

Hope & Comfort is honored to be nominated for the Framingham State University's Nonprofit Giving Course Grant Program. We are grateful for the opportunity to submit this request for funding, and hope you will partner with us to end hygiene insecurity in the Greater Boston area.

About Hope & Comfort

Hope & Comfort's mission is to provide essential hygiene products to support and improve the health, self-esteem, and hygiene education of school-aged children and young adults in need within Greater Boston. We continue to be driven by three core beliefs:

- Every young person deserves dignity
- Every young person should have the opportunity to feel clean, confident, and healthy
- No young person should ever be afraid to do something—such as go to school or join a sports team—because they lack the access to supplies for basic hygiene

Founded in 2011, Hope & Comfort is the only organization in the Greater Boston and MetroWest area dedicated solely to ending youth hygiene insecurity, or the lack of access to essential hygiene products. We are a rapidly growing organization and we have more than doubled our hygiene product distributions in the last year. In 2020 alone, we will distribute 1 million hygiene products including soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, shampoo, deodorant, and in some instances, menstrual products and other personal care items, to approximately 50,000+ youth and families throughout Greater Boston via partnerships with 100 community organizations serving youth and families.

*At the time of this submission, Hope & Comfort is actively responding to the COVID-19 pandemic by distributing unprecedented numbers of hygiene products, particularly soap, to our community partners, as collectively we work to keep the youth we serve as safe as possible by ensuring they have the hygiene supplies necessary to properly hand-wash and cleanse to prevent the spread of COVID-19. **We are currently distributing hygiene products at more than 3x our usual rate.** We normally distribute approximately 80,000 products per month and are currently distributing that amount *every 1.5 weeks.*

While the COVID-19 situation is rapidly evolving minute-to-minute, **we anticipate that we will continue to experience increased demand for hygiene products in the weeks and months to come.** For hygiene insecure youth and families, who now may be facing additional financial hardship as a result of COVID-19's impact on the economy, accessing basic hygiene supplies will be more difficult than ever. Our partner agencies that are currently providing emergency services to youth and families in need will continue to need our support for the long-term—both during this period of social distancing and when they are permitted to return to normal services. Our mission has never been more critical than it is right now. Continued funding is needed to maintain distributions at pace with heightened community need.

About Hygiene Insecurity

Hygiene insecurity is widespread and correlates highly with poverty and food insecurity. (Feeding America Study, <https://tinyurl.com/tovklfa>). We estimate, conservatively, that at least 150,000 youth under age 18 in Massachusetts are hygiene insecure. Lack of access to hygiene products impacts health, putting one at higher risk for illness and viruses such as colds and flu. Lack of access to hygiene products is also linked to low self-esteem in young people, negatively impacting a youth's ability to learn, build healthy relationships, develop social skills, and engage in school and social activities. Hygiene insecurity is particularly difficult for teens and tweens experiencing the physical and emotional changes of puberty. Partner agencies report to us that young people without access to hygiene products are often teased and bullied at school about their body odor or appearance, are unwilling to participate in sports and after school activities, and even skip school because they are self-conscious.

Hygiene insecurity is particularly intractable because the retail cost of hygiene products is high, and federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (also known as SNAP benefits or food stamps) cannot be used to purchase hygiene products. There are no other formal state or federal programs covering hygiene needs. As a result, low-income families must make difficult decisions about how to spend their limited resources, often sacrificing soap, toothpaste, or deodorant in order to pay for food, rent, or medical bills.

Our work, though often behind the scenes, is critical to ensuring under-resourced youth and families can access the basic hygiene supplies needed to keep them healthy and allow them to engage fully in school, sports, extracurriculars, and the other activities of daily life. Our partner community-serving agencies rely on Hope & Comfort to supply them with basic hygiene items for their clients. Partner agencies report that hygiene items are difficult to access. Food pantries throughout the region report that hygiene product donations amount to less than 10% of their donated goods. Staff at schools and youth-serving organizations often buy basic hygiene products for youth using their personal funds—a generous, but unsustainable solution to hygiene insecurity. As a result, Hope & Comfort is needed to help youth, families, and communities fill a critical gap in hygiene security.

How Funds will be Used

A grant of general operating support will be used to help Hope & Comfort distribute 1 million hygiene products to 50,000+ youth and families throughout Greater Boston and MetroWest this year. Hygiene products will be distributed through 3 core distribution channels, via partner community-serving agencies:

1. AT-HOPE YOUTH*:

We provide hygiene products to At-Hope Youth through partnerships with schools and youth-serving organizations. *We use the term “At-Hope Youth” to represent a positive, asset-based approach, reflecting our goal to bolster youth self-esteem. This is in contrast to the term “at-risk,” which reflects a deficit. This channel represents 75% of Hope & Comfort’s annual hygiene product distributions.

- **School Partners:** We partner with public schools in under-resourced communities including Boston Public Schools and public schools in Framingham and Waltham to bring hygiene products to classrooms as part of health/hygiene education curricula.
- **College Food Pantries:** We reach low-income and homeless college students through college food pantries at Berklee College of Music, Bunker Hill Community College, Brandeis University, Mass Bay Community College, and Suffolk University.
- **Youth-Serving Organizations:** We partner with local and statewide organizations that provide recreational and enrichment opportunities, educational programs, pediatric initiatives, and other services to youth in need. Sample partners include Catie’s Closet, Boys and Girls Clubs, Cradles to Crayons, the Wonderfund, and more.

2. FAMILIES

Through community-based food pantry partnerships, we serve At-Hope Youth as well as their parents/guardians. Partners include: A Place to Turn, Centre Street Food Pantry, Dedham Food Pantry, Interfaith Services Food Pantry, Jewish Family & Children Services Waltham, Jewish Family Services MetroWest, St. Mary’s Food Pantry, Wellesley Food Pantry, and more. This channel represents 15% of Hope & Comfort’s annual hygiene product distributions.

3. COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

Sometimes we receive hygiene items that are most appropriate for adults. Though this recipient population is somewhat outside our target youth population, the issue of hygiene insecurity is widespread and we never let quality hygiene products go to waste. These items are distributed to adult-serving community partner organizations such as Pine Street Inn, Rosie’s Place, and other agencies. This channel represents 10% of Hope & Comfort’s annual hygiene product distributions.

We procure hygiene products through highly efficient bulk sourcing relationships with manufacturers and retailers. We both receive large quantities of donated hygiene products, as well as have arranged extremely low-cost purchasing agreements to source products at below-wholesale prices. We also partner with community groups including schools,

businesses, youth groups, churches, synagogues, etc., to hold hygiene product drives collecting tens of thousands of hygiene products each year.

Our longstanding procurement and distribution chains allow us to distribute large quantities of hygiene products into the community much faster and more efficiently than our nonprofit partners could access these products alone. Distribution occurs in two ways, depending on the needs of our clients and partner agencies. In some instances, we package core hygiene products (soap, shampoo, toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, and in some cases menstrual products, floss, and other personal care items) into individual hygiene kits. Kits are distributed to partner agencies who discreetly distribute them to those in need in a manner that respects the personal dignity of our clients. In other instances, we deliver a variety of hygiene products in bulk to our partners so that they may stock hygiene closets and pantry shelves, allowing youth and families to choose the products they need.

Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

Increase Hygiene Product Distribution:

Our most important 2020 goal is to reach more youth and families by distributing 1 million hygiene products. This distribution goal represents significant growth for Hope & Comfort. In the last three years, we have steadily grown from distributing approximately 150,000 products in 2017 to 500,000 products in 2019. **In 2020, we plan to double our distributions to 1 million products.** This growth has been thoughtfully planned and supported through expanded partnerships with product suppliers, funders, and community-serving (client-facing) organizations, allowing us to reach even further into the Greater Boston area to support youth and families in need.

Our long-term goal is to scale our program throughout the state. We are currently working with two statewide community-serving partners to pilot statewide distributions: Catie's Closet (which provides on-site "clothes closets" at schools stocked with fresh, clean clothes and other essentials for low-income youth) and the Wonderfund (which distributes essential resources and personal items to youth placed emergently in foster care across MA). While still in the *very early* stages of this work, this pilot will allow us to test geographic expansion in a limited, impactful, and still relatively local way.

Diversify Product Offerings:

As we expand our distributions, we are also working to increase brand and product options for our clients. We believe that the element of personal choice is critical to ensuring that the youth and families we serve have the same dignified access to personal hygiene as their well-resourced peers—whether that be deodorant products that reflect their gender identity or haircare products suited for their individual hair texture and condition. We are working to diversify our product procurement partnerships in order to broaden our product offerings. We have made inroads with new partners in the last year and, as a result, we have access to new product offerings such as all-natural toothpaste and deodorant. We will continue to work to add more diversity to our product offerings.

Expand Client Data Collection:

Nationally, there is a dearth of research on hygiene insecurity. We are aware of one study by Feeding America (<https://tinyurl.com/tovklfa>) (also referenced above) which explored the lack of access to hygiene products and basic household supplies on low-income families. To gather more data about hygiene insecurity, we are engaged in short-term and long-term data collection projects:

In the short-term, Hope & Comfort is piloting a data collection project through which we are conducting in-depth surveys with a small group of youth clients on a monthly basis. Because we distribute hygiene products via youth-serving partner organizations, we are currently unable to survey *each* youth we serve. However, by surveying a sampling of youth clients, we will be able to draw generalizations about our service and impact, make ongoing program improvements, and inform the broader conversation around hygiene insecurity in our community.

Surveys collect information about clients' hygiene product needs and preferences (i.e. brands, product types such as shampoos for different hair textures). This survey also explores menstrual product needs as we have increased menstrual product distribution in the last year in response to the prevalence of period poverty. (Period poverty is the

lack of access to menstrual products for menstruating individuals, which disproportionately impacts girls and women.) We are also surveying youth about the impact that having access to hygiene products through Hope & Comfort has on their wellbeing such as their school and extracurricular attendance, participation and engagement levels in school and activities, how youth feel about themselves when they have access to hygiene products, etc.

In the long-term, we aim to use technology-based tools to capture data from clients on a larger scale, and to use technology-based distribution models that will allow us to respond in real-time to client needs and feedback. We are in the *very early* stages of exploring available technology and what would be needed (resources, tools, organizational model changes, staff training, etc.) to implement such solutions. This real-time data would not only allow us to meet the unique needs of our diverse client base, but also shed light on the nature of hygiene insecurity in the Greater Boston area and beyond - a prerequisite for the human services sector to address this issue at a systemic level.

Impact in Local Community

Currently, to measure our impact, we track the number of products we distribute by city/town and partner agency. We also track distribution frequency to monitor seasonal needs. In the next year, our goal is to distribute 1 million products to 50,000+ youth and families. The measure of our ultimate success will be our impact on youth health and self-esteem, allowing youth to participate more fully in school and other activities. As noted above, we are currently surveying sample groups of youth clients to collect information about the impact that having access to hygiene products has on their wellbeing.

We also collect anecdotal information from clients who have been impacted by our work. Clients have reported, in their own words:

- “You have no idea how much this has helped me. I was sleeping on people’s couches, working part time jobs and now I’m finally going to college. Without this help from you and the [Boys and Girls] Club I don’t know where I would be or how I would be getting by. Thank you so much.” -***College Hygiene Product Recipient***
- “I cannot tell you how empowering it was to have choice in the products my sisters and I needed. I am always well rested when I wake up in the mornings as I have not spent the night before worrying about having access to the basic hygiene products I need. Hope and Comfort has given me the confidence to face each morning with a fresh start, allowing me and my family to be and feel our absolute best.” -***High School Hygiene and Menstrual Product Recipient***

Staffing

Hope & Comfort is powered by a small, but highly professionalized, dedicated team of 4 full-time staff, 3 of whom are paid employees. Our Executive Director oversees day-to-day operations and drives our overall growth strategy. Our Operations Director oversees the procurement and distribution of all of our hygiene products. Our Engagement Manager is responsible for our growing communications platforms as well as volunteer engagement programs, which help us to build critical awareness and support for hygiene insecurity. Jeff Feingold, our Founder and President, dedicates 40 pro-bono volunteer hours per week to high level strategy and stakeholder relations. In 2019, Jeff retired from his full-time job at Fidelity to focus his attention on Hope & Comfort’s growth. He has promised to never seek a salary from Hope & Comfort. In addition to our staff, we are supported by about 800 volunteers annually, 50% of whom are youth. Volunteers are key in helping us sort, package, and prepare our hygiene products for distribution, as well as lead hygiene product drives in our local communities.

Our team is passionate about our work because they strongly believe that hygiene is a necessity, not a luxury. The issue of hygiene insecurity is too often overlooked, and the Hope & Comfort team is determined to change that. We know that hygiene insecurity is both a public health issue, as well as an issue impacting self-esteem, mental health, and more. Just like food insecurity is an issue that is well-known and understood, we’re resolved to put hygiene insecurity on the map for the purposes of – eventually – finding a systemic solution to put an end to this enormous challenge faced by thousands in our home communities.

Coincidentally, our staff member Abby MacDonald (Community Engagement Manager) is a Framingham State University graduate and a former participant in the Nonprofit Giving course at FSU. Abby has spoken highly of the Nonprofit Giving course which was a powerful experience for her, and an integral part of her journey toward becoming a nonprofit professional. Abby and the entire Hope & Comfort team would be proud to partner with FSU students to deliver upon our mission.

What Makes Hope & Comfort Unique

Hope & Comfort is the the only nonprofit organization in Greater Boston dedicated solely to hygiene insecurity. Our unique, collaborative partnership model involves distributing hygiene products to youth via our youth-serving and community-serving partner organizations. In this manner, we supercharge the educational, recreational, enrichment, health, and other services already being provided to youth and families through our partner organizations. We are a 'value-add' to the missions of our partner organizations, supercharging their existing work to provide education, recreation, basic needs programming, and other critical youth/family services - without duplicating efforts.

Additionally, we are unique in that we utilize a youth-to-youth service model. At Hope & Comfort, youth are not only the core recipients of our services, but youth are also key participants in our mission. Each year, approximately 400 youth volunteers participate in our service-learning opportunities, which include: volunteer events with schools and youth organizations, service days in the community, family volunteer days at our warehouse, internships for high school and college students, and youth-led community toiletry drives.

Youth volunteers engage in the hands-on work of packing hygiene kits for our clients, and participate in "Poverty Simulations" - guided experiential learning opportunities which help youth explore the realities of poverty and the hard choices low-income families must make in the face of limited resources. We also have an active Youth Board which provides tweens and teens the opportunity to be involved at a deeper level in the experience of managing a nonprofit organization through engaging in community awareness-building activities, learning about philanthropy, and stepping into our day-to-day nonprofit business operations.

Sources of Funding

Our work is supported through donations from individuals as well as institutional funders including leading private and community foundations (Foundation for MetroWest, Cabot Family Charitable Fund, Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Martin Richard Foundation, and others) and corporations (Sanofi Genzyme, State Street, P&G (Proctor & Gamble), TJX, Liberty Mutual, and others). Our Board of Directors is thoroughly committed to Hope & Comfort and collectively represent more than 25% of all our individual donations. Our Board of Directors and Board of Advisors also actively fundraise for the organization.