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LOCAL

Sussex Help aids immigrant families in crisis

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Key Points

- A volunteer group called Sussex Help is aiding families of immigrants detained or deported by ICE in Delaware.
- The group provides food, diapers and financial assistance for rent and utilities to affected families.
- Sussex Help works through other nonprofits and churches to protect the identities of the families they assist.

Amid the escalation of U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement activity in Delaware, a group of volunteers in Sussex County are helping families of those who have been detained or deported.

It started last summer with a simple desire to help, volunteer Jack Dixon said, followed by the hashing out of ideas and a name: Sussex Help.

“We realized the best we could do is try to find food sources to bring to families,” Dixon said.

Volunteers also realized it was best to work through other nonprofits and churches that already had the trust of immigrants who are afraid, he said.

“We didn’t want names or addresses,” Dixon said.

The families Sussex Help aids are primarily in Georgetown or Milford, Dixon said, but the organization is making efforts to expand west.

While Sussex Help started out providing items like food and diapers, and still collects and distributes those items, volunteers kept hearing the greatest need was money for rent and utilities, Dixon said.

So the Sussex Help Fund was created, collecting individual donations through the Greater Lewes Foundation.

Donations are distributed monthly, Dixon said, with the money split equally among organizations acting as proxies between Sussex Help and immigrant families, Dixon said.

“If need is for $20,000 and we have $10,00 available, we’ll do half,” Dixon said. “We’ll give everybody half of what they’re asking for, with the understanding the organizations will distribute money to families at the same rate.”

This month, the amount needed for the rent and utilities for the families of detained or deported immigrants in Sussex is $17,600, according to Dixon. That will cover 19 families, including 29 children, he said.

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For the first time this month, Sussex Help was able to raise the entire amount, Dixon said.

They're also helping families get back on their feet financially by helping them create budgets and find jobs, he said.

“The community we’re dealing with does not want to be a charity case,” Dixon said. “They want to be independent.”

In one Sussex family in which both parents were deported, two children were left behind, Dixon said. They’re being cared for by neighbors, Dixon said, who are having difficulty getting them passports to be with their parents.

In another case, a father was taken by ICE, leaving behind a mother and three children, Dixon said. The mother, terrified she was going to be next, was making arrangements for her kids to go to Child Protective Services, he said.

“That’s how desperate mothers are,” Dixon said.

To volunteer, donate or learn more, visit sussexhelp.org.

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