

## Food and More: Meeting Personal Hygiene Needs

Recently, Rhea Marien, a long-time volunteer at the Antigo Community Food Pantry, shared a story about an individual she had read about who had lost her job. In the story, the individual explained that she had found community resources to help her family with their need for food but realized, as time went on, that her family was experiencing significant difficulty related to personal hygiene.

Being resourceful and resilient, the woman tried a variety of strategies to stretch her family's personal hygiene products. She stretched her laundry detergent by airing out her family's clothes instead of washing them. She created a mixture of baking soda and peroxide for toothpaste. She watered down her dish soap. However, the woman was brought to tears as she realized her husband and son were using dull razors and her daughters were quickly running out of feminine-hygiene products.

Clients of the food pantry regularly express the need for personal hygiene products and often face the choice between food and personal hygiene needs. Whether it is to prepare for a job interview or to help their children feel comfortable going to school, the need for deodorant, shampoo, and body soap is a substantial concern.

In a 2012 study by Feeding America on the impact of lack of access to personal hygiene products, low-income respondents expressed "concerns about other people's opinions about their families and their ability to be good parents." The respondents worried that they would not be seen as "respectable" and that "other people would think they did not care about their appearance and health."

The study also found that the people surveyed would "make trade-offs with other living expenses and employ coping strategies to secure essential household goods." Some trade-offs included altering eating habits which, in turn, impacted health. Bathing without soap, forgoing shampoo, and cutting back on prescription medication were other coping strategies identified by those who took the survey.

Personal hygiene products are particularly important to high school students. Mary Griffin works with the Langlade County Retired Educators Association to create "Bags of Six" that contain shampoo, body wash, toothpaste, a tooth brush, floss, and deodorant. These bags are given to the high school to be available for students from families facing financial difficulties. Griffin shared the story of a high school girl, who upon receiving a "Bag of Six," said to a staff member, "This is the first time in a long time that I do not have to borrow toothpaste and shampoo from my friends."

Just as the Pantry seeks to provide healthy food to clients, it seeks to provide the personal hygiene products that are essential for healthy living. The Pantry tries to stock toilet paper, toothpaste and tooth brushes, deodorant, laundry detergent, soap, diapers, shampoo, and feminine hygiene products. The Pantry also tries to have dish soap, paper toweling, facial tissues, lotion, and floss available to clients.

Thanks to the generosity of the community, to organizations like Peace Lutheran Bible School that run personal hygiene drives, and to individuals like Rosemary Hanus and her son, John, who regularly donate personal hygiene products, the Pantry is, to some extent, able to help clients meet their needs for

personal hygiene products. Meeting this important need helps to provide families with the necessities of healthy living and helps the Pantry carry out its vision of creating a healthier community.

To recognize and thank those who donate food, personal hygiene products, and other staples, the Pantry will hold an Open House on Saturday, February 23, from 1:00-3:00 at the Antigo Community Food Pantry at 2120 Progress Boulevard. Come and see how the Pantry stocks its shelves, learn about Pantry operations, and view what this generous community has created to help food-insecure families. Representatives of volunteers, the nutrition committee, the Board, and the Weekend Backpack Program will be there to answer questions. Please take the time to come and see the community's generosity at work.