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Innovative Twin Cities Nonprofit Fills Gap in Social Safety Net

ST. PAUL, Minn. (January 2026): Nearly two years ago, Bridge to Basics was launched to address a critical, yet often overlooked, crisis in the Twin Cities: hygiene poverty. The lack of access to basic hygiene products like soap, shampoo and deodorant affects individuals across all income levels, impacting health, confidence and participation in daily life. Since its first distribution in May 2024, Bridge to Basics, Minnesota's only hygiene bank and one of seven in the U.S., has distributed over 475,000 essential hygiene items to those struggling to afford them.

"Before Bridge to Basics, there was no single organization in the Twin Cities solely focused on hygiene poverty," said Rana Khoury, co-founder and co-executive director. "This gap in access to essentials has a profound effect on people's lives, and we launched Bridge to Basics to change that."

Hygiene Poverty: A Hidden Struggle

Hygiene poverty forces difficult choices, often pitting basic needs against each other. Families struggling with food insecurity frequently must choose between groceries and hygiene products. Government programs like SNAP and WIC don't cover these essential items, creating further hardship. This lack of access negatively impacts physical and mental health, school performance, job opportunities and social interactions. A survey of three metro area food shelves revealed that 45% of shoppers struggle monthly to afford hygiene products, with 76% unable to purchase needed items. Many resort to buying less food to afford hygiene or going without, and nearly 1 in 10 miss work, school, or other activities due to lack of hygiene each month.

Bridge to Basics: A Two-Fold Approach

Bridge to Basics tackles hygiene poverty through a two-pronged approach:

- **Supporting Nonprofits:** By providing hygiene products, Bridge to Basics lightens the load on social service agencies, allowing them to focus on their core missions.
- **Distributing Products to Neighbors in Need:** Partner organizations identify and distribute needed items directly to individuals and families, preserving

established relationships and trust while restoring dignity and promoting well-being.

Partners range from food shelves and schools to housing providers, refugee services, health clinics and other community and public service organizations.

“Bridge to Basics has been essential in providing single mothers with diapers, individuals in need with personal care items, and our elderly population with access to incontinence products,” said Kim Powell, Operations Coordinator at Basic Needs Food Market in Cottage Grove. “They not only provide these products but also restore dignity to our clients who cannot otherwise afford them.”

Mona Perkins, Bridge to Basics board member, former Twin Cities elementary school principal, and current Chief Academic Officer of Rochester Public Schools, emphasizes the importance of school partnerships.

“I witness daily the negative impact that a lack of hygiene products has on our students. We are seeing the effects of hygiene insecurity in our schools,” Perkins said.

Community Investments: Empowering Change

Bridge to Basics is deeply grateful for the foundational support from The John & Denise Graves Foundation, The Oakfish Foundation, NAILBA Charitable Foundation, Elmer & Eleanor Andersen Foundation and Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation. These early investments recognize the gap in basic needs and the vital role Bridge to Basics fills within our community.

“We’re incredibly grateful for the support from our foundation partners,” Khoury said. “These investments are game-changers, allowing us to launch, scale and sustain our work to meet the ongoing needs of our community.”

Additionally, the corporate community has leaned into the mission through large bulk donations, like Tru Earth laundry detergent, Aveda, and Curio Brands, and employee engagement programming such as hygiene kit building and hygiene drives.

Individual donors also play a vital role, providing both essential hygiene products and financial support to restore dignity to those in need. Their generosity recognizes that hygiene is a basic need, impacting health, well-being and overall quality of life.

Together We Can Support More Basic Needs

Bridge to Basics calls on the community to join the fight against hygiene poverty:

- **Donate:** Financial contributions directly support the purchase of hygiene products.
- **Shop:** Supporters can purchase products directly from a wholesaler, stretching money further and unlocking additional product
- **Host a Hygiene Drive:** Organize collection drives for essential items.
- **Volunteer:** Get hands-on at our warehouse or remotely engage via assembling hygiene kits and family care bags.
- **Advocate:** Raise awareness about hygiene poverty and encourage support for existing community organizations.

https://bridgetobasics.org/

https://www.linkedin.com/company/bridge-to-basics/

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Behind the Mission: Key FAQs

We get a lot of great questions about how Bridge to Basics operates. Here are key facts that show why our support matters:

Q: What is a hygiene bank?
A: A hygiene bank is a nonprofit that provides personal care and hygiene products in bulk to a network of nonprofits, similar to what a food bank like Second Harvest Heartland does in our community. Bridge to Basics adapted this food bank model to provide these essentials at no cost to a network of nonprofit organizations. Each month, partner nonprofits can "order" needed hygiene items and then pick the products up at the end of the month to distribute through their programming.

Q: Why does the Twin Cities need a hygiene bank?
A: Neighbors who deeply struggle financially have very limited resources to secure these essentials. Federal program dollars (SNAP, WIC) don't allow for their purchase and no local nonprofit can provide them at scale because they aren't mission focused on these items and rely on donations. Bridge to Basics partner direct service providers now have consistent access to hygiene for their clients.

Q: What items does Bridge to Basics carry and distribute?
A: Bridge to Basics carries head to toe essentials that individuals and families need to start and end their day with health, dignity and well-being. Nearly all of the items provided are full-size and include: shampoo, conditioner, ethnic hair products, bar soap, body wash, lotion, deodorant, razors, toothbrush, toothpaste, laundry detergent, toilet paper, diapers, incontinence products and menstrual items. Additionally, Bridge to Basics carries travel-size items and hygiene kits to support nonprofits supporting housing insecure or unhoused individuals, like Minneapolis Metro Transit Homeless Action Team (HAT).

Q: What are the harms someone experiences if they have ongoing limited hygiene access?
A: National research from Feeding America and local research conducted by Bridge to Basics finds a number of negative effects on hygiene insecure individuals range from isolation due to social stigma, a reduced sense of confidence and general well-being, and reduced earning and learning success due to missing work or school.

Q: Why doesn't Bridge to Basics distribute products directly to people in need?

A: Bridge to Basics distributes through a carefully built collaborative nonprofit network for two reasons: one, neighbors who are struggling do not need another barrier to getting essentials. Bridge to Basics keeps hygiene distributions through familiar places and faces by partnering with organizations who have programming and relationships in place. Secondly, Bridge to Basics' mission is to not only get items to people who need them, but help over-stretched nonprofit partners amplify their impact. The Bridge to Basics saves partner nonprofits time (654 hours annually) and money ($35K for those with annual budgets to support hygiene needs) by taking the hygiene procurement task off their plates.

Q: What are the nonprofits Bridge to Basics supports through its hygiene bank?
A: Bridge to Basics supports a number of diverse nonprofits across the Twin Cities metro area that support health, human services, food, education and housing. These collaborators are: 360 Communities: Partners for Success, Saint Paul Public Schools: Project REACH & Fostering Connections, EXPO Elementary, Kenwood Elementary, Southwest High School: Laker Locker, SoWashCoCARES: School District 833 foundation, City of Minneapolis School-based clinics, MHealth Fairview Community Advancement team, Project for Pride in Living, Solid Ground, Lutheran Social Services: Refugee Resettlement Program, Coated in Love: 3000 Acts of Kindness, FocusMN, Minneapolis Metro Transit Homeless Action Team (HAT), ICA Food Shelf, Neighbors Inc., Basic Needs Food Market, and Open Cupboard.

Q: Does Bridge to Basics have plans to expand the network?
A: Yes! We have a waitlist of more than 60 nonprofits seeking the reliable, ongoing hygiene inventory we provide; however, we are limited to our current network until we secure new funding support.

Q: Which nonprofit sector receives the greatest amount of hygiene?
A: Food shelves and food pantries receive the largest volume of hygiene, followed by school partners.

Q: Why should people donate money instead of products?
A: Product donations are incredibly important to keep costs down and inventory inclusive of more brand name products; however, Bridge to Basics' purchasing power allows every $1 donated to deliver over 3 hygiene items to a struggling neighbor

Q: What percent of Bridge to Basics' hygiene inventory is purchased?
A: 62% of Bridge to Basics' inventory is purchased through wholesale distributors. While in-kind gifts are round out the inventory, financial donations allow them to purchase at scale and guarantee the specific items that meet the greatest needs.