



Love Box[®] Information Packet

HOPE | COMMUNITY | EMPOWERMENT | CURIOSITY | TRANSFORMATION



Love Box[®]

LETTER TO A LOVE BOX LEADER

If you are reading this, then you are considering becoming a Love Box volunteer. As a former foster parent and an active Love Box volunteer, THANK YOU. We are delighted that you are taking the next steps to help be a positive change agent for children, youth, and families in the foster care community. We believe in the power of **relational, community-based care** and the simple act of good people stepping up and helping out, and we are SO glad that you do too! We cannot progress as a society until we recognize that **any neglected child is our collective responsibility**.

We created the Love Box program to give everyday people an opportunity to come alongside a local fostering family and join their support system. Caregivers and children alike need authentic trust-based connections and we know that children from hard places in particular need **consistency, support, and attachment** to caring adults to heal. You are committing to be an extension of support, someone who looks for ways to be an encouragement, and to offer practical and useful help.

I have heard many encouraging stories over the years as well as worked with many incredible volunteers who have taken our programs and completely embodied our hope, which is to see consistent monthly support turn into **authentic, deep connections**. Volunteers who look for small and meaningful ways to engage the children, lift a burden from a caregiver, and help create a space of healing make big impacts. As a foster parent, I know first hand how consistent relationships between my family and our volunteers can bring **hope, stability, and support**; how helpful it was to my home and my life and my child; how much a meal after a stressful day, or a well-timed care package, a coffee treat, or a day outing with my child could bring so much stability. These children and families--they need people who are willing to go the **extra mile** and remind them of the hard and holy work of fostering, of opening hearts and homes to children from hard places, and the gift of not doing it alone. I hope you grow to love this program as much as we do. If you are anything like me, you will start this journey thinking these children, youth, and families need you, but will soon realize you need them.

Let it always be about the children,



Chief Program Officer



WHY OUR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES NEED YOU



Children are removed from their homes and placed in foster care due to neglect, abandonment, or because they are the victims of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. When children are removed from the home they are confused and upset and they need the temporary protection and nurturing that a foster family can provide. It can be extremely difficult for children to adjust to a new home, new caregivers, new norms, a new school, and a new community. We also know that children in foster care experience high placement instability, many of them moving homes frequently. One large factor leading to this high rate of turnover is foster parents feeling **unsupported** or **overwhelmed**.

This is where we come in. We support the WHOLE family.

The Love Box program provides fostering families (caregivers, children in foster care, and biological/adopted children) with community and holistic support. This wrap-around support enables caregivers to continue to do the important and meaningful work of being foster parents. As a Love Box volunteer, you will be matched with a local foster family based on location, compatibility, and scope of needs. When our families are matched with committed volunteers who show up monthly, parents feel supported and children gain a greater sense of normalcy, relational permanency, and self confidence. Think of yourself as the fun “auntie” and “uncle” who visit once a month and bring love, encouragement, and hope. You’ll be surprised how a simple act of kindness and being intentional with your words can make such a positive impact on a family.

This program requires a one-year commitment.

You will commit to showing up in meaningful ways at least once a month. Love Boxes can be personalized care packages to meet practical needs or it can be the act of bringing a meal, babysitting, or taking the kids to do a specific activity. You have the freedom to get creative! The only thing we ask is that you commit to writing handwritten encouraging notes for each of the children and caregivers.

HOW DOES THIS MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

- ☆ Providing support to caregivers allows for a more stable and nurturing environment and empowers parents to focus on what matters - what the child needs to heal.
- ☆ Providing a child with typical childhood experiences (playdates, extracurriculars, camps) helps promote positive mental health, emotional well-being, and identity formation.
- ☆ Providing multiple healthy role models to develop authentic connections is essential for children to learn to create healthy trust-based relationships with supportive secondary adults - YOU!
- ☆ Providing opportunities for children and youth to learn skills, practice new things, get excited about education, and be exposed to developmental growth helps prepare them for independent living.

Not everyone is called to foster or adopt, but everyone can make a difference in a child's life.





PROGRAM BASICS

This program is radically customizable to the specific family



Minimum of a **year's worth of monthly support** with a specific foster family. The financial commitment is based on the foster family's needs. A good monthly estimate is \$25-35 per child and \$50-75 total for the parents. Volunteers may choose to support with time-based investment vs. monetary support.



You work with your Love Box family to **determine a schedule** that works best for you both. You will commit to initiate contact with the family each month. Caregivers no doubt have so much on their plate, proactively following up goes a long way!



The Love Box hangout can take place **anywhere** (a park, your home, a restaurant, etc.) but typically at the fostering family's house. We encourage you to do what works best for the family.



Show children, youth, and caregivers that they matter and are important. Your role is to **build a relationship** with the children and serve as a mentor as well as to provide the parents with support and community.



We are completely volunteer based and can only grow our impact by good people (like YOU!) stepping up and helping out. Thank you for **investing in serving** the foster care community.

PROGRAM BASICS

LOVE BOX CONTENTS

- A handwritten note encouraging the child/ youth and caregiver (over time these will become more personal as you get to know the family)
- **Suggested items for children:** books, favorite snacks, interest-based items, arts/crafts/activities, clothes, etc.
- **Suggested items for parents:** Meals, household supplies, pantry items, gas cards, gift cards, etc.

LOVE OUTSIDE THE BOX

Many families have important and essential needs that do not “fit” in a box. We encourage this! Volunteers may also choose to:

- Pay for an activity or sponsor an extra-curricular opportunity
- Babysit or plan playdates to allow for the caregiver to have a break
- Transportation for after school pick up or extracurriculars

You'll receive a monthly newsletter with Love Box ideas; however, we encourage you to tailor your support to the family's needs.

What we love most about Love Box is that it is tailored to the needs of the family and the means of the volunteer.

The newsletter also includes a monthly impact form that we ask you to fill out.



VOLUNTEER CHECKLIST



- 1 Gather a group** or decide if you have the ability to support a family as an individual. Talk to your friends, family, and colleagues. Group members can help support you as the Love Box leader and can help offset financial costs or disperse support.
- 2 Complete paperwork.** All members must fill out confidentiality and liability waivers. Leaders and any members consistently interacting with the family must also complete a background check and sometimes a fingerprint check through the family's agency. Each individual leader or co-leaders must complete processing fees.
*If applicable
- 3 Familiarize yourself** with this Love Box packet as well the FAQs.
- 4 Get matched!** We will match you with a foster family based on location, compatibility, and scope of needs. Finding a good fit is vital, as we know how important this relationship is! At this time a back-ground check will be initiated per the agency/state requirements.
- 5 Meet the family!** Your case manager will schedule an initial meeting between you and the family and conduct an assessment to determine the family's strengths and needs.
- 6 Attend training.** Love Box leaders and group members wanting to interact with the family must complete a Love Box training as a group with your Angels case manager. Training is approximately 90 minutes.
- 7 Schedule 1st meeting!** You will reach out to your fostering family to schedule your first hang out with them and set up a plan for the following months. Many groups have a consistent schedule they keep. (for example 3rd Saturday of every month).
- 8 Show up.** Each month, you will reach out to your family to see how you can best support them.
- 9 Complete monthly tracking forms.** This is essential to help us track outcomes/impact and provide you support.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Do I have to provide a box each month?

No. Many volunteers choose to pay for an activity, event, extracurricular activity, babysit or take the family on an outing, etc., in the place of a traditional "Love Box". Every family has unique and diverse needs and requires different types of support! We want this program to be radically customized to the REAL needs of each home.



Where do we get our boxes?

Your case manager will supply your group with boxes. However, a box is not required if you would prefer to deliver your items in a different way or if your support is more "outside of the box!"



Do we have to fill a box for each child in the home or does the whole family get one?

You can create individual boxes, but we recommend one box for the whole family with items for each person in the home. You may also want to create just one box with general household items (but don't forget notes for everyone!). *Note: not all families need support in the form of a "box" or care package.



How does a volunteer group find out what the foster family's needs are?

The Love Box leader has a contact number for the caregiver and is responsible for building a relationship with them, as well as finding out what the needs/wants are for the children and family each month. **We suggest taking the initiative to give ideas and options- it can be so overwhelming for some parents to ask for help!**



Is there a financial limit we can spend on the family?

No, there is no limit, but we ask that you spend a reasonable amount. This program is about consistent support, meaningful connections, and relational experiences. We want the program to focus more on relationships than the "stuff".

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS CONT.



Are we allowed to ask personal questions?

No, please do not attempt to get information from the children or foster parents about why the children are in foster care. It's up to the child whether or not they share any information with the volunteer.



Are we allowed to hug a child?

We ask that you do not initially attempt physical contact with the child who is at an age to provide verbal consent. Over time and with trust they might initiate it. Please be aware that children in foster care often have inappropriate or non-existent boundaries due to abuse/neglect and need help in establishing healthy emotional and physical boundaries. Always keep this in mind. A great way to establish healthy touch is to start with a fist-bump or high-five and discuss developmentally appropriate contact with their caregiver and your case manager.



Are we allowed to take pictures of the children?

You may only take pictures if you've been given permission by the child and caregivers. Even if you are given permission to take a picture of a child in foster care, you are NOT allowed to post any picture of the child to social media or share in a public setting due to privacy and confidentiality as well as the safety of the child.



Are we allowed to be left alone with the children?

Not unless you choose to be approved as a babysitter or respite provider. We encourage all groups to nominate one Love Box member to complete this process. Deeper relationships form when volunteers are able to have one-on-one support, taking children on special outings, providing transportation for the fostering family, and being able to give the parents a break.



What if I have a concern?

If you ever have a concern about your volunteer group, the foster family, or any children in care, we ask that you speak with your Regional Angels case manager and they will go over the best way to proceed. It's important to navigate any issue as carefully as possible. **It is important to note that you are a mandated reporter and if you have cause to have any suspicion of child abuse or neglect you required by law to report to the relevant authorities.**

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

We do birthdays BIG at Austin Angels!

We know birthdays can be hard for many children in foster care because they are not with their families or because they have not had an opportunity or the resources to celebrate their birthdays. You can help support your family as they plan parties! Here are some practical ways you can help children feel CELEBRATED:

- Buy a personalized birthday cake based on the child's interests
- Provide the favors for the party
- Provide decorations (balloons, streamers, banners, etc.) and help decorate the house the day of the party
- Find a location for the party
- Help a caregiver with set up or tear down
- Show up at the party and celebrate an amazing child!



AUSTIN ANGELS C.H.A.T.S.

(Connection, Healing, Advocacy, Teaching, Support)

Austin Angels hosts quarterly online "C.H.A.T.S." for volunteers and mentors across the country to attend. They are a resource for volunteers and even prospective volunteers to learn more about child welfare, volunteering, trauma, etc., and how they can make a difference in the foster care community.

These are a great opportunity for volunteers to come together and meet other people who are doing this work!



"In this Love Box I am an idea generator, a dinner maker and food deliverer, an extra set of hands, a support for our leads, a voice of compassion, and trauma-informed love. It also gives me a chance to work as a team with other loving members, to problem solve, to lead from love, and to practice selflessness."

- Lexi, Love Box Member

