

## Little Boxes of Hope

By Sarah Fisher, Youth Services Librarian, Glouster Public Library, and Tessa Evanosky, Youth Services Librarian, Chauncey Public Library, Ohio

In mid-January 2020, Glouster Library had a small but mighty addition constructed out front at the end of the sidewalk, where the cement meets the grass. This addition is a 2'x3' box, about a foot deep with a plexiglass framed door. As small as the box may appear, the kindness and care that went into its procurement could fill a million boxes just like it. Our blessing box, or little food pantry, was built by Bryce Lemaster and her grandmother. Bryce now works for the Athens County Health Department, where she was serving as an AmeriCorps member at the time. After connecting with community members about where the little pantries might be best utilized, Bryce set to work building and seeking out local artists to give the boxes some pizzazz. The pantry here at the Glouster Public Library is painted a mellow yellow, with unique characters advertising the box's intent "Take what you need, leave what you can."

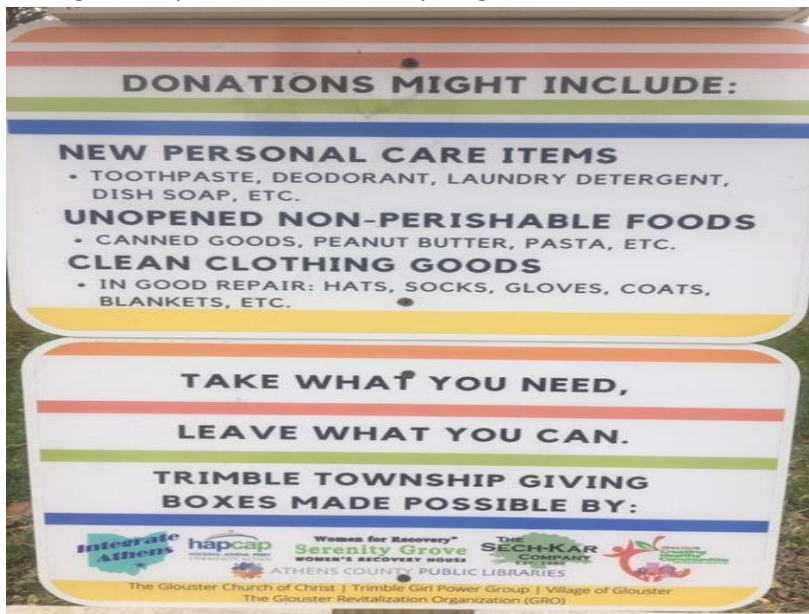


In its first year with us, the pantry has held dry goods donated by passers by, community members, and the local food bank. I have seen it overflowing, with items stacked beneath, but never empty. Our pantry and others like it create the opportunity for people to access free food or toiletries and to share what they have, no questions asked. There are now two more little pantries within a couple of miles, and more popping up in nearby neighborhoods. These three sparks of generosity and creativity are important stepping-stones on the path to understanding and solving problems related to hunger and food access.



The Chauncey Library, about 10 miles south, has since expanded their pantry based on demand to offer winter clothes. “While libraries are information hubs for adults and teens, they are also afterschool snack hubs for kids. They know we will always be there with a cheese stick for them unless we are closed. Now they know to go to the blessing box,” says Youth Services Librarian Tessa Evanosky.

“We recently expanded our box to include a clothes rack for jackets, scarves, and blankets, as well as hats, gloves and personal hygiene supplies. We get between 15 and 30 people visiting per day that we know of, and the donations all come from community members with some monthly help from the food bank in Logan. I think the box has also created a sense of pride in our little community. It’s a symbol that people care about one another regardless of politics, or any other divide. These little boxes are a small sign we are getting one another through what promises to be a very long winter.”



(Glouster and Chauncey are branches of Athens County Public Libraries in Ohio, which has been a leader in providing food to communities for many years, including being an early adopter – over 22 years! – of having library branches serve as Summer Food Service Program sites – ed.)