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Annual Report

How did we do in
 twenty-o-two?
 Very well,
 Thanks to you!

There were many successes in the past year which will bear fruits for a long time to come. First of all, we overcame the disastrous drop in income we experienced after 9-11. This was a major goal. We are now back on an even footing going into 2003.

To prevent such a roller-coaster effect from happening again, the Board has begun looking at "capacity building" grants and positioning ourselves to be in a good place to apply for them. We completed the survey of all members in June 2002, and that was a major asset. For the first time it documented what we actually are doing and showed the power of The Box Project.

The Mission Statement was changed to reflect even more clearly what we do. A business plan was constructed to take us forward in the coming years and provide structure to our growth. We are in an excellent position to grow again.

Hundreds of families were screened and matched in 2002. While the overall number of sponsors is dropping, it has followed the historical loss of approximately 1/3 of each year's new crop of sponsors. We are working hard

to reduce this percentage, but many "Oprah" families simply do not believe they need us once they are matched nor will support helping others to be matched.

We also began accepting recipient families from the Sioux reservations in South Dakota. The addition of SD to our target areas makes us truly national in scope.

Our Board jumped from twelve to fifteen members. In addition, we have begun a partnership with Inland Paperboard & Packaging Corp.

Staffing has remained at three full-time equivalents. Allen, Sue and Maureen are the only paid employees for The Box Project and staff the office in Plainville, CT.

We have conducted an annual audit by an independent firm, Nancy Riella, CPA., whose summary reports are copied inside.

In the coming year we look forward to seeing the results of the new "Classmatch!" program and exploring the capacity building concepts and possible grant funding of some of our activities. The "Comic Book" will be out around summertime and we will watch for its impact.

With your help, 2003 will be even better.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

Dear Members,
 I just finished reading, "Nickel and Dime" ... On

(not) *Getting By in America* by Barbara Ehrenreich and would urge all of you to read it as well. Through letters and phone calls we can empathize with the daily challenges our families face as they struggle to house, feed and clothe themselves and their families. Barbara Ehrenreich chose to walk in their shoes. Her two year odyssey began with her concern about poverty in America and a question to her editor, "How does anyone live on the wages of the unskilled?"

He challenged her to try it herself and to write about her experience. As you'll find out, she discovered that no job is truly "unskilled" and the jobs that were available to her...waitress, hotel maid, nursing home aide, Wal-Mart sales clerk, required exhausting mental and muscular effort. She also quickly realized that one job was not enough - she needed two if she intended to live indoors.

The boxes that we send and the letters that we

write may sometimes seem to be small offerings in view of the economic needs of our sister families. Yet we know from the letters we receive at the office and the work we're doing as a board that we are making a difference. Our families know that across the miles there is someone who cares. Someone who's there to advise and mentor, to provide information about access to resources, or to lend an ear as well as a helping hand.

We again thank you for your generous response to our fund raising letters. As you know, member dues only pay 1/3 of the expenses for one year of service to our new members. Our goal for 2003 and 2004 is to diversify our income streams through grants, fundraising and appeals that will supplement your member dues. With that in mind, we've been working hard to create an organization that's "funder-friendly" - and we're proud of the fact that our audit report underlines the fact that we're now operating at a 4% ratio of administrative costs to program costs; most not-for-profits struggle to achieve even a 20% ratio.

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GUIDELINES FOR CROSS-CULTURAL INTERACTION

The following is a guide written by Adell Moore who heads a social agency in Georgia, used to work for The Box Project many years ago, and now is a valued member on our Board.

CULTURE: The integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communication, actions, customs, beliefs, values and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group.

- § **Acknowledge the importance of the family's cultural background.** Our view of the world, our communication styles and our values and beliefs stem from our culture.
- § **Don't make cultural assumptions.** Don't assume that because you witnessed a behavior in someone that this is a culture-bound behavior that applies to all.
- § **Avoid being judgmental.** Avoid judging people by personal cultural standards, values and beliefs.
- § **Learn about the culture of your family.** Read articles and books about various cultural groups, especially written by members of the same culture as your family. Attend cultural sensitivity workshops and seminars.
- § **Use the family's definition of family.** Some cultures consider extended family or close friends part of their family. Be considerate and respectful of this definition of "family."
- § **Pronounce names correctly.** Write the phonetic pronunciation of difficult names and keep the list in a helpful place. Don't be bashful about asking for correct pronunciations.
- § **Speak clear English.** If you are interacting with a person who speaks English as second language, it is far better to speak English in a normal tone than to mirror the speech pattern the person is using.
- § **Be accountable for mistakes.** When a mistake happens, offer an apology and an honest explanation.
- § **Be aware of your own biases, prejudices, stereotypes, and your personal communication needs.** Your role is to offer families friendship, encouragement, advice and empower them to break their cycle of poverty; not recreate them in your cultural image.

VOLUNTEERING For The Box Project

The Box Project is building and renewing its database of volunteers who can help the program.

If you have a skill, trade or craft which might be useful to our program and wish to help the Board, a committee or the office in times of need, please let us know. We will add your name and skill to the list and be able to contact you when needed.

President's Message

Continued from Page 1

We are also delighted that so many of you are using our web chatterbox on a regular basis and supporting each other in innovative and caring ways. Our website will be even more user-friendly in a few months as we launch an updated version that reflects our growth as an organization and a consistent "look and feel" in all of our communication materials.

In an effort to promote better communication and understanding between sponsor and recipient families, we obtained a grant from Inland Paperboard and Packaging to develop a new recipient member orientation "comic book." The intent is to welcome new members, set expectations and emphasize that good communication builds good relationships. You'll hear (and see) more about this in our next newsletter.

Our newly launched public relations committee will target media across the country to get coverage of our mission and goals and the need for new sponsor families. At present, we have a list of

about 350 families who are waiting to be matched. For some, a holiday helper was assigned, and many of the gifts requested on their lists helped to make a positive difference in their celebrations. We thank all of you who reached out to these families in December.

Right now we urgently request your help, suggestions, public relations contacts, etc. to recruit new sponsors. Last year, our exposure on the Oprah Show and the articles in *Family Fun* and *Parade Magazine* were the catalyst for matching 2000 new sponsors with sister families. We receive at least 25 to 40 letters each week from qualified recipient families and are committed to matching them with sponsors. We know with your help we won't disappoint them.

Again, we thank you for your continued support and suggestions as we face even more challenging economic times. Please don't hesitate to call or email us with questions or comments at any time.

Yours sincerely,
Pat Schneider
Board President

Helping Children Cope in Unsettling Times Tips for Parents

Current world events are very unsettling. The war, economic difficulties, and the nation's heightened state of alert can cause justifiable anxiety. The uncertainty of terrorist warnings can be especially unnerving. Children may be confused or fearful that they or their loved ones are at risk. **Adults need to help children feel safe**, even if they themselves feel vulnerable. Parents can help children understand what is happening factually, how events do or do not impact their lives, and how to cope with their reactions.

Tips for Parents

Know if your child has special risks. The degree to which children are affected will vary depending on personal circumstances. Children will be most vulnerable who:

- Live in proximity to past traumatic events or "high" target areas.
- Have suffered a personal loss from or had firsthand exposure to violence or military actions.
- Have parents currently in the military or on active duty in the reserve forces.
- Have parents who fought in past conflicts like the Gulf War.
- Have parents involved in emergency response or public safety.
- Are of non-U.S. origin and may feel threatened by intolerance or racism.
- Suffer from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, depression or other mental illness.

Remain calm and reassuring. Children will take their cues from you, especially young children. Acknowledge that the war and uncertainty of threats are unnerving but the likelihood is that your family will be okay. There is difference between the *possibility* of danger and the *probability* of it affecting them personally.

Acknowledge and normalize their feelings. Allow children to discuss their feelings and concerns and encourage any questions they may have regarding current events. Listen and empathize. An empathetic listener is very important. Let them know that others are feeling the same way and that their reactions are normal and expected.

Take care of your own needs. Take time for yourself and try to deal with your own reactions to the situation as fully as possible. You will be better able to help your children if you are coping well.

If you are anxious or upset, your children are more likely to be so as well. Talk to other adults such as family, friends, faith leaders, or a counselor. It is important not to dwell on your fears by yourself. Sharing feelings with others often makes us feel more connected and secure. Take care of your physical health. Make time, however small, to do things you enjoy.

Avoid using drugs or alcohol to feel better.

Maintain a normal routine. Keeping to a regular schedule can be reassuring and promote physical health. Spend family time doing enjoyable activities. Ensure that children get plenty of sleep, regular meals, and exercise. Encourage them to keep up with their schoolwork and extracurricular activities but don't push them if they seem overwhelmed. You know your children best, and your love and support are the most important factors to their sense of security.

Focus on your children's strengths. Identify what they have done in the past that helped them cope when they were frightened or upset as well as their competencies in daily life. Also remind them that the country has weathered many other crises, including terrorism, natural disasters and war, and has emerged stronger and more united each time.

Be a good listener and observer. Let children guide you as to how concerned they are or how much information they need. If they are not anxious or focused on current events, don't dwell on them. But be available to answer their questions to the best of your ability. Young children may not be able to express themselves verbally. Pay attention to changes in their behavior or social interactions. Most school age children and adolescents can discuss their concerns although they may need you to provide an "opening" to start a conversation. Don't push, but ask what they think about current events. Even if they don't want or need to talk now, they may later and they will know you care what they think and feel.

Be willing to discuss the concept of death. Children may be more concerned about dying or their loved one dying, particularly given the intense focus on death in the wake of earlier terrorist attacks. Talking with them is important. Outside resources can be very helpful (e.g., books for children that address death, grief and hospice organizations, or your faith community, if part of your family life). If a child comes from a home with a resilient belief system or faith, it will likely provide a powerful source of support when it comes to dealing with these issues.

Turn off or monitor television. It is important to stay informed, but watching endless news coverage is likely to heighten your anxiety and that of your children. Young children in particular cannot distinguish between images on T.V. and their personal reality. Older children may want to watch the news, but be available to discuss what they see and help put it into perspective.

Discuss events in age-appropriate terms. Share information that is appropriate to their age and developmental level. Understand what your children know already. Young children may require repeated reassurance during the

day. Tell them they are okay and that adults will always take care of them. School age children can understand details and reasons behind specific actions, such as increased security but cannot absorb intense or frightening information. Adolescents may want to discuss issues related to terrorism, war, patriotism, free speech, etc., as well as safety issues.

Stick to the facts. Answer children's questions factually and include a positive element to answer, e.g., "Yes we are on high alert, but we have been here before. It does not mean that something bad will definitely happen." "Yes, we are at war, but our troops will keep us safe." "Yes, there are more police on our streets, but they are there to protect us." Don't speculate about what *could* happen.

Differentiate between war and terrorism. Children may see images of suffering and death from the war and may confuse these far away actions with potential danger at home—particularly young children. Older children may be aware of heightened risk of terrorism because of the war, but you can help them distinguish between the two types of actions. Acts of war involve attacks on military targets and are government-to-government actions linked to official foreign policy objectives. Terrorism targets innocent individuals with the goal of inflicting harm and terror.

Remind children not to ridicule people or ideas just because they are different. The issues of war and terrorism are complicated. Children, particularly younger ones, will tend to view them in absolute terms, with good guys and bad guys. Reinforce that most people are good and ultimately care about the same things: safety, freedom and opportunity. Remind them that people who support the war also care about protecting innocent lives and that people who oppose the war care deeply about the United States and the safety of our troops.

Help children explore and express their opinions respectfully. Explain that opinion is not the same as fact. Fact is what actually happens. Opinions are how we feel about what happens. Everyone has a right to their opinion and discussing different views can deepen children's understanding of the world. Addressing the intolerance that leads to conflict and aggression can also help children regain a sense of control. Have children avoid stigmatizing statements like, "War protesters are wimps," or "People who believe in war are idiots." Encourage children to state their beliefs with opening phrases like, "I believe or I think" instead of "It is" or "You should."

Be aware of the potential for bullying. Some students may act out their heightened emotions through anger or intimidation. Let your children know that you and school personnel can help if they are being mistreated.

Continued on page 5

CLASSMATCH! is on track. We're already collecting teachers' names and information on classes that want to be included in the program starting in the fall. In the meantime, the Education Task Force is working on developing activities and teacher outline kits for participants. If you know a teacher of grade 3 through 8 who would like to participate too, please have them contact us.

The **COMIC BOOK** project is developing very nicely! Ron Goulart and Orlando Busino's initial drafts were more than we could have hoped for. This project, developing a comic book telling recipient families about Box Project relationships, is on track and we really look forward to its printing.

The **ANNUAL AUDIT** went very well and once again we look fantastic. This year we were even able to document all of your volunteer hours because of member's participation in the survey in 2002. In the past we were always hurt because the goods and services went directly to families, not through the office. That made it appear like the administrative costs for the program were high. But this time we can document the thousands of hours put in by our members—wherever they may be.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATIONS have gotten far out of balance. We have about 300 more applications from qualified recipient families than we have sponsors to match them. If you know someone who might be a good sponsor, please tell them about us! If your own recipient family is no longer communicating, let us know—there are others waiting.

EMERGENCY FUND use continued high for the first two months of 2003. We sent out an average of one check a week, up to \$300. Most of this was to stop shut-offs of electricity or heat. Donations targeted to the Emergency Fund of The Box Project are always appreciated.

THE NEXT BOARD MEETING is set for June 57 in Rapid City, SD. The Board will be meeting with representatives and members from the reservations

NEWS BRIEFS

As you have read in past issues, there's a LOT going on at The Box Project! Here is a fast run-down on many of the activities going on:

which we have added to our target areas. While the Board members meet frequently via conference calls as they work on projects and committees, the full Board meets only three times a year.

Sue Deschaine got a new **COMPUTER** here in the offices. The increased memory and speed are showing us what our databases and listings could really do. We really didn't know we were so slow and shouldn't have had all the lock-ups until we saw this new one in action. (Now we're all jealous!)

A **FUNDING DRIVE** is scheduled for May. The Board voted to have TWO drives each year, May and November. We know that some of you only want to be contacted once a year, and we're implementing a way to designate that. With about 4000 letters going out, it cannot be done by hand. If you are among those who only want to be contacted once a year, please bear with us, let us know, and toss the extras out for now. Also please remember to be sure to clearly let us know if you are sending DUES or a DONATION. They are not the same!

Speaking of DUES....
We are now sending out the dues renewal envelopes in the month your dues are up for renewal. If you want to know when that is (or was) look at your mailing label on this newsletter. The date next to your name is when your dues are due!

The COSMIC CHUCKLE resounded in late February when Allen had spent many hours seeking help in getting a national media outlet to recruit more sponsors. After two days of frustration a little email popped up from LISA BRAUN, a Box Project member who just happened to mention she would like to be helpful. Until recently Lisa was the Vice Presi-

dent, Promotion and Music Marketing for MTV!!! Allen says he was chumming for mackerel for three days when Jaws showed up and heaven laughed at him. **THANK YOU LISA!!!**

THE NEW WEBSITE is still under development. While activity is going slower than expected, there's a good reason. Board member Sue Taylor is working to develop a unified look and "feel" to ALL our public documents, and the website will be one of the first to show it. What we do here will also reflect on our stationery, forms, and even this newsletter. We want to get it right, so we're going deliberately slow and exact.

It's been a very cold, harsh and long winter here at the offices. It's been the kind of winter that easily gets depressing. The staff wants to say **THANK YOU** to all those members who wrote us with nice letters and news over the past months. It made our gray days a lot better.

A Nice Letter
I just found your website after doing a search. My mother, Jean Downey, has been sending boxes to her family in Mississippi since about 1968—almost 35 years. I don't know if she is still on your sponsor list, but she still sends boxes. I remember as a child helping Mom make a quilt for our (sister) family. That was to be the first quilt of many. We had such fun deciding what to put in the boxes! Now, 200 quilts later, I am sending my own boxes of quilt fabric to a quilter in Gees Bend Alabama..... I just wanted you to know that The Box Project has a ripple effect, like dropping a stone into a pool of water.
Regards, Marsha Downey

NEWS FLASH
Just as we were about to go to press with this edition, we have information that The Smithsonian Museum of American Art staff may be partners with us in Classmatch! The Smithsonian is interested in the cross cultural communication and very enthusiastic about this program.

THE BOX PROJECT, INC.
STATEMENT OF FUNCTIONAL EXPENSES
YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2002

	Supporting Services			Total
	Program Services	Administration	Fundraising	
Compensation and related expenses				\$ 101,478
Compensation	\$ 74,505	\$ 26,973	\$ -	\$ 1,323,680
Volunteer Expenses in Kind	1,323,680	-	-	8,449
Payroll taxes	6,203	2,246	-	
Total compensation and related expenses	1,404,388	29,219	-	1,433,607
Occupancy				1,595
Electricity	1,435	160	-	1,051
Heat	946	105	-	114
Water & sewer	103	11	-	9,850
Rent	8,865	985	-	2,488
Maintenance	2,228	260	-	4,488
Telephone	4,264	224	-	9,133
Insurance	-	9,133	-	28,719
Total occupancy expenses	17,841	10,878	-	
Administration				7,288
Professional Fees	3,644	3,644	-	6,226
Board Meeting Expense	-	6,226	-	11,111
Postage	9,974	556	581	4,190
Printing	1,751	209	2,230	10,688
Newsletter	10,688	-	-	4,480
Office supplies and expense	4,032	448	-	1,186
Payroll service fees	593	593	-	1,213
Bookkeeping fees	607	606	-	512
Internet Expense	512	-	-	753
Dues & subscriptions	527	226	-	1,727
Member Development & Administration	854	863	-	4,939
Equipment Rental & support	4,445	494	-	735
State filing fees	368	367	-	1,245
Promotion	1,245	-	-	380
Seminars & training	190	190	-	56,673
Total administration expense	39,440	14,422	2,811	
College Fund Expenditures	3,647	-	-	3,647
Emergency Fund Expenditures	5,834	-	-	5,834
Survey	-	-	-	-
Conferences	289	-	-	289
Travel	1,659	711	-	2,370
Total expenses before depreciation expense	1,473,098	55,230.00	2,811	1,531,139
Loss on disposal of asset	-	192	-	192
Depreciation expense	-	4,298	-	4,298
Total functional expenses	\$ 1,473,098	\$ 59,720	\$ 2,811	\$ 1,535,629

THE BOX PROJECT, INC.
STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY
YEAR ENDED DECEMBER 31, 2002

UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS		
Support		\$ 115,702
Dues		116,256
Contributions		1,323,680
Contributions in kind		4,003
Direct Aid Fee		817
Miscellaneous income		27,889
Fundraising income		544
Interest income from unrestricted assets		
TOTAL UNRESTRICTED SUPPORT		1,588,891
Expenses		
Program services		1,473,098
Supporting services		59,720
Fundraising		2,811
TOTAL EXPENSES		1,535,629
INCREASE IN UNRESTRICTED NET ASSETS		53,262
TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS		
Interest income on temporarily restricted assets		297
Restrictions satisfied by payments		(6,422)
Grant received		12,046
INCREASE IN TEMPORARILY RESTRICTED NET ASSETS		5,921
INCREASE IN NET ASSETS		59,183
Rounding		-1
NET ASSETS AT BEGINNING OF YEAR		181,083
NET ASSETS AT END OF YEAR		\$ 240,265

Helping Children Cope

Continued from page 3

Communicate with your children's school. Find out what they are learning. Share any concerns you have with teachers including if you have a family member on active duty. Encourage the teacher to keep you informed as well. Remember that teachers might be under heightened stress like everyone else. Not only are they providing extra support to their students, they may also have loved ones who are called to active duty and/or trying to cope with their own personal reactions to events.

Encourage children to talk to you or another caring adult. Emphasize that you are there to help and that they should let an adult know if they or a friend feels overwhelmed for any reason.

Do something positive with your children to help others in need. Making a positive contribution to the community or country helps people feel more in control and builds a stronger sense of connection. One suggestion is to find out if there are families in your community with parents who are deployed. They may need babysitting, errands run, yard work, etc.

Be aware of these potential child/adolescent reactions to trauma. Most children will be able to cope with their concerns with the help of parents and other caring adults. However, some children may be at risk of more extreme reactions because of personal circumstances. Symptoms may differ depending on age. Parents should contact a professional if children exhibit significant changes in behavior or any of the following symptoms over an extended period of time.

- **Preschoolers**—thumb sucking, bedwetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior, withdrawal from friends and routines.
- **Elementary School Children**—irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration, withdrawal from activities and friends.
- **Adolescents**—sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior and poor concentration.

©2003, National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East West Highway #402, Bethesda, MD 20814

Note: We want to thank the NASP for this information and working with The Box Project to provide it for our newsletter and families.

The News Box

The Box Project
Post Office Box 435
Plainville, Connecticut
06062-0435

Non-profit Org
US POSTAGE
PAID
Permit #9
Plainville, CT 06062-0435

OUR MISSION: Encourage families and individuals living in rural poverty in America to become self-sufficient and overcome the cycle of poverty by offering them friendship, educational and material aid.

The Last Word

Fred Rogers, the creator of Mr. Rogers Neighborhood, remarked often about how important it is for children to know they are worthy of being

loved, and indeed are loved. I agree. But what he missed was the truth that we grow older, but we really never grow up. The feelings and dreams of childhood are always with us, just behind the curtains of our mind. We still need to know we are worthy of love and are loved.

Great books of philosophy and theology have been written about people's needs to feel accepted by something

greater than ourselves. A parent is usually the model for this hunger. But some people are told they are NOT worthy, that they must earn love—and the criteria for them to do so is kept unclear. So they hurt inside, grow hostile and isolated.

In talking to many older sponsors, it is clear most carry the scars of times they felt unappreciated. Like Simon & Garfunkel's "Boxer" there were times they cried out, "I am leaving." But then there were also those wonderful moments when some small thing happened and they just knew this was right and good, and the fighters remained.

Love is never wasted. Sometimes it takes years to grow, but it's never wasted.

Since we began working on this newsletter, the war has broken out. While there are many mixed emotions about the recent events, I wanted to add a note of our staff's full appreciation, respect and support to those service people and their families facing the dangers of the war in service to their country.

Some of us may question the politics, but none of us question YOU. Serve with pride, because we are very proud of you.

— Allen