

News Release

For Immediate Release:

The Box Project Pilots New ClassMatchSM Program

Plainville, CT—January 8, 2004—The Box Project, a national, non-profit organization that makes a positive difference for thousands of American families living in rural poverty, recently launched a new ClassMatchSM program.

The ClassMatch program is a correspondence program that pairs classrooms, students, and teachers from around the country creating an opportunity to share their lives, interests, and what they are learning with each other. Through a generous donation, the ClassMatch program was able to offer the Smithsonian American Art Museum's award-winning multi-media educational resource packet, "Public Sculpture, America's Legacy" for each class in the program. The goal is to provide materials that encourage students to look at their local culture with new eyes and share what they see while also learning about other cultures.

Dr. Mohammad Hoque, professor of social work at Mississippi Valley State University, Chair of the ClassMatch development committee, and member of the Board of Directors for The Box Project, commented, "It is wonderful to have the value of this effort recognized as it opens so many more opportunities for the students and teachers."

In an act of generosity exemplifying the values of the "Pay It Forward" concept, a student who had previously received educational funds from The Box Project designated \$7000 for the organization to use in new ways "to help other kids". The Box Project Board of Directors knew just what they wanted to do with those funds. "For years, we had teachers in various parts of the country ask if we could match their classrooms with other classrooms—similar to how we match families in our Family Match program. Sometimes we were able to make these matches, and the positive results underscored our philosophy that education is truly the key to self-sufficiency. Our vision was to grow this concept into a large-scale program," said Cindy Shearer, President. "One student's request to 'help other kids' put the wheels in motion that allowed us to turn our vision of the ClassMatch program into a reality."

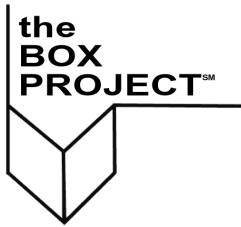
With the ClassMatch program, The Box Project matches pairs of elementary school classrooms across miles and cultural lines. Participating classrooms come from across the United States. Twenty-two classes are involved in the pilot program and the initial reactions have been extremely positive.

"There's no sponsor or recipient in this program," said Ms. Shearer. "It's just kids and teachers sharing across cultures. They describe for each other what life is like where they live, and everyone benefits from it."

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P.O. Box 435 ~ Plainville, CT 06062 ~ Phone: 860.747.8182 ~ Fax: 860.793.8857 ~ Email: info@boxproject.org ~ Web: www.boxproject.org

Our Mission: Encouraging families and individuals living in rural poverty in America to become self-sufficient and overcome the cycle of poverty by offering them friendship, education, and material aid.



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The teachers use shared cards and letters as exciting ways to teach literacy, sociology, geography, history and many other topics. Classes have even written and produced videotapes to share with their ClassMatch friends whom they have never even met.

"The kids are really excited, and that's what counts," wrote teacher Kristie Tays of Knollwood Elementary, a Rapid City, South Dakota school participating in the pilot program.

Since 1963, The Box Project has acted as a matchmaker, pairing sponsors from around the country with carefully screened individuals or families living in rural poverty that want to become self-sufficient and overcome the cycle of poverty. Their Family Match program is unique in offering a direct connection between the matched families and eliminating any intermediary. Sponsors control how much time they spend and what finances or resources they will contribute to their matched family. Sponsors offer long-term friendships, including encouragement and advice, along with assistance such as boxes of food, clothing, or supplies sent directly to the families about once a month. As they come to know each other more, trust and friendships grow—providing a positive and valuable experience for both the recipient and the sponsor.

Plans are already being formed for the 2004-05 school year as more and more teachers and schools have heard of the program and wish to join in next year.

"We're looking for a major sponsor for this program," said Ms. Shearer. "We have the people and the experience to make miracles happen and have a positive impact with these students. But we still need help if we want to see it grow and expand to even more classrooms next year."

About The Box Project

The Box Project, Inc. is a national, not-for-profit 501(c)(3) organization. Founded in 1962, The Box Project has been working to help people living in areas of the United States with the highest rates of rural poverty. We seek to ease the effects of poverty and increase mutual understanding through friendship, education, and material aid. With the help of our referring agencies, we seek out families who want to better themselves, work, and learn, then provide programs to support their growth and success. For more information on how to get involved, visit us online at: www.boxproject.org or call 800-268-9928.

Contact:

The Box Project

Sue Taylor, Media Relations

Phone: 818-501-4616

Fax: 818-301-2666

Web: www.boxproject.org

Email: media@boxproject.org

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