

Hygiene product giveaway fills in the gaps, called 'a blessing'

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Mar 28, 2019



Elizabeth Mendoza looks through household products with her husband, Joe, at a giveaway organized by the Giving to the Nations nonprofit Thursday at the Dr. John Bryant Community Center, 601 21st St.

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Rows of cleaning products, toothpaste and plastic bags are lined up to be given away at a philanthropy event Thursday at the Dr. John Bryant Community Center, 601 21st St.

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RACINE — Two local women, Elizabeth Mendoza and Tresia Funderburg, called Thursday's hygiene product giveaway "a blessing."

Pastor Lynn Nys, the director of [Giving to the Nations](#)¹ nonprofit, which put on the event at the [Dr. John Bryant Community Center](#)², said that although there are plenty of food pantries in the area, there are far fewer places that are consistently able to stock hygiene products.

Both Mendoza and Funderburg get by thanks to disability/Social Security checks, but that money doesn't always cover every household necessity.

"We're really in need right now," Mendoza said. "This was like a godsend."

"It's a blessing because these household items cost a lot," Funderburg said.

One hundred individuals and families were given tickets to the event, scheduled for 3-7 p.m., with the doors being opened to anyone during its final hour. They were able to collect necessities ranging from hand soap, dish soap, deodorant and toothpaste to paper towels, laundry detergent and feminine products, including tampons, free of charge.

Feminine products need

Nys pointed out that, if a woman starts menstruating but doesn't have access to any feminine products, they may end up staying home from work or school. [One survey with 90,000 respondents, conducted by the health app Clue](#)³, found that 18 percent of American women said they had "missed school, work or an event" out of fear that someone might find out they are on their period.

"There is such a need for feminine products," Nys said.

Trade-offs

[Feeding America and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign published the "In Short Supply" study in 2013](#)⁴. It found that more than 30 percent of low-income American families are unable to afford non-food household goods on a consistent basis.

As a result, those families were forced to make "trade-offs," having to decide what "necessities" were OK to live without for a short time.

"Even working families sometimes have to make choices between what they can and can't do," Nys said. "A lot of people don't realize this."

Over a 12-month period, nearly three-fourths of the families included in the study had forgone washing dishes and/or clothes. Another 39 percent said they had brushed their teeth without toothpaste, nearly half had to "cut back on medical expenses," two-fifths either were late or couldn't pay rent, and 32 percent said they had reused a diaper because of the cost.

“To do dishes, you’ll have to sit there and use shampoo sometimes,” said one of the people who took part in the study.

“You can just brush your teeth with water if it comes down to it because we’ve been homeless before,” another was quoted saying.

Keeping clean

In addition to the health risks — [wearing clothes repeatedly without washing increases the risk of infection, according to the International Scientific Forum on Home Hygiene](#)⁵ — not being able to afford things like soap or doing the laundry can create social problems too.

“There’s a stigma if you don’t look clean or your clothes aren’t washed,” according to Nys.

Funderburg said that she reached out to a couple of family members to join her at the giveaway. She said her sister isn’t able to work because of a respiratory problem and her niece needs it to get her back on her feet.

“My sister needed this,” Funderburg said, “and my niece just started working, so this will help her too.”

Sources:

1. <https://www.givingtothenations.org/>
2. <https://www.cityofracine.org/communitycenters/>
3. <https://helloclue.com/survey.html>
4. <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/research/in-short-supply/in-short-supply-executive.pdf>
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