

Fenestrate Press presents

The Little Free Failure of Capitalism; or, Distributing Socks to Your Neighbors for Fun and Nonprofit

A Leaflet Curated by

The Restocker

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Comprising the following articles:

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Welcome to the Little Free Failure of Capitalism. This is a project to help the houseless and/or indigent in south Seattle, make art, distribute zines and information, and generally put a thumb on the scale of horrors; we've been running since the end of August, 2024, and no end is in sight.

This zine is both a guide to building your own aid station and advocacy for doing it. If you're a tech worker or professional in Washington, you're making many multiples of the poverty line, and you don't even pay income tax. The money required to build and stock LFFC, while nontrivial, is also much less than you've been led to believe by people who always want to wait for the "right" opportunity for giving to come along—and the benefits are immediate, and for your neighborhood. Come take a read, and then join in.

Revisions:

- November 13, 2025: initial widespread release.

What

This zine is an explanation of what we built and why, a how-to guide on building your own, and a pitch for doing it.

So, what's this exactly?

The Little Free Failure of Capitalism (LFFC to its friends, pronounced LIFF-see) is, depending on my mood when you ask:

- A self-service kiosk handing out necessities other than food to the houseless and indigent communities of south Seattle;
- My most emotionally-devastating side project;
- An agalamic, syncretic support kiosk—we hand out things that are expensive in small quantities, but nearly free in bulk, and add anything to the project that we can sustain and which will help;
- My personal instantiation of doing more than nothing.

In short, it's an aid station handing out non-food that also distributes zines and art.

As of October 2025, we hand out:

- Masks (KF94 and N95)
- Socks
- Safer sex: condoms, internal (“female”) condoms, and lube
- Wound care: nitrile gloves, ABD pads, non-adherent pads, Vaseline, CoBan, Band-Aids
- Period products: tampons plus five sizes of maxi pads
- Narcan (naloxone) in both nasal and injectable formats
- Hygiene supplies: soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, razors, shaving gel
- Weather supplies: disposable rain ponchos, handwarmers, warm gloves, warm hats, sunscreen (ponchos are year-round because it's Seattle, but the rest comes and goes as appropriate)
- Miscellaneous: Earplugs, pencils, ibuprofen, hand sanitizer, paper bags

We also distribute zines, art, native plant seeds (seasonally), and brochures from Crisis Connections^[1] that connect people to shelters, food support, houselessness support services (like showers, phones, computers), and medical assistance. We provide mobile device charging, free WiFi, and a free landline phone (and a place to stand while using it). We often hand out stickers.

We believe strongly that there should be no barriers to accessing assistance: none, zero, zip, nada. You don't need to talk to anyone to use LFFC, you don't need to prove you're "worthy," you don't need to be sober (in general or even while swinging by!), you don't need to say your prayers. You don't need to be houseless or indigent, either; kids stop by on their way to or from school to grab period supplies they forgot, housed families stop by to grab this week's zines, and people from all walks of life come get free Narcan because, unlike (some) pharmacists, we don't judge you for wanting it, regardless of why.

Seattle should have zero of these, because everyone should be housed, clothed, warm, fed, and able to partake in the comfort of friends if they so choose. (As a visitor put it on a comment card: "This is a balm to the soul, and a knife to the heart.") But until that day, Seattle needs many, many more of these kiosks.

Footnotes:

1. <https://www.crisisconnections.org/>

Why

Why should someone do this?

In the US, there are two major political parties. One is composed of centrist cowards. The other is speedrunning a grifty redux of the rise of Hitler circa 1935, but with much worse fashion sense. (Seriously, JD Vance always looks so rumpled you'd think he had just finished molesting a sofa.) As a compromise between the two parties, then, the extremely limited safety net that the government bothers to provide is:

- facially insufficient for the need;
- focused on ensuring that people barely survive;
- gated extremely heavily to ensure that the same bad actors who invented the “welfare queen” can’t find people to point to and say “this person doesn’t deserve help;” and
- restricted to people who have photo ID and birth records quickly available to prove their citizenship, because, after all, people fighting for survival always have well-organized records!

As a result, even for people who are served by this “safety net,” there are a lot of needs that go unmet, and by design a lot of people are left in the cold.

Why did I do do this?

Because I couldn’t fucking stand it anymore, that’s why.

If you’re paying attention in 2025, inside of you there are two reasonable, yet opposed, options competing for your heart (at least; you may have more!):

1. OH MY FUCKING GOD i have got to do something THIS IS ALL TERRIBLE how do i possibly help FIRE EVERYTHING ALL AT ONCE
2. Making “big gesture” attempts at public charity is unsustainable, because once the initial excitement wears off, you won’t be able to keep up the effort, you’ll burn out, and in a few months we’ll be back to the status quo ante but with one more person saying the problem is “too big to solve.” So don’t.

The second idea is rational, well-considered (and often articulated by people much smarter than I am, as well as more versed in leftist theory), and so I listened to it, told it I would keep it in mind, and then put a pillow over its face.

I took some inspiration from the following quote:

May I set the stage? I shall impersonate a man; come, enter into my imagination and see him. His name: Alonso Quijana, a country squire, no longer young, bony, hollow-faced, eyes that burn with the fire of inner vision. Being retired, he has much time for books. He studies them from morn to night, and often through the night as well—and all he reads oppresses him, fills him with indignation at man's murderous ways towards man. He broods, he broods, and he broods, and finally, from so much brooding, his brains dry up. He lays down the melancholy burden of sanity, and conceives the strangest project ever imagined: to become a knight-errant, and sally forth into the world to right all wrongs! No longer shall he be plain Alonso Quijana, but a dauntless knight known as Don Quixote de La Mancha!

Man of La Mancha (Wasserman, Leigh, Darion, 1965).

Whether that's helpful or not is up to you!

Why should you do this?

Because you can, and because people in a civilization have a moral duty to ensure that others aren't left to die for no reason.

People experiencing houselessness spend most of their time dealing with that fact—trying to scrape together fees for nightly shelters, begging for food, etc.—and end up in problematic, and sometimes dire, situations for a lack of pretty basic supplies. People end up with sepsis because they couldn't get enough period supplies, get dysentery in the largest cities in the US because they couldn't find a place to wash their hands, or lose feet to literal trench foot because they couldn't get dry socks.

We can sit around and look and hope and wait for the “right thing” that fixes everything, but it's been a while and nobody has yet invented a Star Trek utopia, so I'm not hopeful one's coming on Monday. If you work in tech, you absolutely have the income to support this; we're a tech worker and a nonprofit worker, with a kid and a full-time nanny, and we can still make this happen.

So start doing this, and if the utopia shows up we can all stop. Tell me what worked and what didn't for you, and let's build the world we want to live in, rather than the “effectively altruist” cruelty we inhabit today. We have a duty to our neighbors, and I'm tired of pretending otherwise.

If you have questions, or if you set up something inspired by this zine, please do let me know: info @ lffc.us.

Build

Siting and Permits

“It is easier to ask for forgiveness than it is to get permission.” · attributed to RADM Grace Hopper

“Only three things can really fuck up your day: three-phase power, the fire marshall, or the building inspector.” · local hackerspace leader

Candidly, the trick for siting is to avoid needing a permit. In Seattle, the way to do this is to comply with the permit exception^[1] for “Little Free Libraries.” A lot of cities will have something similar. If you have an HOA^[2], you’re likely screwed for doing this at your home. So go find someone else’s!

Why? Before starting LFFC, we took a lot of walks around various neighborhoods, particularly the Beacon Hill^[3] neighborhood of Seattle. On a given walk, we might encounter a lovely and fun idea: a short story printer! A seed library! A sock exchange! And the next time we passed through the same street, without fail, they would be gone. What kept happening is that in Seattle, we have planting strips (dirt between sidewalks and the curb), and that’s the obvious place to put a Little Free Library or similar. It’s also illegal; there’s no way to get a permit for that location. It therefore takes precisely one phone call from one jerk neighbor to remove such a thing.

LFFC therefore falls into an existing permit exception and is on land we own. It therefore isn’t subject to a base permit challenge, but would require a more complex type of attack—and since in our immediate circle of friends, we count an accountant, several lawyers, some professional contractors (none who worked on LFFC, but they can wave a hammer convincingly), and many other useful sorts, “we’d like to see them try.”

Construction

How to construct a LFFC-like object will depend a lot on siting, so we don’t have any hard or fast rules here, just some notes.

- Use concrete · your posts should be footed in concrete, as it adds a lot of stability. You’ll want to pour the concrete in form tubes^[4] to ensure it has the right size and depth; there are calculators online that, given a post size and a height above ground, will output a tube diameter and length. You don’t need to get a concrete mixer; you just need to search the web

for quick set concrete fence posts[5] and then do what it says. It works, it's reliable, and you can do it with no previous experience (I did!), as long as you're generally able to do household DIY projects.

- MDF and particleboard will hurt you - for the initial LFFC build, we used two reclaimed guitar display cases as the primary cabinets. They looked wonderful and functioned great! For about... four months. Then the mold set in, because underneath their sufficiently-elegant veneers, they were just particleboard, and there's really no way to make that weatherproof. From January through May, we fought a rearguard action against black mold in the cases, and we completely rebuilt LFFC in August, just shy of the one-year anniversary.
- The roof should protect guests - In the initial design, we built a roof kind of like those on Little Free Libraries: it protected the kiosk. What we didn't think through until midwinter was that people spend several minutes looking at LFFC to browse and find things they'd like to have, and our roof was actively hurting that; the edge was pretty well-placed to dump water down the backs of visitors (this was also due to a gutter failure, to be fair, but it was wet). In the above-mentioned rebuild, we also put on a substantially larger roof.
- Think about lighting early - In Seattle, it gets dark before 6pm for half the year, so most visitors will come after dark—but even in more southerly climes, you'll want light for two purposes: to attract visitors, and to aid in item selection. Think about how you're going to add lights (including wiring!) as part of your design process.

Optional Add-Ons

We have a few things beyond the primary “distribute things people need” mission that we do at LFFC. All of these are exceptionally optional; there's no need to build these in at the start, but you might consider leaving some space in your design for future fun ideas.

Phone

We've had a landline phone since day one. Why do folks need a landline phone in the age of cell phones? First, they may not have a phone at all; while the Lifeline[6] phone program started under Obama expanded cell phone access, the first Trump administration choked it almost to death, and the second one has, naturally, not fixed the situation. Second, even if they have a Lifeline phone, such phones are relatively frequently stolen, have low allotments of minutes, and may simply not have charge (see Charging, below). Finally, for people in abusive relationships, a cell phone can be a tool of control, where the abuser can check that the victim doesn't contact “prohibited” people or groups. For all these reasons, a landline phone can be a very useful resource.

At first, there was some, though not very much, usage of the phone—just a few calls per month. Later, we added brochures from Crisis Connections[7], which collate food resources (both hot meals and food banks), medical resources, support services, and shelters with hours, gating requirements, and contact information. Usage shot up, and has remained high since (between a call every two days and three calls a day, depending on the month). Crisis Connections is only for King County, WA, but some kind of similar compilation of resources might exist in your area.

Service is provided by Futel[8], a Portland-based Situationist collective who both sets up street phones (as of November 2025, 25, including three in Seattle) and does interactive audio art on them, as well as providing voicemail and operator services. They're awesome. To add their service to your location, you can reach out to them at their site. If you're in Seattle, though, read the WiFi section below.

WiFi

We got a request to add WiFi in April 2025, and brought it online in August. The difficult thing about WiFi isn't providing an Internet uplink, it's providing one that doesn't cause difficulty for the site hosts; if a visitor downloads copyrighted material, the host's ISP will harass the host, not the visitor, and possibly shut off access. Thankfully, we have a solution; our friends at ShadyTel[9], long-time participants in the PNW hacker scene, provide the uplink via a tunnel. This means that guests appear, to the Internet, to be coming from ShadyTel, not from a site host.

LFFC was the first site host for this approach, but we realized that since the phone and WiFi both need power and an Internet connection (and nothing else), this was a repeatable solution; hence, we launched the Connections[10] subproject, which adds combined landline phone + WiFi service (along with the brochures mentioned above) to sites around Seattle. So far, our first two locations beyond LFFC are at Seattle Community Fridge[11] sites, but we'd be delighted to expand anywhere a street phone and WiFi would be useful. If that's you (even if you're not doing a larger aid project like LFFC!), please do reach out; there are more details and a video at the Connections site.

Charging

Charging is very useful to visitors, as it can be difficult to find power, particularly accompanied by a safe space to wait. We've iterated on charging quite a bit, and while we currently have a working solution, it's not "finished" by any means:

- Originally, we wanted to let people charge devices without having to stand at LFFC, so we provided "borrow and return" USB batteries. They were borrowed! They were not returned. This happens.
- We then installed a multiport charger with cables, attached to LFFC. It was very popular for a few weeks, and was then stolen.
- We then installed another of the same charger, with substantially more reinforcement. It lasted a few months, and was then stolen by someone with no regard for LFFC; they not only took the charger, but destroyed much of the lighting as well (an exceedingly rare instance of real damage to LFFC). We waited a few months after this to come up with a new plan as part of the site rebuild.
- We currently have a power strip with small USB chargers, completely contained within a locked, waterproof enclosure (screwed to the 4" beams of LFFC); cables exit the box via waterproof cable glands. This isn't ideal; the small chargers sometimes come unplugged of their own accord, and not exposing any open USB ports means that people with USB-chargeable devices that need special cables are out of luck. So far, however, it has held up.

Zines and Art

Zines and art have always been part of what we wanted to do at LFFC. Adding things in these categories has been very bursty, but we've been delighted by how many community members leave art to distribute. We print most of the zines that go out, but at least one locally-created periodical now has LFFC on their site list. There are so many fun things to do here, and we have more planned!

Footnotes:

1. https://www.seattle.gov/documents/Departments/SDOT/PublicSpaceManagement/HomeZone_Toolkit.pdf
2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrizmA0r7Os>
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beacon_Hill,_Seattle
4. <https://www.spiralpaper.com/concrete-form-tubes-s/1825.htm>
5. <https://www.quikrete.com/athome/video-setting-posts.asp>
6. <https://www.lifelinesupport.org/>
7. <https://www.crisisconnections.org/get-help/resources/emergency-services-brochures/>
8. <https://futel.net>
9. <https://shady.tel/>
10. <https://lffc.us/connections/>
11. <https://seattlecommunityfridge.org/>

Distribute

What We Give Out

Any aid site is going to have a finite amount of capacity. Capacity can be determined by funds available, by storage for backstock (stuff that's not currently being handed out), or by storage in the aid cabinets. Handing out a bunch of different products, however, complicates things; how many toothbrushes do you need per condom you hand out, for instance?

We suggest thinking of capacity in terms of pairs of socks per day. Socks are critical for the unhoused population, and of all the things we give away, socks are the one that goes first, every day; if there are still socks left in the bins when we do a daily restock, we can tell immediately that not many people visited. (If that happens too frequently, it's a sign that you need to increase advertising to get the word out more effectively!)

At LFFC, we give away ten pairs of socks per day. This isn't a magic number, it's simply the output of our bin sizes and our sock sizes. Accordingly, when you look at the numbers below, scale the numbers to N socks per day, times a month, and divide/multiply accordingly.

Quantities are illustrative for an average month in which we're giving an item out. Some items, like warm hats and gloves, are seasonal; we've also added many year-round items over the course of our fourteen months of operation (the most recent are razors and shaving gel, in October 2025). Every month, we publish the quantity we actually gave away of every item on our website; if you're curious to dig into the data, contact us and we'll be happy to share anything we have.

A note on perceivable quality

When you're looking for cost-effective stuff to hand out, you will come across what could be charitably described as "awful crap," stuff that no one would use except in dire need. LFFC, by policy, doesn't distribute anything we wouldn't use ourselves, and we're willing to spend a small amount of extra money to do that.

One example that may help to illustrate this: toothbrushes. Our toothbrush dealer has a range of toothbrushes available, but many of the cheapest ones fall into one of two categories:

- Toothbrushes designed for maximum-security prisons, in that they have very short handles (in one case, no handle at all, relying instead on a

sleeve that fits over a finger) and are extremely bendy to prevent their being turned into shivs.

- Toothbrushes that have the size, shape, and/or construction of children's pretend toys.

Every aid program will have its own balance between cost-efficiency and quality, but we would urge you to avoid things that are so cheap as to make visitors feel unvalued. The difference in cost is often pennies per month of distribution, but the difference in how visitors feel will be significant.

The List

- Socks (300 pairs) - We started with athletic socks, but soon moved to thermal socks; we've been fortunate enough to find a supplier that has a wool-blend thermal sock that's affordably priced, and in quantity, the cost is actually well below bulk "athletic" socks on most sites. We've always done crew length; we've heard on the grapevine that many sources of socks donate ankle-length socks which are common, but they're strongly disliked by the client community (too many opportunities for chafing). We've always done one size (men's 10-13), simply because our volume isn't sufficient to enable stocking multiple sizes (if we did that, we'd be buying socks in lower quantity which would then increase our cost); that said, we have had occasional requests to stock smaller socks, so there's some unmet need here.
- Seasonal
 - Hats (150 hats) - This was an explicit and repeated request from our clients. We prioritized wool-blend for this and the gloves specifically to ensure they keep people warm even when wet. These don't seem to have multiple sizes.
 - Gloves (Warm) (150 pairs) - We introduced these alongside the hats. Again, wool-blend.
 - Hand Warmers (300 pairs) - Hilariously, we've consistently found the brand name (Hot Hands) to be cheaper for bulk purchases than any generics. Larger "body" warmers are also made, but we've standardized on the hand-size ones to buy at larger quantity (and thus bring prices down).
 - Sunscreen (30 packets) - Originally we didn't think that the small packets of sunscreen would be valuable because it would take so many to get to the recommended 1oz to use. After some time, we remembered that the 1oz recommendation is for swimming, where people are wearing very little clothing. Our clients are mostly clothed, so sunscreen is to protect their face and hands; the small packets are thus perfect.
 - Ponchos (30-80 ponchos depending on weather) - Get the thickest ones you can find, because the thinner ones tear substantially more

easily than plastic food wrap. I would characterize our current ones as “okay but not great,” but I haven’t found any great ones that are cost-effective; the next level up from these are non-disposable nylon often distributed with a sports team logo, and that isn’t affordable at our scale.

- Wound Care - in Seattle, the illicit drug supply is heavily adulterated with Xylazine (Tranq). Tranq causes giant abscessed wounds all over the body (not just at injection sites), so there are lots of people who are dealing with pretty gnarly wounds. The Everywhere Project^[1] has excellent resources on tranq and wound care.

- Gloves (Nitrile) (500 gloves) - At the suggestion of a friend who has done harm reduction efforts, we’ve always distributed these in groups of three, with two gloves stuffed into a third. This keeps two very clean. We hand out only the XL size, because smaller hands and larger hands can both fit. We only distribute nitrile gloves to avoid hurting visitors who have latex allergies; that said, note that nitrile gloves are about twice as expensive as latex gloves, so this is a choice.

- ABD (Combine) Pads (40 pads) and Non-Adherent Pads (40 pads) - Combine pads have absorbent gauze and a waterproof backing so that fluids can’t leak through the pad; they’re like giant, non-adhesive Band-Aids. We added the non-adherent pads (which, as their name suggests, don’t get stuck to wounds by clotting blood or drying fluids) at the suggestion of street medics who visited LFFC one day; they recommend a non-adherent pad directly over the wound, and then a combine pad over that to keep things from leaking. We use the 5x9 size in both items.

- CoBan (60 rolls) - These are the COherent BANDages you might be familiar with from donating blood; they’re sometimes called vet wrap. They’re stretchy and rubbery and only stick to themselves. For a venipuncture, you’ll usually get a 1” wide bit holding down a cotton ball. We hand out 3” wide rolls because they’re the most useful for holding on the non-adherent + combine pad stacks.

- Band-Aids (1000 bandages) - Originally we handed these out loose, but that wasn’t very helpful. After a brief time making packs of Band-Aids using small envelopes, we now buy them in 20-pack baggies and hand those out. (10-pack would also be fine, you just want to hand them out in some kind of pack, but making packs yourself is time-consuming and fiddly.)

- Vaseline (120 packets) - used to keep wounds moist, to promote healing. We added these after realizing that we were tearing through lube packets and figuring out why.

- Safer Sex - We added these supplies at the suggestion of the state agency distributing naloxone. “Can’t people get condoms everywhere?” To some extent, yes, they can, but at the same time, not as “everywhere” as one

might think. Usage shoots way up when school is out for summer (we see lots of high schoolers coming just for these supplies), but generally these supplies are in demand year-round. We get all of these from the government (in Seattle, from King County Public Health^[2] (KCPH)), because lube packets are expensive in sub-pallet quantities, and while bulk condoms are cheap, getting a mix of brands (particularly, including latex-free condoms) is difficult, and that's something KCPH does for us.

- External (Male) Condoms (300 condoms, but wild monthly swings) - as noted above, a mix of brands (KCPH uses the phrase “find your fit!”) including non-latex.
- Internal (Female) Condoms (15 condoms) - there's only one brand on the market, and they're substantially more expensive per condom, but they're useful for anyone who has sex with men.
- Lube (200 packets) - KCPH will provide silicone-based or water-based lube; we hand out only water-based lube.
- Period Products
 - Pads (60 pads) - I asked period-having friends what to stock, and the big takeaways were that wings are not optional, and that a range of sizes/absorbencies is key. I'll discuss which supplier I settled on below, but whichever you choose, get all their sizes/absorbencies, and then provide their selection chart on the container so that people know which they want.
 - Tampons (100 tampons) - For tampons, by contrast, we've only found “Regular” absorbencies set up for bulk distribution, so that's what we distribute.
- Basics
 - Soap (50 bars) - We're actually phasing bars of soap out in favor of an all-in-one shower gel / shave gel / shampoo combination. The argument in favor of bars is that they last longer, but we're not convinced that's helpful for our clientele (who may not realistically be transporting a bar of soap from place to place until it's used up). The all-in-one gel comes in single-use packets.
 - Toothbrushes (200 toothbrushes) - They're toothbrushes: full size, and while they're basic, they're also not the weird kind that only has right angles and looks like a cartoon sketch of itself.
 - Toothpaste (120 tubes) - When searching for this, a “travel size” tube is about 0.8 or 0.85oz. If you get 3oz tubes, those are enormous, and too large to fit well in pockets. (Can you tell we messed this up once?)
 - Ibuprofen (150 two-pill packets) - Everyone gets headaches, muscle aches, etc., and while alcohol or illicit drugs can certainly numb pain, providing a non-intoxicating alternative means that people don't need to use those if they don't want.
 - Pencils (50 pencils) - We've always had pencils available with the comment cards, but they weren't something we intended to give

out. The fact that they went away near-daily showed us there was a need for them!

- Earplugs (70 pairs) - We distribute reusable silicone earplugs on a string to make it easier to keep track of them.
- Hand Sanitizer (200 packets) - Hand sanitizer has been a frequent client request, but even small bottles are too expensive at our scale. We recently learned about these single-serving packets with a perforated cardboard back, so you bend them in half and they squirt efficiently into your hand (they're not like ketchup packets), however, and they have been popular.
- Paper Bags (110 bags) - These are lunch-sized bags. We waited a long time to start distributing these, for no real reason, and they've been very helpful to folks; so many of the things we distribute are in the category of "small thing that is easy to drop" that it's a real boon to have a bag to put things in.
- Razors (???) - We have only just started distributing these, so we don't have useful numbers yet. We added them at visitor request.
- Masks (130 masks) - We have both KN95 (earloop) and N95 (Aura trifold, back of head strap) masks, individually wrapped. The N95s we're able to source at very low cost, but the KN95s are substantially more popular. We purchase them ourselves, but if we weren't able to do that, our local Mask Bloc would be willing to help out as well.
- Naloxone (50 boxes) - Absolutely table stakes, but absolutely unaffordable at retail prices; the cost to source this much naloxone at retail price would equal the cost of everything else, combined. We're extremely thankful that our state and county provide it to us. Package warnings and general recommendations are to keep it at "room temperature;" however, peer-reviewed studies (e.g., this one from 2019^[3]) show that it's fine even after freezing or boiling. We store it inside until it goes into the kiosk, however.

Evolution

As you settle into your niche in your community, you will find what things your visitors need and don't need. We have intentionally solicited feedback and requests from visitors since day one, and many of the things we distribute are the result of requests:

- Warm hats
- Razors and shaving gel
- Hand sanitizer
- Pencils

We've also received feedback from subject-matter experts in different areas:

- Non-adherent pads (street medic)
 - Most absorbent gauze/dressings will adhere to a wound, so a dressing change can reopen a closing wound. Using a non-adherent pad means that the wound can be covered but the pad won't adhere to it. For weepy wounds, you can back them with combine pads (which have substantial absorbent material, backed by a waterproof layer) and hold it all on with a CoBan.
- Vaseline (RN)
 - Wounds need to be moist to heal. Vaseline is used to promote healing and avoid scarring on many wounds.
- Condoms (state naloxone experts)
 - This was the equivalent of "people who buy X also buy Y;" the state simply recommends that safer sex supplies be part of any naloxone distribution point.
- Paper bags (houselessness experts)
 - Because we distribute a bunch of tiny things, they're easy to drop; bags help carry them, and indeed we've seen many fewer dropped items near LFFC since we added bags.

At the same time it is critical that you be wary, even suspicious, of growth. "Scope creep" is the term of art in tech (probably elsewhere!) to describe a project that does something, and then someone adds "just one more feature" repeatedly; this is why one popular text editor now includes both an email client and a psychoanalysis chatbot. Scope creep means you'll outgrow your physical space and also do less well on the things you originally focused on, so try to choose a goal, pursue it, and avoid work outside that goal. Remember that unlimited growth is not helpful to you or to your community: the only thing that grows without limits is cancer.

For LFFC, we have explicitly refused to offer food despite requests. There are a few reasons for this:

- Existing resources: there are several free pantries in a few-block radius of LFFC, as well as other sources of food (a local church that does extensive food distribution, a rescue mission, etc.)
- Limited space: food is bulky, and there is finite space within our cabinets.
- Externalities: food requires secure storage space to avoid animal issues. This is top of mind for us, as around six months ago, a family of rats made a home in our car's engine and ate half the engine wiring harness, leading to an expensive repair and many jokes at our expense, so we really don't want to attract more animals to our driveway.

The point is not that your project should avoid food, but that you should make a decision intentionally, and be careful when revising it.

Suppliers

Let's talk about Amazon. Many people considering this work will instinctively oppose using Amazon for supplies; after all, their world-scale tax evasion and record of forcing their employees to die for profit are, mildly, "bad." We concur. That said, we have found some products that we can't source elsewhere for anywhere near the same cost. You can choose whether to pay twice the cost for some products to avoid Amazon, or to be able to distribute more products; either is a reasonable choice. We've chosen Amazon (for the things listed below), but not without negative feelings about it.

Here's where we get things:

- Eros Wholesale^[4]: This former lingerie company now does great bulk supplies. They cover a broad swath of product quality, so it's important to look carefully at what you're ordering to ensure you're not accidentally buying weird, user-hostile products (see the discussion about prison supplies above). Their shipping is also very stickershock-ish; that said, even with shipping included, you won't find better prices on many of their products.
 - Source for: socks, soap, razors, hats, warm gloves, toothbrushes, toothpaste
- BagsInBulk^[5]: An alternative to Eros, but we've moved away from them for most supplies as our ability to buy larger orders has increased. One area they specialize in, however, is all-in-one care packages that can be handed out on the street, so if you're interested in that, they're your place.
 - Source for: Band-Aids in packs
- Medline at Home^[6]: Medline is a hospital supplier, but they sell the same products to individuals via their "At Home" website. I would actually like to increase our use of Medline, but their pricing is... odd. It's important to check that the pricing they offer is actually good before buying. That said, their shipping is incredibly fast.
 - Source for: ABD combine pads
- Amazon: I don't really need to explain Amazon to you. AmazonBasics, their "low-cost" brand, is usually more expensive than other alternatives at LFFC's scale, but one exception is very important: they are by far the best value I've found for maxi pads with wings in a variety of sizes/absorbencies, as discussed above. (It's not even close, seriously.) Some other things come from different vendors within Amazon each order, but

Amazon seems to be the preferred method for vendors to sell stock reaching its end of life, so it's a good source.

- Source for: maxi pads, nitrile gloves, CoBan, earplugs, non-adherent pads, ponchos, pencils
- WarmSpark^[7]: They just do handwarmers. In the winter of 2024-2025 I found that I could get HotHands (the brand name in this space) in bulk cheaper than any knockoff, but now I've come to find WarmSpark are substantially cheaper still and their quality is excellent.
 - Source for: hand warmers
- Wherever: There are some products that I search across the web for every time I order them, as the prices vary seemingly randomly. Sometimes these will end up coming from Amazon, and other times they'll come from Nocturnal Aviation Associates, Ltd.
 - Source for: tampons, paper bags, hand sanitizer, ibuprofen, Vaseline, handwarmers

Footnotes:

1. <https://www.everywhereproject.org/resources>
2. <https://kingcounty.gov/en/dept/dph/health-safety/disease-illness/hiv-sti-hcv/condoms-lube>
3. <https://harmreductionjournal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12954-019-0288-4>
4. <https://www.eroswholesale.com/>
5. <https://bagsinbulk.com/>
6. <https://athome.medline.com/en>
7. <https://warmspark.net/>

Fund

Construction Costs

Construction costs are going to be tightly tied to your design and location. LFFC cost around \$950 to build, excluding things like the charging station. The rebuild cost around the same (we didn't have to redo the foundation and main beams, but we built a larger and better-designed roof).

Ongoing Costs

Backstock

For fourteen months of operations, we've spent \$17,671.37 on things we hand out, and we have handed out \$11,564.32 of that. The difference represents the value of the backstock—all the stuff in our garage that will be handed out. That difference (\$6,107.05) is a high-water mark for LFFC so far; backstock value usually floats between \$2,000 and \$4,000.

That high of a value of stuff that's waiting to go outside feels inefficient in an era when people have grown used to just-in-time logistics. The reason behind it is slightly different for different categories of stuff:

- Things we maintain a slim backstock on, because just-in-time is fine: earplugs are a great example of this. They get cheaper in bulk, but only up to about 100 pairs (of the kind we give out). Over fourteen months, price fluctuations have been pretty small, and the supplier running out of stock hasn't happened, so we don't worry about it. Other examples: CoBan, Ibuprofen, Vaseline, non-adherent pads, maxi pads.
- Things we maintain a punctuated backstock on because the only quantity to buy is enormous: ABD combine pads, tampons, and ponchos are like this, where the only bulk size is enormous, but the bulk pricing discount is so big that it motivates spending the storage space (and then slowly, slowly using it up). (We buy ABD combine pads in boxes of 400, even though that's nearly an entire year's supply for us, because the discount is ridiculous. Bulk tampons seem only to come in boxes of 500. Ponchos are in boxes of 200 or 300.)
- Things we maintain a deep backstock on because we get progressive discounts and are worried about price shocks: This is the category that makes up the bulk of the value in the backstock. Our supplier for socks, in

particular, gives a progressive discount where each case is substantially cheaper if you buy more cases. This led to our most recent sock order being for 1,800 pairs, which is... a lot of socks to be honest. (That's about eight boxes, each 2ft x 2ft x 2ft; they take up a lot of space.) That said, the deal was incredible, and these items are very vulnerable to price shocks (in particular, from the random tariff policy of the US). Buying socks in smallish bulk (240 pairs at a time) got us a cost of \$1.17/pair; buying them in this giant quantity gets us \$0.72/pair for substantially better socks (thermal-weight wool-blend, instead of cotton-blend athletic socks). A 40% cost reduction would be major even if we hadn't also gone up significantly in quality.

COGGA

We publish our Cost of Goods Given Away (COGGA) every month. It's very seasonal, because the most expensive things we give out are hats and gloves, which we only do in the winter. Our winter COGGA is thus in the \$1,200-\$1,400 range, whereas our summer COGGA is more like \$500-\$800.

Out-of-Pocket

Our actual out-of-pocket outlay is very bursty, as you'd expect from the above discussions, with some months being less than \$500, and some being more than \$4,000 (it was a really large sock order, among many other things). Over time, though, it averages to around \$1,300/month.

Fundraising

When we started LFFC, we didn't have any intention of soliciting, or even accepting, donations. We ended up accepting them because there were so many people insisting that they wanted to give money to support LFFC, which is, of course, a very kind impulse. Find a fundraising platform and set it up so that you have someplace to direct people, would be our advice. (We use DonorBox^[1], but if you use that, make sure to customize the notifications to make it clear that donations aren't tax-deductible, as most of their clients are 501(c)(3) entities!)

Footnotes:

1. <https://donorbox.org/>

Maintain

Daily Restock

There isn't a substitute for going out and checking supplies daily, and we suggest you plan on that. Once you get your habits set up—place things in your backstock area for efficiency, have a good system for taking notes on what needs doing, etc.—a restock might take only 5-10 minutes per day, and early on (as word is only getting out) you may not have much to do. Regardless, daily restocks will provide benefits:

- Topping up items each day that have been only partially consumed (e.g., someone takes 3 of 30 tampons, but you refill back to 30) helps show people that this is an ongoing resource, not a one-shot donation. That will help people feel safe relying on its continued presence, which will encourage word-of-mouth; it will also help show people that they don't need to take everything available because it won't be there tomorrow. (I think of the latter issue as the “desert rain” phenomenon: plants and animals in a desert go into a huge burst of activity when rain happens, as they know they have only a short time to exploit it. As a site host, it's entirely understandable, but somewhat annoying when you're putting out ten bars of soap every day and knowing they're all going to one person! Continued daily restocks will eventually alleviate the issue, however.)
- Actually going and interacting with the kiosk will ensure you see things that are broken or breaking, things that are unexpected and causing issues, or other small problems before they become big problems. It might also give you ideas; it took us a couple of weeks of noticing that the suggestion card pencils were nearly always missing before we decided simply to stock pencils as one of our items, because the community was clearly speaking to a need.
- Candidly, it's nice to have one thing you can do every day to oppose the extreme amount of evil and hatred being spread by the literal fascists in charge of the US right now. It's better than screaming into your pillow!

Heartbreak

Some people are shitty. Some people will leave messes. Some people (in my experience, usually local truant middle-schoolers) will intentionally destroy naloxone. Some people will leave comments with needs you can't possibly address, but which are emotionally devastating to think that people have to live with.

A few tips derived only from my experience; take them or leave them as you feel appropriate:

- Remember that houseless and indigent people aren't ambassadors, they're just people. Therefore, like any group of people, some of them will be assholes. That doesn't reflect on all houseless or indigent people, any more than the one fat guy cutting you off in traffic means that all fat people are dangerous drivers.
- You're interacting with the community, and some parts of any community suck. It's good for you to have a different sample than your job exposes you to.
- If you like a bit of woo, just as a treat: you're attempting to put good into a system that is severely good-deficient. Like getting into a cold sleeping bag and warming it up, it's going to take a while before you feel the warm (or good) being reflected back at you from your surroundings—but in the interim, you're still putting the correct energy into the system.

Conclusion

It will take work. It will take effort. It will cause all manner of odd conversations (I've had multiple coworkers ask why I keep taking photos of my cats on top of literal thousands of socks). It will, occasionally, be a pain in your ass.

The alternative, however, is allowing suffering to continue that you, personally, through just individual effort, could alleviate.

So put on your big-girl panties and put some socks out on your driveway.

"Come on, you sons of bitches! Do you want to live forever?" - SgtMaj Daniel Daly

"When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food,
they call me a Communist." — Fr. Hélder Pessoa Câmara

"When life closes a door, throw knowledge through a window."

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