



Journey of Hope

November 2025

— A Beacom Research Fellows Report | Augustana Research Institute



Lupe Fernandez Aleman, Beatrice Achieng Anyim

Beacom Research Fellows

Editor: Carla Graciano

Augustana Research Institute

Augustana University

Sioux Falls, South Dakota

This report was made possible by a gift from Miles and Lisa Beacom to support the Beacom Research Fellows Program at Augustana University. The Beacom Research Fellows Program partners Augustana students with community organizations to complete collaborative research projects on behalf of the organization. Fellows make rigorous research, data management, analysis, and reporting more broadly available to organizations in the Sioux Falls area that are working to improve the quality of life.

Commissioned by Journey of Hope



Journey of Hope	0
Introduction	3
Goal of this Study	5
Background Literature	5
What Is Being Done Today	7
Limitations of Federal Programs	10
Methods	12
Distribution Observation	12
Identifying the Problem	13
Fellow Testing of the Tracking System	14
Fellows Observing Journey of Hope Using Tracking System	16
Findings	16
Conclusion	20
Limitations	21
Future Studies	21
References	22



Introduction

As living costs increase and wages remain stagnant, access to basic resources—including hygiene resources—becomes more scarce. In 2023, it was found that Sioux Falls had 10% of its population living below the poverty line (Census Reporter), and with economic poverty may come hygiene poverty. As described by Provision Promise, hygiene poverty “is a person or family’s inability to afford the most basic hygiene items.” Unfortunately, many families are forced to decide between necessities such as food and hygiene resources. Basic hygiene needs include shampoo, conditioner, body wash, a toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, and feminine products (pads and tampons). Organizations, such as Journey of Hope (JOH), strive to improve the availability of hygiene resources in the Sioux Falls community and its surrounding areas.

Inspired by the experiences of their late son, Kari and Darin Palmer founded JOH in 2020. The organization seeks to help individuals who face similar hardships as their son while spreading the love of their faith, Christianity. The organization was founded to provide basic hygiene care, like a clean pair of socks, a toothbrush, toothpaste, deodorant, body wash, and shampoo to individuals who were recently released from incarceration and individuals experiencing homelessness. Later, Kari and Darin would expand the organization to help supply other non-profit organizations, Sioux Falls residents, and Title 1 schools.

Initially, the main focus of the organization was to offer blue draw-string bags containing a clean pair of socks and some basic hygiene essentials. Every blue draw-string bag contains the same products. These blue draw-string bags were distributed to individuals who have been released from incarceration and those experiencing homelessness. As the organization grew, so did the ambition to serve more individuals, recognizing the breadth of need. As mentioned before, 10% of the Sioux Falls residents are living below the poverty line (Census Report).



Acknowledging the wider community's need for hygiene products, Kari and Darin decided to expand JOH's services. JOH acquires hygiene supplies through donations and a monthly budget of \$800. Based on availability, JOH fulfills requests submitted by other non-profit organizations and Title 1 elementary schools. As JOH serves the community, they have also learned what hygiene products to acquire and offer. For example, women experiencing hygiene insecurity need menstruation products as well. Therefore, JOH has made an effort to provide pads and tampons for menstruating individuals.

As mentioned before, JOH receives requests from non-profits and schools. Schools that request items are both Title 1 elementary schools and non-Title 1 schools. According to the Sioux Falls School District, a Title 1 school receives federal funding for schools with high poverty rates. A form of measurement of eligibility is the number of children receiving free or reduced lunch. Once they receive a request, JOH provides basic hygiene supplies, including shampoo, soap, and deodorant. The requested items are either distributed in person by JOH volunteers at selected distribution sites or directly by the agencies themselves. At these distributions, individuals and families are free to choose the items they need.

For this study, the Beacom Fellows were tasked with creating and testing a tracking system for the organization. The tracking system was to help understand the demographics and the number of people being served at each distribution site. Additionally, Fellows improved the organization's ability to track the number of items distributed, thereby better gauging the community's need for specific products.



Goal of this Study

At the beginning of the study, JOH wanted to evaluate the organization's impact within the community. However, upon initial observation, the Fellows found there was not enough data to analyze the impact of JOH on the Sioux Falls community. After discussing the findings with JOH, both the Fellows and JOH agreed that gathering data on how many people were being helped was an important first step. Shortly after the Fellows set a goal, they would use mixed methods to improvise a tracking system. The tracking system needed to be efficient, but not interfere with operations. Mixed methods consist of observations, data sharing and collection, and surveying.

Background Literature

To begin with, it is important to understand the lack of current statistics on people experiencing hygiene poverty, as well as the lack of research conducted around hygiene poverty. Chiem (2024) describes hygiene poverty as “a silent epidemic.” He labels this crisis as silent because the individuals experiencing hygiene poverty fear embarrassment, making it a hard topic to discuss and address.

Hygiene items are not a “luxury”; they are a necessity. There is a direct correlation between well-being and access to hygiene resources. Lack of resources like shampoo, deodorant, body wash, diapers, feminine products, etc., can devastate a person's well-being. Hygiene poverty creates fear and stress, such as fear of being bullied in school, or having to call out of work for not having access to menstrual products (Chiem 2024).



Similarly, Mohd. Tahit and Haque (2024) describe how people who menstruate and are experiencing hygiene poverty are more likely to experience mental health issues or infections and miss work or school. Mental health can be depleted by people menstruating without access to feminine products. Further, stigma, embarrassment, and missing work or school due to hygiene poverty and menstruation exacerbate gender inequality in regards to income and education.

The cost of hygiene products makes it challenging for some individuals and families to secure them. As the cost of living increases relative to income, so does the rate of hygiene poverty. According to Provision Promise, “73% of families cut back on food costs to afford basic hygiene items.” They also describe how hygiene poverty creates a cycle of poverty. As one illustration of that effect, Goldblum and Shaddox (2021) found that for every diaper donated to a family, that family saw an increase of \$11 in wealth. When a family runs out of diapers and does not have enough money to buy more, they miss work because daycare facilities do not provide diapers for children. Missing work means missing out on a day’s worth of income. The income missed by families continues to keep them in poverty. This is why organizations like JOH, diaper banks, and other organizations are essential to communities.

Measures to address hygiene poverty demonstrate the power of meeting people’s needs. For example, Goldblum and Shaddox (2021) document the effects of Whirlpool’s donation of washers and dryers to low-income schools to help reduce absences. Students were able to bring their laundry to school to get washed and dried. This initiative allowed students to have clean clothes, which in turn saw 73% of students who were “chronically absent” have good attendance after the Whirlpool donation (Goldblum and Shaddox 2021).



For individuals and families experiencing homelessness, access to hygiene resources is more challenging. Limited access to clean running water and sanitation can have negative consequences on this vulnerable population. According to Nava and Wilson (2024), one-third of respondents to a survey of people experiencing homelessness reported having a urinary tract infection (UTI). Similarly, other infections and rashes were noted to be recurring while experiencing homelessness.

What Is Being Done Today

Currently, nonprofit organizations like JOH are actively working to combat hygiene poverty. As mentioned before, JOH is actively providing hygiene items to many individuals and families in the Sioux Falls area. With the rising cost of living and stagnant wages, it has become more difficult for families and individuals living in poverty and below the poverty line to acquire the basic necessities like food, hygiene essentials, rent, etc.

The impact of hygiene poverty can be better understood by mapping it to frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and the United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Wellness Wheel. The UN created a sustainable development model, where the top seventeen issues are identified. Poverty is ranked at number one, meaning the UN sees combating poverty as the top priority issue to address. The poverty crisis is not an isolated issue; it is an issue seen across the globe. In the United States, "nearly 40% of adults report that they struggle to afford at least one basic need for health care, housing, utilities, or food" (Chiem 2024). Beyond directly addressing poverty, programs like Journey of Hope also help address several other sustainable development goals, like enhancing quality of life (see the following tables).

Sustainable Development Goal	Hygiene's Impact
Zero Hunger	People living on limited incomes face tradeoffs when their household budget cannot cover all of their expenses. For some, purchasing food may trade off with buying hygiene supplies.
Good Health and Well-Being	Hygiene poverty is associated with a higher risk of infection.
Quality Education	Students without access to showers or laundry facilities may be embarrassed to attend school, which can interfere with their education.
Gender Equality	Hygiene poverty disproportionately affects people who menstruate. Inaccessibility to menstrual products increases gender inequalities.
Clean Water and Sanitation	Inaccessibility to clean water and sanitation increases the risk of infections and diseases.
Decent Work and Economic Growth	Hygiene insecurity can lead to missing work or prevent individuals from attending interviews.
Reduced Inequalities	Hygiene poverty makes it extremely challenging for people to improve their conditions. When considering intersectionality, the overlapping of identities, some individuals become more vulnerable than others.

SAMHSA's Wellness Wheel outlines eight dimensions of wellness. It is a useful tool for thinking about the multifaceted ways in which hygiene affects an individual's well-being.

According to the University of New Hampshire, the wellness wheel can be described as "the integration of 8 important dimensions of wellness: emotional, financial, environmental, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual." These 8 dimensions are connected and

can cause a negative domino effect. For example, if an individual is experiencing homelessness, they are missing many important dimensions of wellness. For one, the individual is struggling financially and is forced to live in harsh environments. As one dimension is lost, others follow.

8 Dimensions of the Wellness Wheel	Hygiene's Impact
Emotional	High risks of insecurity, depression, and anxiety regarding hygiene poverty can make it challenging to achieve mental and emotional stability.
Financial	Financial instability creates stressful decisions between choosing food or other necessities like shampoo and hygiene. Poverty can create financial hardship when it leads to missed work.
Environmental	Individuals experiencing homelessness face dangerous living conditions and a lack of hygiene and sanitation, which can contribute to infection, as well as making it challenging to feel safe.
Intellectual	Missing school can cause children and young adults to fall behind in school, making it challenging to stay intellectually stimulated.
Occupational	Missing work because of hygiene insecurity makes it more challenging to get promotions and advance career ambitions.
Physical	Maintaining physical health is hard if access to water and sanitation is not available. Infections and diseases can be detrimental to physical health.
Social	Insecurities regarding hygiene create social distancing to avoid feelings of embarrassment.
Spiritual	It can be hard for individuals to attend their spiritual locations if they feel insecure due to hygiene poverty.



Because gaps in hygiene items create far-reaching challenges for individuals and families, combating hygiene poverty is essential. Organizations are working to mitigate hygiene poverty by providing basic hygiene essentials, such as soap, shampoo, diapers, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and feminine hygiene products. Simply the Basics describes their work as “uplifting” and understands that hygiene insecurity creates many issues, from psychological to economic. By addressing hygiene poverty as a community, “we can break the barriers imposed by hygiene insecurity and pave the way for a more resilient and thriving society” (Simply the Basics).

Limitations of Federal Programs

Another challenging narrative for combating hygiene poverty is the assumption that current federal aid can easily solve hygiene poverty. However, federal aid has been ineffective and limited when it comes to addressing hygiene needs. According to Goldblum and Shaddox (2021), federal assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Women, Infants & Children (WIC) are not helping individuals and families acquire hygiene items. Instead, these two programs focus on mitigating food insecurity. Non-food items, including basic hygiene supplies, cannot be purchased with SNAP or WIC benefits. Furthermore, the assistance programs have limits that restrict the amount they can provide to help families afford food and save money for other items, such as hygiene supplies. SNAP and WIC require individuals and families to meet specific income brackets, making it challenging to work more hours. The income requirements serve as a strategy to help the most vulnerable, but they create a setback. The setback can be described as a poverty cycle.



In this cycle, families and individuals are forced to feel like they should not work more because they fear losing their federal assistance. Many families find themselves among the working poor, who earn too much to qualify for assistance programs but too little to meet all of their basic needs. For instance, Cerullo (2024) found that half of Amazon's workers struggle to make ends meet, from covering food to covering housing. One-third of the 1,484 surveyed employees have sought federal assistance like SNAP. Amazon offers a starting hourly wage of \$15, which is over the minimum wage in several states. Despite offering this hourly wage, employees still struggle to cover basic living expenses.

Another federal program offered is Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF aims to mitigate financial hardship for struggling families by providing cash assistance. However, states do not always use the money allocated to them for TANF to provide direct assistance to families in need. Bergal (2020) found that many states use TANF money to fund other programs. For example, some states have used TANF to fund scholarships for middle-class families. The lack of supervision of the federal government has led to states' misuse of TANF funds.

Further, TANF is hard to qualify for, and its support is time-limited. To get TANF, a person has to care for a child under 18 and cooperate with child support enforcement. This can be challenging for some people, especially if domestic abuse cases are involved. The victim will more than likely not want any contact with the other parent. As mentioned before, TANF is time-limited. According to the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP), a family is given a lifetime maximum of 60 months of TANF benefits, but some states have a shorter period. It is also important to understand that different states have different eligibility requirements, such as setting the income eligibility level. For example, in the state of South Dakota, for a family of



three to qualify for a maximum monthly benefit of \$700, the family would have to have an income below the eligibility level of \$700 (NCCP).

Again, these federal programs make it challenging for individuals and families to get out of the cycle of poverty. Low income eligibility levels make it challenging for individuals and families to improve their financial status. Suppose a family increases their income, even by \$100. In that case, the family is at risk of losing the federal assistance programs it relies on, even when the additional income is not enough to constitute a livable wage.

Methods

For this study, Fellows sought to create and help integrate a tracking system. The tracking system was deemed essential by the Fellows, since JOH did not have data on how many people they had served. By tracking how many people are being served, Fellows can demonstrate how JOH has served the Sioux Falls community by providing hygiene essentials. Methods used for this study include observations, surveys, data collection, and organization.

Distribution Observation

The Fellows' first task was to attend as many distribution sites as possible and observe how Journey of Hope operates. Observing the operation of distributions was critical to finding solutions to the barriers the organization faced in data collection. One of the first things noticed at distribution sites was the lack of a client tracking system. Instead of tracking the number of people served, the organization relied on its inventory log, or records of remaining inventory, to estimate how many people were served.



Fellows realized that tracking people served by referencing the inventory log was not ideal. The inventory log assumed each item accounted for one person served; however, individuals were free to take more than one item for themselves or family members. Counting the number of items removed from the inventory would not directly correspond to the number of people served.

After observing a few distribution sites, it became apparent that implementing a client tracking system separate from inventory would be the most effective way of tracking people served. Later observations were used to test out the tracking systems to eliminate any obstacles or challenges. The system had to be simple but effective. The biggest concern Fellows wanted to avoid was implementing a system that made operations more complicated. Fellows wanted to ensure that the tracking system would help the organization, not hinder it, and that it would not take away from volunteers' personal interactions with clients. One of the most impactful and meaningful aspects of volunteering and serving the community is making connections with the individuals seeking help; this makes the experience meaningful for all parties involved.

Identifying the Problem

As mentioned above, the inventory tracking system was found to be ineffective in tracking how many individuals were served at a given time. As a result, it was concluded that there was no data on how many people have used the services provided by JOH. Therefore, the Fellows found that tracking people served should be separate from the inventory tracking. The problem of combining inventory and people served was that it was producing inaccurate numbers. For example, if a person takes three items (e.g., deodorant, shampoo, and body wash), it would assume three people were served, when in reality, it was one person.



After concluding the need for a tracking system for individuals served, Fellows and JOH agreed to make the tracking system include two demographics. The demographics decided to track were gender and age.

As mentioned before, there was no data on how many people were being helped, so there was no data on income, employment, age, etc. Fellows advised JOH to first track how many people they served, and to later reapply to the Augustana Research Institute for future studies, like measuring the impact JOH has on the Sioux Falls community.

Fellow Testing of the Tracking System

After identifying the problem, Fellows were tasked with creating a simple, effective tracking system. The system had to be simple so that implementation and “training” would not hinder the operation of the organization.

Fellows created a tally sheet to keep track of people served. The tally sheet consists of three demographics: women, men, and children. If a woman was served, the volunteer would mark it down as 1 woman served. Each person served would be marked down, regardless of whether they showed up alone or with family. At every distribution site, the location and date would be noted. At the end of the distribution, the volunteers would count the total number of each demographic separately and then combine the three demographics to find the total number of people served.

Location:**Date:**

Men	Women	Children

Totals	
Men	
Women	
Children	
Grand Total	

In March 2025, the Fellows visited distribution sites and implemented the tally sheet. It was important to have the Fellows try the tally sheet before handing it over to the organization. This was done so that the Fellows were able to test the tally sheet and adjust it if any issues were found. The original tally sheet documented families and individuals, but it later created confusion because it was not always clear from observation whether groups of individuals



represented families or not. To account for this, the tally sheet was remade into a simpler version. The version above is the sheet currently being used by Journey of Hope.

After each distribution, the information gathered from the tally sheet was added to a Google Form. The Google form is updated by Kari and Darin after each distribution. The form was used to create a dashboard, where Kari and Darin can see how many people were served after each distribution site. The dashboard created by Beatrice Achieng Anyim allowed the organization to keep track of how many people were served since March 2025.

Fellows Observing Journey of Hope Using Tracking System

After the Fellows tested the tally sheet, Journey of Hope was tasked with using the tally sheet. In April 2025, Fellows again visited distribution sites, this time to aid volunteers on how to utilize the tally sheet. As mentioned earlier, the original tally sheet caused confusion because of difficulty distinguishing individuals and families, so the sheet was later altered to be simpler.

Once the tracking system was turned over to JOH, Kari and Darin Palmer were responsible for inputting the data from the tally sheet. Volunteers use the sheet during the distribution operation, then turn in the sheet to Kari or Darin. Apart from the initial confusion, using the tally sheet was efficient. JOH continues to implement the tally sheet and is still entering data from the tally sheets onto the Google Sheets, which, along with the dashboard, continues to update as entries are entered into a Google Form.

Findings

The demographics and distribution tracking systems were built using data from the tally sheet and the JOH agency request sheet.

The demographics tracking system records the total number of individuals served by Journey of Hope, distinguishing between in-person distributions and agency-requested deliveries. The demographics tracked—men, women, and children—are the same as those included in the tally sheet. The information recorded in the demographics tracking system is summarized in a dashboard that updates in real-time as data is entered. Figure 1 below shows the current data in the dashboard.

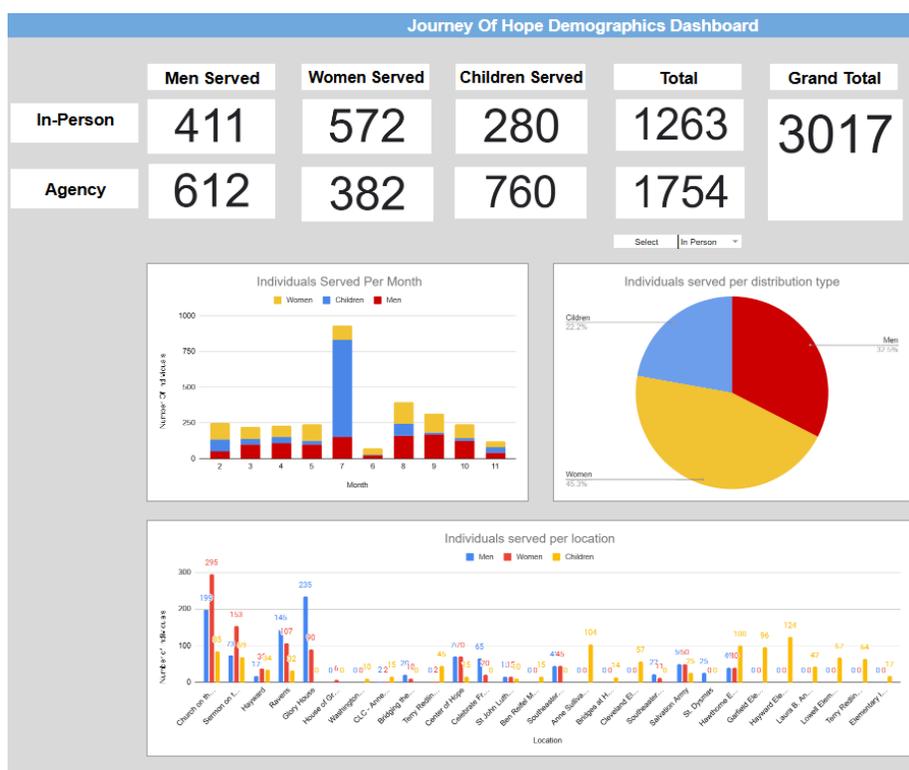


Figure 1 JOH Demographics Tracker Dashboard | November 3, 2025

Figure 2 shows the demographic data as of November 5, 2025. JOH has served over 3,000 individuals since the demographics tracker became operational. Of the 1,263 individuals recorded in the in-person distributions, 411 were men, 572 were women, and 280 were children. Of the 1,754 agency request deliveries recorded, 612 recipients were men, 382 were women, and 760 were children.

	Men Served	Women Served	Children Served	Total	Grand Total
In-Person	411	572	280	1263	3017
Agency	612	382	760	1754	

Figure 2 Table of Demographics Served | November 3, 2025

Figures 1.3 and 1.4 show the percentage of individuals served per distribution type (in-person distribution or agency-requested deliveries) split between the three demographics. Of the total number of individuals served through in-person distributions, 45.3% were women, 22.2% were children, and 32.5% were men. Of the total number of individuals served through the agency-requested deliveries, 21.8% were women, 43.4% were children, and 34.9% were men.

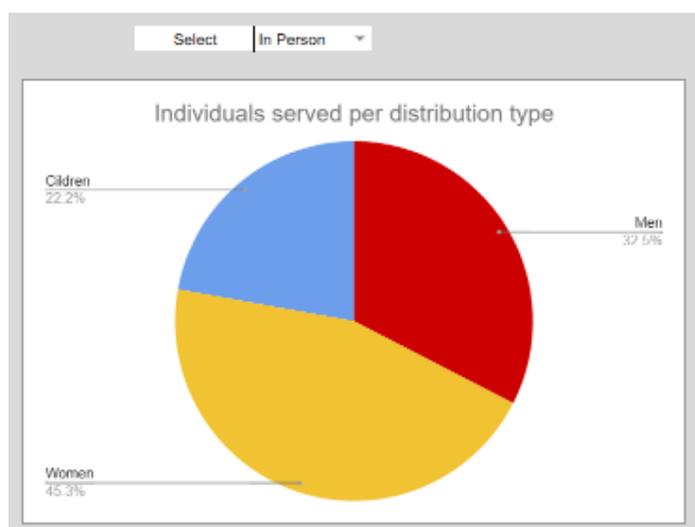


Figure 4 Percentage of Individuals Served through Distributions | November 5, 2025

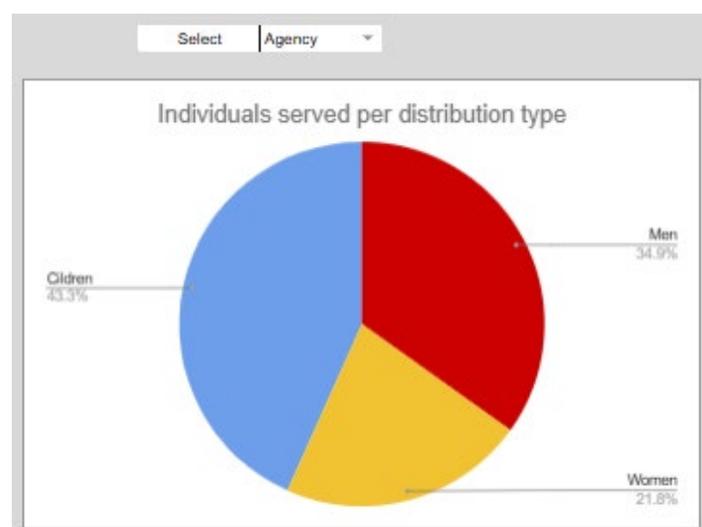


Figure 3 Percentage of Individuals Served through Agencies | November 5, 2025

Whereas the demographic tracking system focuses on the people served, the distribution tracking system records the number of items distributed by the organization, distinguishing between hygiene items and clothing items. The list of items tracked was derived from Journey of Hope's organization request form. After receiving a request, JOH enters the information into a Google Sheet table. The data from the table then autopopulates the dashboard, allowing the

hygiene distributions to be tracked. Figure 5 displays the product distribution information since the tracker went live in February 2025. Of the 27,462 items distributed, 23,699 were hygiene items and 3,763 were clothing items.



Figure 5 Total number of products distributed | November 5, 2025

Figure 6 shows the annual distribution of hygiene products across 6 categories. Of the hygiene items, shower hygiene products were the most distributed, followed by body care (e.g., lotion, deodorant) and dental hygiene products.

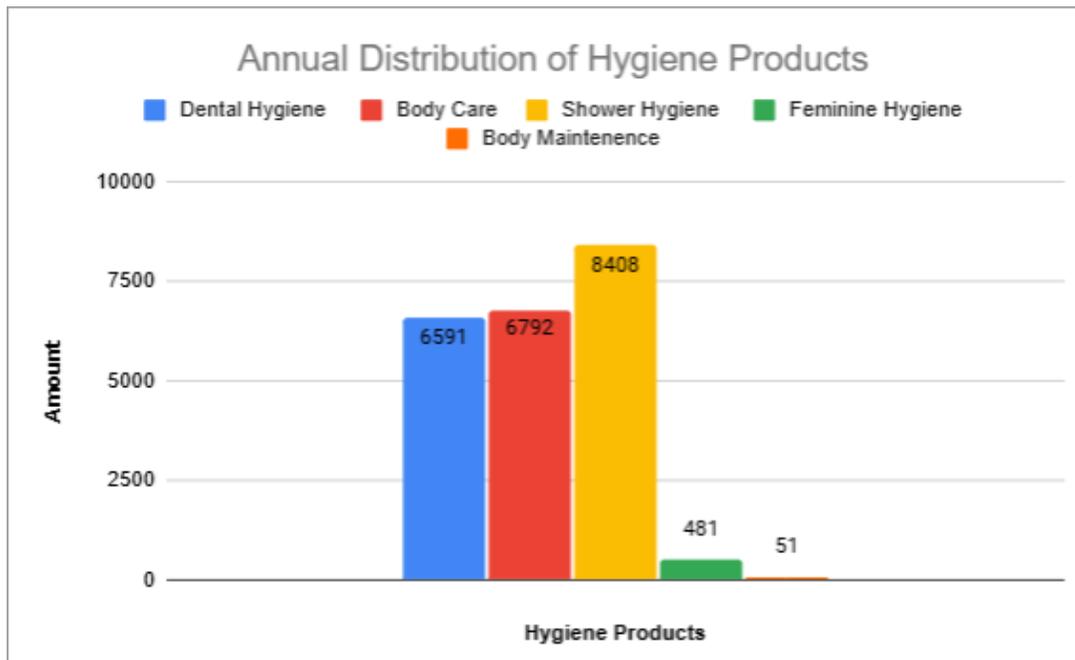


Figure 6 Annual Distribution of Hygiene Products | November 5, 2025

Figure 7 shows the annual distribution of clothing products. Socks were the most distributed item, followed by bags and winter clothing essentials—which include hats and gloves.



Figure 7 Annual Distribution of Clothing Items | November 5, 2025

Conclusion

The time frame of active work on this research started in October 2024 and ended in May 2025. Approximately once a month, Fellows would meet with Kari and Darin Palmer to discuss the progression of the project. The majority of the project required Fellows to attend distribution sites. Through close observations and trial and error, the Fellows found a simple yet efficient tracking system. The tally sheet is encouraged to be used at every distribution site.

Apart from the tracking system, Fellows also created a dashboard to help track how many people have been served, as well as a separate dashboard to track items incoming and outgoing. The inventory dashboard helps Kari and Darin see what items are being used the most, as well as the total amount of hygiene items given to people and other organizations.



Limitations

Some of the limitations of this project include limited interview participation and inconsistent turnout in distribution. When Journey of Hope took over the tally sheet, Fellows created a short interview to understand the people served by Journey of Hope. However, the interview did not yield enough information to be included in the report, concluding that the small sample size could incorrectly represent the majority of the people served.

Another limitation was the inconsistency in the distribution turnout. Weather played a significant role in turnouts. This was especially true if the distribution was done outside.

Future Studies

When Journey of Hope first applied to work with the Beacom Research Fellows Program, they wanted to know the impact their organization has on the community. As mentioned earlier, it was essential to begin tracking the number of people served by Journey of Hope first. The Fellows suggest that Journey of Hope should reapply to measure the impact the organization has on the Sioux Falls community and surrounding communities. By continuing to track the number of people served, it will continue to demonstrate the need for organizations like Journey of Hope. The next study would help further understand poverty and hygiene, and help Journey of Hope improve as an organization.

References

- Bergal, Jenni. 2020. States' Raid Fund Meant to Pay for Needy Families to Pay for Other Programs. *Stateline*. [stateline.org](https://www.stateline.org)
- Census Reporter. 2023. <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US4659020-sioux-falls-sd/>
- Cerullo, Megan. 2024. "Half of Amazon Warehouse Workers Struggle to Cover Food, Housing Costs, Report Finds." *CBS NEWS*. www.cbsnews.com
- Chiem, Phat. 2024. "The Hidden Costs of Hygiene Poverty." *Good360*.
- Goldblum, Joanne S., and Colleen Shaddox. 2021. "America's Unspoken Hygiene Crisis." *The Century Foundation*. [tcf.org](https://www.centuryfoundation.org)
- Mohd. Tohit, Nor F., and Mainul Haque. 2024. "Breaking the Cycle: Addressing Period Poverty as a Critical Public Health Challenge and Its Relation to Sustainable Development Goals." *Cureus*, 16(6):1-13. [DOI:10.7759/cureus 62499](https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.62499)
- Nava, Bianca, and Amanda M. Wilson. 2024. "Access to hygiene facilities and experiences of hygiene-related disease: A pilot study of unsheltered individuals in Tucson, Arizona." *Hygiene and Environmental Health Advances*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heha.2024.100100>
- National Center for Children in Poverty. South Dakota State Profile Summary, TANF Flexibilities Supporting Low-Income Families. 2024. *Bank Street Graduate School of Education*.
- Provision Promise. "Hygiene Poverty Statistics to Know." [provisionpromise.org](https://www.provisionpromise.org)
- Simply the Basics. "Unveiling the Ripple Effect: Hygiene Insecurity as a Community Challenge." 2023. [simplythebasics.org](https://www.simplythebasics.org)



Sioux Falls School District. <https://www.sf.k12.sd.us/page/title-i>

United Nations. “The 17 Goals”. *Department of Economic and Social Affairs*.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>