



STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO HOSTING A CARE KIT EVENT

What is a care kit?

A care kit is a small bag with basic needs items for neighbors who are experiencing homelessness or are otherwise in need.

Why do we make care kits?

Care kits are a useful resource to have on hand to offer to folks we encounter in our daily lives who ask for assistance. While they do not address the deeper needs of people experiencing homelessness (i.e. the need for stable, affordable housing!), they can help meet immediate needs like food, water, and hygiene products.

Handing out care kits is also an opportunity for connection with our neighbors. Many people feel awkward in the moment or don't have cash on them when asked; this is a way to intentionally prepare for these encounters, and results in warm and neighborly interactions that foster genuine community across housing status.

Why do we host care kit events?

Making care kits is a great opportunity to bring together a group of people to intentionally discuss issues of homelessness and housing insecurity in our communities. Care kits are a tangible and accessible starting point for further discussions about how to support our neighbors in need.



HOW DO I PLAN A CARE KIT EVENT?

STEP 1: Decide on a date, time, and location for your event. Share that information with your community!



WHY INCLUDE CASH?

There is a common misconception that you should not directly give cash to people experiencing homelessness. This comes from harmful narratives about who “deserves” our assistance and the autonomy of people without homes. Giving cash recognizes that poverty should not take away one’s dignity or autonomy. Someone asking for assistance is best positioned to know what would be most useful to them, and a small amount of cash gives them that freedom of choice.

Additionally, because it is often what people in need of assistance are explicitly asking for, adding cash to care kits facilitates a warm and responsive interaction, rather than seeming condescending by offering items when someone asks for money.

STEP 2: Collect RSVPs

For care kit events, collecting RSVPs is extremely important! When you know for sure how many people are going to attend your event, you can decide how many and which items each person is responsible for purchasing. Ideally, you should finalize your list of RSVPs a few days or a week prior to the event.

STEP 3: Create a list of items to include in your care kit

Start with 1 gallon-sized or quart-sized Ziploc bag, or a similarly-sized reusable bag, to hold your items

Then, add any of the following items:

- 1-2 small snacks (e.g. applesauce, granola bar, etc.)
- 1 mini bottle of water
- 1 resource sheet
- Handwritten note
- Toothpaste + toothbrush
- Socks
- Soap
- Deodorant
- Menstrual products
- 1 MetroCard or a few \$ of cash

TIP: Adapt your care kits based on the season! If you live in a cold climate, in the winter, try to include gloves and hand warmers. In the summer, water bottles are even more essential.

CRISIS INTERVENTION HOTLINE

If you have a question about accessing shelter or other services, including if you have been denied access to shelter, please call **1-888-358-2384**, the Crisis Intervention emergency hotline, and leave a detailed message, including your phone number. We will do our best to respond to you as soon as possible. More info: www.coalitionforthehomeless.org.

GRAND CENTRAL FOOD PROGRAM

The Grand Central Food Program distributes meals and other items 7 days a week at the following times and places (times are approximate):

- **St. Bartholomew's Church** • 5:30-7pm • St. Bart's, 108 E 51st St (between Park and Lexington Ave)
- **SCHEDULE OF DOWNTOWN FOOD VAN**
- **7:15pm** 35th St under FDR Drive
- **7:45pm** Chinatown, (Lafayette & Leonard St)
- **8:00pm** Staten Island Ferry Terminal
- **8:20pm** Sunshine Hotel/Bowery Mission (between Stanton & Rivington)
- **8:45pm** Madison Square Park (5th Ave & 27th St)
- **9:15pm** Penn Station (NE Corner of 34th St & 8th Ave)
- **SCHEDULE OF UPTOWN FOOD VAN**
- **7:15pm** SW Corner of 51st St & Broadway
- **7:35pm** Port Authority, 40th St
- **7:55pm** 79th St Boat Basin (79th St & West Side Hwy)
- **8:15pm** 86th St & West End Ave
- **8:30pm** St. John the Divine (112th St & Amsterdam Ave)
- **8:45pm** Harlem Hospital (137th St & Lenox Ave)
- **9:00pm** Lexington Ave & 124th St
- **9:15pm** Central Park (5th Ave, & 72nd St)

FREE MEALS & MENSTRUAL PRODUCTS AT PUBLIC SCHOOLS: MON- FRI 3:00pm - 5:00pm

- Manhattan Acad. for Arts & Language: 111 E 33rd St
- Urban Academy Laboratory High School: 317 E 67th St
- P.S. 130 Hernando De Soto: 143 Bantier St
- P.S. 163 Alfred E. Smith: 163 W 97th St
- M.S. 243 Center School: 100 W 84th St
- Beacon High School: 521 W 43rd St
- High School for Health Professions and Human Services: 345 E 15th St
- The Peck Slip School: 1 Peck Slip
- New York City Lab Middle School for Collaborative: 333 W 17 St
- P.S. 217 Roosevelt Island: 645 Main St
- Murray Bergtraum High School for Business Careers: 411 Pearl St

For a full list, call 311 or visit: <https://www.schools.nyc.gov/freemeals>

SOUP KITCHENS

- **St. Bartholomew's Church**: 108 E 51st St • Sun, M, W: 7-8:30am; M-Sun: 5:30-6:30pm; Sat: 9:30-11am • 6 to 51st St
- **Grand Central Neighborhood**: 120 E 32nd St • Daily: 6:30-8am; 12-1:30pm; 4-6pm • 6 to 33rd St
- **The Bowery Mission**: 227 Bowery • Daily: 8-9am; 1-2pm, 5-6pm • Line up 30 mins before • 6 to Spring St
- **Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen**: 296 9th Ave • Meals and social services, M-F: 10:30am-12:30pm • C/E to 23rd St
- **New York Common Pantry**: 8 E 109th St • M-F: 2:30-3:30pm; Sat-Sun: 4-5pm • 2/3 to Central Park N/110th St, 6 to 110th
- **Salvation Army Harlem Temple**: 540 Lenox Ave • M-F: 11am-12:30pm • 2/3 to 135th St
- **Broadway Community Inc.**: 601 W 114th St • M, W, F: 12:30-1:30pm • 1 to 116th
- **Church of the Village/UMC**: 201 W 13th St • Sat 11:30am-2pm • A/C/E/F/M/L to 14th St
- **St. Joseph's House**: 36 East 1st St • Mon-Fri: 9:30-11am • 212-862-3900 • J to Bowery, F to 2nd Ave
- **Community Kitchen of West Harlem**: 252 W 116th St • Mon-Fri 4-6pm • A/C/B to 116th St • Grab-and-go
- **St. Francis Breadline**: 144 W 32nd St • Daily: 7-8am • B/D/F/M/N/Q/R/W to Herald Square

FOOD PANTRIES

- **New York Common Pantry**: 8 E 109th St • Wed-Sat 10am-2pm • Register for food pantry Mon-Sat 10am-2:30pm • 2/3 to Central Park North/110th St, 6 to 110th St • ID and proof of address required
- **West Side Campaign Against Hunger**: 263 W 86th St • Tu-Fri: 9am-1pm • 1 train to 86th St • ID required
- **Church of the Village/UMC**: 201 West 13th Street • Tues 3:30-5:30pm (line starts 3pm, no earlier) • A/C/E/F/M/L to 14th St
- **SA - Harlem Temple**: 540 Lenox Ave • Mon-Fri, 9:30am-1pm • Appointment required • Call (212) 862-3900
- **Community Impact Pantry**: 616 W 114th St • Produce pantry: Mon 12:30-1:30pm • Supermarket pantry: 4th Saturday, 1-3pm • 1 to 116th St
- **Grand Central Neighborhood**: 120 E 32nd St • Second Wednesday of every month 2-3:30pm • 6 to 33rd St
- **St. Francis Breadline**: 144 W 32nd St • Friday and Saturday, 9-10:30am, clothing upon request • Closed holidays
- **Community Kitchen of West Harlem**: 252 W 116th St • Tues/Thurs 11am-3:30pm, Wed 1-6pm, Sat 11am-2pm • Seniors only: Tues/Thurs 9:30-11am • A/C/B to 116th St

SOURCE:

Coalition for the Homeless

Check out this sample resource sheet for Manhattan!

Resource sheets are community-specific, and provide an accessible list of emergency services available to people experiencing homelessness in your area. These resources can include soup kitchens, drop-in shelters, and more.

You can find resource sheets from local organizations, or you can research and develop your own based upon your specific location and the needs of your neighbors. Expect resource sheets to change over time, so be open to adapting your resource guide!

Step 4: Decide how many care kits you want each person to take home with them

EXAMPLE:

Our goal is to make 40 care kits, which means that each of the 8 attendees will have 5 care kits to bring home with them!

Step 5: Divide up responsibility for purchasing items

You can decide how to divide responsibility for purchasing items based on the structure and financial ability of your group. Open Hearts typically asks each attendee to bring or purchase items in a way that ensures that each person spends about the same amount. You could ask people to sign up to purchase something that is financially feasible for them, or to bring something they already have on hand. If you are making care kits as part of an organization that has an existing budget, you can use that budget to purchase items as well.

| Item | Price |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| Quart or Gallon-sized Ziploc bags | \$6 |
| Applesauce | \$20 |
| Granola bars | \$20 |
| Mini water bottles | \$10 |
| Socks | \$40 |
| Soap | \$40 |
| Mini toothpaste | \$30 |
| Construction paper for cards | \$8 |
| TOTAL | \$174 |

| Person | Items to bring | Cost |
|--------|---|---------|
| 1 | Construction paper, quart-sized ziploc bags, mini toothpaste (10) | \$21.50 |
| 2 | Applesauce | \$20 |
| 3 | Granola bars | \$20 |
| 4 | Socks (20) | \$20 |
| 5 | Socks (20) | \$20 |
| 6 | Soap (20) | \$20 |
| 7 | Soap (20) | \$20 |
| 8 | Mini toothpaste (30) | \$22.50 |

SAMPLE CARE KIT EVENT AGENDA:

Part 1: Welcome your group and discuss the importance and purpose of creating care kits

- Watch a video/read a news article about homeless or housing insecurity, ideally featuring the perspectives of people experiencing homelessness
- Check out this [bystander intervention training](#)

Part 2: Education about homelessness and housing insecurity

It is important to explicitly recognize that, while making and distributing care kits is absolutely productive, it is not the only thing we can or must do to support our neighbors experiencing homelessness. Care kit events are a great opportunity to talk with attendees about other opportunities for support, compassion, and advocacy, and we recommend incorporating this type of discussion into your event



Part 3: Assemble the care kits with your group!

You can do this either by having each person build one kit at a time, or using an assembly line method.

Part 4: Talk with attendees about how to distribute their care kits

TIPS TO SHARE FOR DISTRIBUTING CARE KITS:

- Carry a kit or 2 in your bag each day when you go out.
- You don't know whether a person is experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity just by looking at them. Don't make assumptions—instead, let people signal that they are looking for assistance (e.g. by approaching you and asking for something, holding a sign, etc.), and only then should you offer a care kit.
- Some folks might not want a care kit, and that's ok! You should never pressure someone to accept a care kit. Respecting a person's autonomy and agency is an important way of recognizing their humanity.
- Give without judgment or expectation. It's not our job to decide who "deserves" support, to verify someone's need for assistance, or to make sure the items in the care kits are used in a certain way. Trust that folks know their own needs.

Any questions about this guide, or want to share photos of your care kit events?

Connect with Open Hearts Initiative!



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