



## Love Box Information Packet

COMMUNITY | EMPOWERMENT | HOPE



*Love Box*

# LETTER TO A LOVE BOX VOLUNTEER

If you are reading this, then you are considering becoming a Love Box volunteer. That's so exciting! What I know about this program is that it draws some fantastic folks.

As a Love Box volunteer, you will become a positive change agent for children, youth, and families in the foster care community here on the Olympic Peninsula. We believe in the power of **relational, community-based care**. We believe in the simple act of good people stepping up and helping out. We believe that **any child that enters the foster system is a chance for us to bring our best as a society and as individuals.**

Every day people like you are changing the experience of foster care in this community, one child, one family at a time. By coming alongside a fostering family and strengthening their support system, you create the conditions that all humans need to thrive. We know that children who enter the foster care system, in particular, need **consistency, support, and attachment** to caring, reliable adults to heal.

Volunteers like you have taken our programs and completely embodied our hope, which is to see consistent monthly support turn into ***authentic, life-affirming connections***. Our volunteers look for small and meaningful ways to engage with children, lift a burden from a caregiver, and help create a space of healing for kids entangled in foster care. Dedicated volunteers can bring **hope, stability, and support** to families at all stages in the foster care process.

A meal after a stressful day, a well-timed care package, or a day outing with a child can bring so much stability and breathing room to a family unit. Our families need people who are willing to go the **extra mile** and remind them of the hard and holy work of fostering, of making time and space for children who deserve every opportunity to thrive, and the gift of not doing it alone.

I hope you grow to love this program as much as we do. It's all worth it.

Let it always be about the children,

Morgan Hanna

Founder of Olympic Angels



# 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 consistent support. By caring for the whole family, we enable caregivers to focus on the important and meaningful work of being foster parents. As a Love Box group, you will be matched with a local foster family based on where you live and the needs of families on our waitlist, and the skills and hopes that you bring as the volunteer. The match is everything!

We believe in providing more healthy adults around every family's table. When families are matched thoughtfully with committed volunteers who show up regularly, parents feel hopeful and supported. Children have greater access to normal and fabulous kid things that are often overlooked in the chaos of foster care. And you'll be surprised how a simple act of kindness and being intentional with your words and time can make such a positive impact on a family.

Your Love Box team will be matched with one specific foster family for a minimum of one year. You commit to meeting with your family at least once a month, throughout the year, with the goal of establishing safe, supportive relationships. Visits are an opportunity to build intentional connections through activities, sharing a meal, and creating bonds. Some groups have a regular meal night. Some babysit, drive to therapy, and provide respite care. Some mow lawns and grab groceries. Every family is different so every Love Box is different!

## 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 focus on what makes them uniquely *them* helps prepare them for life outside of foster care.

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





# PROGRAM BASICS



Minimum of a **year's worth of monthly support** (deliveries and/or activities) with a specific foster family. The financial commitment is based on the foster family's needs and your group dynamic- some folks might choose to have their primary involvement be financial, and some might choose to be primarily relational.



You work with your Love Box family to **determine a schedule** that works best for you both. You will commit to initiating contact with the family regularly, at least once a month.



The Love Box drop-off or hangout can take place **anywhere** (a park, your home, a restaurant, school, etc) and depends on your relationship with the family and what their needs and interests are.



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. Don't just give a game- give the one you will play together.
- **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 or special therapy
- Babysit or plan playdates to allow for the caregiver to have a break
- Transportation for after school pick up or extracurriculars
- Have work parties, go for walks, meet at the beach, etc.

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

**The newsletter also includes a monthly impact form that is essential to fill out.**



# VOLUNTEER CHECKLIST



- 1 Gather a group** or decide if you would rather join an existing group. Talk to your friends, family, and colleagues. Group members can help support you as the Love Box leader and can help share the load. Groups are typically 5-10 people, led by 1 or 2 leaders.
- 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 and additional training.
- 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 background check will be initiated per the agency/state requirements.
- 5 Meet the family!** Your case manager will schedule an initial meeting between the Love Box leader and the fostering family and conduct a formal needs assessment.
- 6 Attend training.** Love Box leaders and group members must complete a Love Box training as a group with your Angels case manager. Training is approximately 3 hours. We can schedule this at the leader's home, or elsewhere as needed.
- 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, meal every Friday, etc).
- 8 Show up.** Each month, you will reach out to your family to see how you can best support them. You will also be in regular contact with your Olympic Angels case manager.
- 9 Complete monthly tracking forms.** This is essential to help us track outcomes/impact and provide you support.

# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



**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!).



**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!**



**Are we allowed to be left alone with the children?**

Not unless you choose to be approved and have a background check. We encourage all groups to nominate at least one Love Box member to complete this process, and ideally, at least one person per child in the foster family. Deeper relationships form when volunteers are able to have one-on-one mentorship, taking children on special outings, providing transportation for the fostering family, and being able to give the parents a break.



**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 experiences. We want the program to focus more on relationships than the care packages.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## Are we allowed to ask personal questions?

No, please do 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. 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.



## 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.



## 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 Olympic 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 are required by law to report to the relevant authorities.**

# 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.



What about COVID-19?

We ask that each group takes their own safety and the safety of their child and family with the utmost importance, and keep apprised of local, state, and federal guidelines as we continue on in this pandemic. Ask your case manager and confer with other volunteers about how they have adapted and what they are doing!



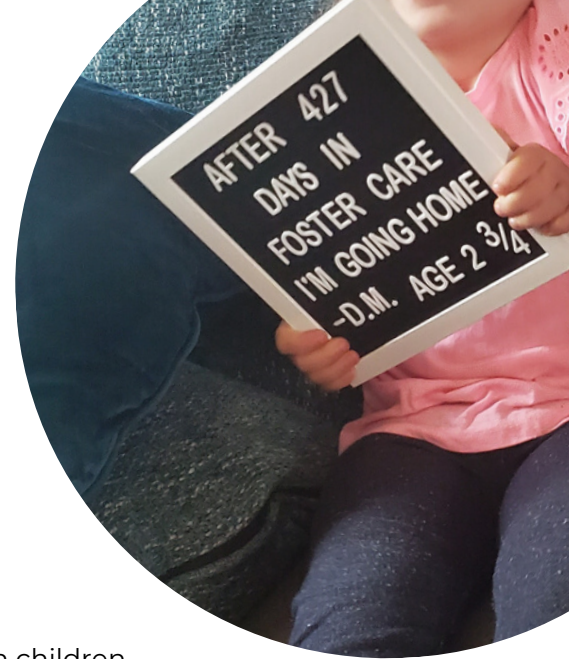
# WHERE THEY GO WE GO

Foster care is very fluid.

Children are moved on average 7 times in 2 years when the foster placement is unsupported.

Sometimes the move is because of reunification. Reunification is when children get to be reunited with their families and this is actually the goal of our child welfare system- *to help children reunify with their families* in a safe, and stable, and permanent environment.

Foster care is not meant to be forever. About 3 in 5 children will return home to their parents. If this happens for a child in your Love Box, we will coach you to take your support and relationship with them if at all possible. This is one way we can help reduce trauma and increase the resiliency of children and vulnerable families. **As one more person to love this child, you are an important person in their life.** By staying consistent and reliable, you are helping to reduce the trauma and dislocation children feel through multiple moves.



Sometimes a child is moved from a foster home for reasons other than reunification. The foster family may be a short-term family for the child or be unable to meet the child's needs. The child might move to another home in our community, in which case, it will likely be very possible to follow. Or they might be moved to a group home or facility.

Your love and support during this time is so appreciated and needed. We will work with you to keep you connected to this precious child if at all possible.

"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

