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Music benefits children

By Jennifer Lord/ Daily News Staff
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It seems like such a basic idea: babies need baby food.

But baby food is not covered by food stamps. Food pantries don't stock it, since most baby food jars are made of glass. And parents on a limited budget, with minimal knowledge about nutrition, likely have neither the skills nor the tools to carefully cook and puree fruits and vegetables to the right consistency.

"There is this big loophole in the system," said Daniel Levine, 17, a Shrewsbury High School senior who spent his summer creating the Massachusetts Children's Fund, a nonprofit group devoted to getting baby food and supplies to children throughout the state. "I've seen so many of these little kids come through our house. I couldn't imagine that they weren't getting the right food."

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Levine's parents, Steve and Jamie Levine, have been foster parents for the past year and a half. While following up on a baby that had been in their care, they discovered the child's mother along with the other teenage mothers in the parenting program were feeding the child cut-up hot dogs and french fries instead of baby food.

The Levines arranged for the babies to get the proper food, but Daniel Levine thought they should take it a step further.

"I told him, 'If you want to change it, do something about it,'" Steve Levine said.

The result is the Massachusetts Children's Fund, which has been incorporated and registered as a charity in the state. Daniel Levine is now working on

the IRS paperwork to allow donations to be tax-deductible.

"There are over 100,000 families with children in the state suffering from hunger and malnutrition," Daniel Levine said. "That just isn't acceptable. Baby food is relatively cheap and, if they can't buy it with food stamps, we should be able to get it to them."

The Levines have been holding drives for baby food and Jamie Levine, a former nurse who has worked with the Department of Social Services, has been funneling cribs, strollers and other baby equipment donated by friends to families in need. They have also been working to find volunteers to teach classes on nutrition to low-income families.

The family hosted a concert by Maia Sharp last fall to benefit Camp To Belong, a camp that reunites siblings separated by foster care. Their connection allowed 100 tickets to be set aside for Sharp's concert Saturday at The Center for Arts in Natick. All proceeds from the \$25 ticket sales will be donated to the Massachusetts Children's Fund.

To reserve tickets or to find out more about the Massachusetts Children's Fund, visit www.machildrensfund.com.

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