dogs, potato salad, macaroni & cheese, baked beans, fried catfish or whatever they can afford.

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People living in the delta have many basic needs. Often the things that we take for granted are not available to these families. The best recommendation is to openly communicate and ask your match family about their individual needs.

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