



*Open
Hearts
Initiative*

Welcome Kit Guide



What is a welcome kit?

A welcome kit is a bag with material resources to welcome new neighbors who are in temporary housing facilities in your neighborhood. It might include items like soap, shower shoes, and snacks--or other things, depending on the needs of residents at a particular shelter! Welcome kits also include a note or card expressing welcome.

Why make welcome kits?

Welcome kits offer our neighbors who are in temporary housing needed resources for day-to-day living, but they are also a gesture to welcome neighbors, just like New Yorkers might bring a meal to new neighbors in their apartment buildings. Providing welcome kits to neighbors experiencing homelessness addresses the immediate need for basic needs items while fostering warm and neighborly interactions and genuine community across housing status.

Why host an event to assemble welcome kits with your community?

It's often easier and more sustainable to have a group of people collect and assemble items rather than just one person! And importantly, making welcome kits is also a great opportunity to bring together a group of people to intentionally discuss issues of homelessness and housing insecurity in our communities. It's a tangible way to break down stigmas about homelessness and the people experiencing it. The act of putting together welcome kits underscores that everyone, regardless of their housing situation, is a neighbor worthy of dignity, respect, and having their basic needs met. Holding an event to assemble welcome kits can also be an accessible starting point for further discussions about how to support our neighbors in need. After assembling welcome kits using relatively common and inexpensive items, ideas will begin to flow about more ways to connect across housing status and support your homeless neighbors.



HOW TO MAKE AND DISTRIBUTE WELCOME KITS

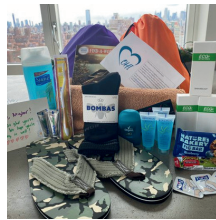
Is there a shelter, supportive or transitional housing site, or other location serving neighbors experiencing homelessness in your community that would benefit from a gesture of welcome? Here are the steps you can take to plan an event in your community to collect and assemble welcome kits.

STEP 1: Identify a shelter site + items needed

The first step is to reach out to a shelter in your community to learn about what items will be most helpful for new residents. Ask what items residents are already provided with (every shelter is different!) and what resources they need. Based on that information, build a list of items that should go in each welcome kit. The exact contents of the kit are flexible --it's the personalized gesture that is most important.

What might go in a welcome kit?

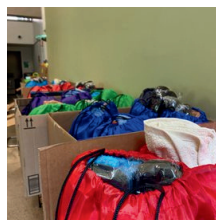
Check out a few examples from past events!



Shower shoes



A handwritten welcome note



A washcloth

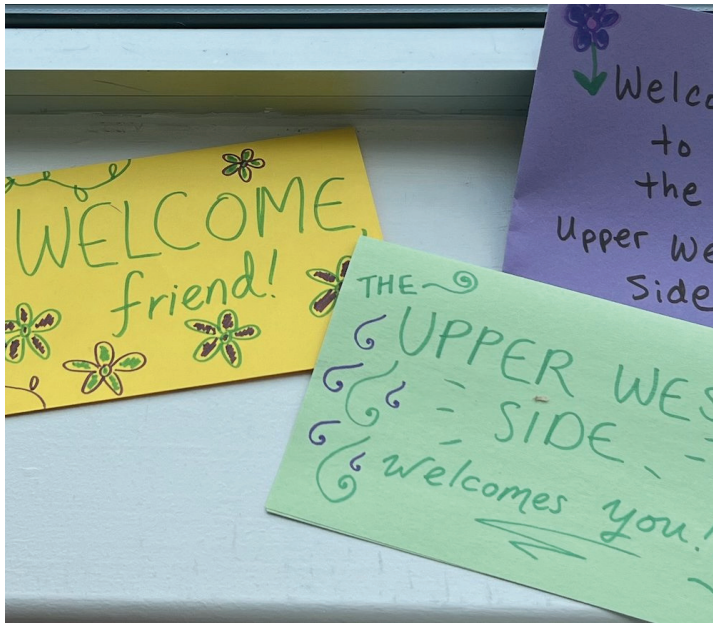
Some of our past welcome kits have included...

- Gift bag, drawstring backpack, or other bag to put the items in
- **Handwritten welcome note from a neighbor - if folks at the shelter speak other languages, make sure to translate your note!***
- A sheet with information about additional resources and services in the neighborhood (e.g. libraries, free community activities)
- Snacks
- Toiletries
- Shower sandals
- Washcloths
- Reusable water bottles
- Earplugs
- Sleep masks/eye masks
- Gloves
- Socks

***While most of these items are flexible, we recommend including a welcome note in all situations!**

STEP 2: Decide on a date, time, & location to assemble kits

- Choose a date, time, and location for your event.
- Share that information with your community!
- Collect RSVPs! This is important to your event so you can plan ahead of time how many people will be helping out with the event, you can decide how many people are responsible for purchasing supplies, and how many kits you can make. The RSVP list should ideally be finalized a week or a few days prior to the event.



STEP 4: Assemble the welcome kits at your event

Check out our **“Sample Welcome Kit Event Agenda”** on the next page for an example of how you might structure the event!

STEP 5: Deliver the welcome kits

Coordinate ahead of time whether you are distributing the welcome kits at the shelter, or just dropping them off there. Having some folks from your group distribute the welcome kits at the shelter can be a great opportunity for interacting as neighbors and building community, but dropping off the kits may be a better option if there is limited space at the shelter.

STEP 3: Collect items

Decide how to divide responsibility for purchasing items for the kits based on the structure and financial ability of your group. Here are a few approaches to consider:

- Ask each attendee to bring or purchase items in a way that ensures that each person spends about the same amount.
- If you are making welcome kits as part of an organization that has an existing budget, you can use that budget to purchase items.
- Create and distribute an Amazon wishlist and let folks decide what to buy.
- Ask local community organizations or houses of worship to take responsibility for providing some items (e.g. one synagogue provides the shampoos for the kits.)



SAMPLE WELCOME KIT EVENT AGENDA:

6pm– 6:15 pm: Welcome your group and discuss the importance and purpose of creating welcome kits

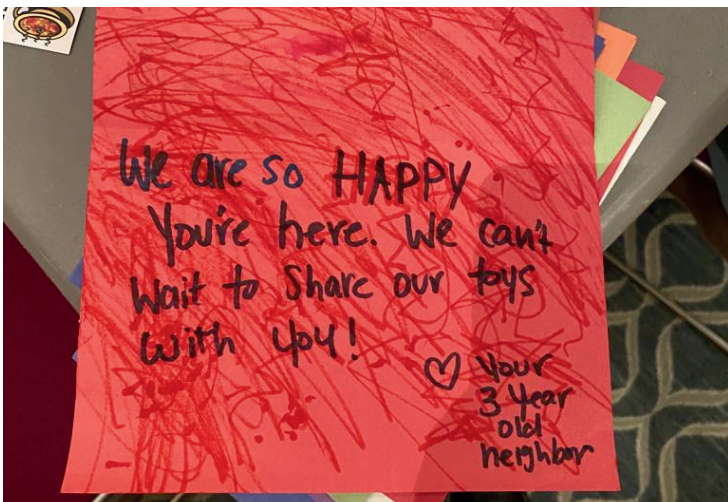
This is a good chance to share some information with the group about the particular shelter you are making the welcome kits for. Is it about to open, or has it been open for a while? Which neighbors does it serve (e.g. families with children, single adults, etc.)?

6:15pm – 6:30 pm: Learning more about homelessness together

It is important to recognize that, while making and distributing welcome kits is absolutely productive, it is not the only thing we can or must do to support our neighbors experiencing homelessness. Welcome kit events are a great opportunity to learn more about homelessness together--e.g. by watching a video interview with someone who has experienced homelessness, or reading a short article together--and talking as a group with about other opportunities for support, compassion, and advocacy.

6:30pm – 7:30pm: Assemble the welcome 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, where all the welcome kit supplies are laid out on a table and each volunteer has a specific item they are in charge of packing. There should be a section designated for writing the welcome cards to neighbors--this step is important!



Any questions about this guide, or want to share photos of your welcome kit events? Connect with Open Hearts Initiative!



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