





Clothing Distribution Program

STARTER GUIDE



Note in the Pocket **Clothing Distribution Program**

STARTER GUIDE

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"That first year, each child in Margaret's kindergarten class received a warm coat. That one act of kindness has grown from dozens of coats that first year to tens of thousands of mini-wardrobes being delivered to children annually."

Our community did this and yours can, too.

It is our hope that by sharing this toolkit, Note in the Pocket will inspire new clothing distribution programs that will begin clothing children with dignity and love to a growing number of communities each year. There are over eleven million children in this country living in poverty. By providing quality clothing and shoes, we can improve the social, emotional, mental, physical and academic development for these children and give them a brighter future.

Please reach out to us - we're here to answer questions, brainstorm ideas, and to celebrate your successes!

Dallas Bonavita,

Executive Director, Note in the Pocket

Clothing Insecurity video

Valler Bonavita

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Who We Are

OUR Mission

To provide quality clothing to homeless and impoverished children and families with dignity and love.

WHO WE Help

We provide clothing to children and their families identified through our partnerships with social workers within the public school system and social service agencies in Durham and Wake Counties, NC.

WHAT WE Believe

We believe that it is unacceptable that children are limited in their social, physical and academic for school and life.

How We Started

Note in the Pocket was started by the Reiland Family. The eldest daughter Margaret, after graduating from college, began teaching kindergarten at a very impoverished school. Her children lacked many of their basic needs and their education was negatively impacted because of this.

Margaret and her mom, Susan, decided that before it got cold that fall, each of the children in her class would receive a warm coat. They collected good quality but outgrown coats from family, friends and neighbors and purchased the rest new but at discount prices.

The day came and the children received their coats. It was the most excited and joyful the children had been all year. They wore their new coats home but the next day, many of the coats were returned because the families couldn't believe anyone would give their child a coat. So the school social worker put a note into each pocket that said, "This coat is your child's to keep. It is a gift from the community."

Our community donates the clothing, our community volunteers to quality control and

organize the clothing and shoe donations and the community supports us financially so we can send our children to school happy, confident and dressed for academic success.

And that is who Note in the Pocket is - We are the community.



Why We focus on Clothing - 5:



Note in the Pocket has identified an indisputable need, developed a unique and proven model, and built a collaborative network with Wake & Durham County public school social workers and local social service agencies. This partnership has created a win-win situation to reach the children in most need of our services in our community.

Our program developed as most do, as a response to an undeniable and scantily met need. The programs currently in existence did not adequately address the clothing needs of our children living in financial crisis. Our original research showed local homeless and transitional agency staff providing clothing assistance through requests made on personal Facebook pages, out of their own children's closets, and piecemeal through random clothing donations that were often unsolicited.

The quality and quantity of the clothes thus obtained were limited. Churches and social agencies that provide clothing are often not organized in such a way as to provide enough specific-sized clothes per individual to make a substantial difference. Many programs force the families to rummage through piles of disorganized and poor quality clothing in search of the items and sizes they need. Though well intentioned, this can be a humiliating and unproductive experience.

Our procedures for quality control, sorting, sizing, inventory tracking, and distribution enable us to provide more than a couple of items of clothing. Children need enough of everything. Our students receive a complete mini-wardrobe so they have what they need to be successful in school whatever the weather.

It is our hope that by giving you the benefit of the many lessons we learned, you can start small (like we did) and grow into an organization that will clothe a growing number of children each year.

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FIRST STEPS:

Research & Decisions

While planning, consider the following: Is anyone else doing this work in the community? Often supporting a program that is already established is the most effective and efficient way to make an impact.

Who

- Who is providing clothing help in your community? Talk to them. What is working and what is not?
- ♦ Who are the children/families in need and what are the numbers?
- ♦ Who do you want to serve? Children only? Families?
- Who is needed to make this work? (school social workers, faith communities, social service agencies, volunteers, civic groups, etc.?)

What

♦ What are the services you want to provide? Age groups, type of clothing/shoes items, quality, quantity, etc. Do you want to provide a set amount? Keep a tight focus. Programs that try to solve too many problems weaken their impact and become frustrated.

When

Factoring in research, planning and team building - When do you want to start providing your services? Start with the end in mind and work backwards. Be prepared for unexpected delays. Be patient, new things take time.

Where

♦ What is your service area? Start small and build. Your level of community involvement will dictate your ability to scale.

Why

- Why are you personally invested in this mission?
- Share true stories of kids before and after receiving quality clothing and the positive changes that resulted. True stories make people want to get involved.

Stories will be the secret to your success.

Know your Why.

(Google "How to find my Why"

if you don't know.)

Clothing insecurity can be an emotional topic so take your time and learn before jumping in.

Document your research and know your numbers.

Based on Free and Reduced numbers in your school district, what is the need in your area? The data will support your case when seeking help and resources.

Who do you want to serve? Do you want to focus on a specific age to start?

When Note in the Pocket first started, we focused on school-aged children. As our clothing donations grew, we expanded to all children, birth through high school. Ask for the sizes and types of clothing you need and be clear that clean, school appropriate clothing is needed.

Accepting donations.

Most people do not care about tax receipts for donated clothing but some will. Many will expect, and should receive, a tax receipt and thank you letter for financial support. Look for a faith community or nonprofit that will let you operate under their tax exempt status under Fiscal Sponsorship until you are ready to apply for your own 501c3, if you ever get that far. If running your program alongside another nonprofit or as a faith community's mission program, that could be ideal.

Let people know what you need.

It isn't just quality clothing and shoes that can be reused. You need supplies, equipment and help. Share a list of needs with friends and family. People will donate no longer needed laptops, printers, filing cabinets, rolling carts, shelving, etc.

Consider how you will collect and save data.

Even if your organization is small, it is wise to document all that you are doing to track growth. In the early days, you can't track too much data. Spreadsheets can help chart activities and show growth and areas that need attention. Low costs CRM's (Customer Relations Management) can be extremely valuable to keep track of the people who are supporting your program through partnerships, clothing and financial donations, and as volunteers.

Avoid Mission Drift, which is doing things that are "off mission."

If you are going to focus on clothing insecurity - do that and do it well. Try hard not to dilute that focus. An example of mission drift for a clothing distribution program would be to put books, food or school supplies in with the child's clothing packages. There are organizations that provide these services. Odds are, there are not many in your community helping with clothes.

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Facilities & Materials

SECTION 1

A: The first few years

In the early days, you will probably start this program in someone's home like the Reiland Family did. They ran Note in the Pocket out of their house for seven years. If you decide to grow your program beyond the space limitations of your home, you may find a faith community, nonprofit or business will share some space with you until you can afford to pay rent.

Space is needed to give you a place to store and process clothing donations, This is where volunteers will quality control, sort, size and inventory the donated clothing and shoes. To begin sorting and organizing the clothing that has been donated it will be important to have specific resources in place. You will need tables to comfortably quality control, sort and size the clothing and shoes and shelving to organize the items until needed. Basic office supplies and a computer with Excel or Google sheets is needed for documenting information.

Volunteer & Donation Center/Office Space

Office Furniture & Supplies examples (often donated!)

Desks	Tables	Printers
Paper, envelopes, stamps	Chairs	Phone (with voicemail)
Filing cabinets	Rolling carts	Freestanding donation box
Clothing racks and/or shelving	Hand truck	Post Office Box (for
	Z-Racks for hanging	consistency in mailing address)
Storage bins/boxes	heavier items	Trash bags to hold
Pencils, pens, markers, scissors	Computers	donations (Reuse trash bags as often as possible to reduce cost)
	Email (we use gmail)	

Facilities and Materials

B: You are growing!

You have started a successful clothing program! You are providing clothing to your core focused families/children and have a dedicated location outside of your home, either an office or community space that you can call your own. You have established contacts for financial assistance/funding, volunteers to process donations and referral partners to help reach the families. At this point, through trial and error, you have established processes (whether written or not) to get the donations from the community, sorted into categories and distributed to your core base.

We recommend tracking your data as early as possible but if you have not started documenting your data yet, now is the time to start. This is how you will show potential donors (either financial or otherwise) and grantors your growth and impact. This will also document that you are accepting donations and distributing with integrity.

Volunteer & Donation Center/Office Space

To give you an idea of what space can do - In 2013, we began working out of 2,000 sq ft of donated space and provided clothing to 1556 individuals - mostly children. Before having this space, we worked out of a variety of much smaller donated spaces - the Reiland's home, then a school classroom one summer, then a storage room in a nonprofit until we found the local business man who shared a 2,000 sq ft space with us.

He said, "I've got 2,000 square feet of space you can use. You will outgrow it before you can afford it." Tell people what you need and when it is time, it will come. In this line of work, patience and faith are key.

Tracking/Documentation Systems to consider

- Website that showcases your organization, what you do and how vou do it
- Donor Management System (CRM) (We use <u>Little Green Light</u>)
- Volunteer Management/Scheduling system (Sign up Genius is a great place
- Funding (PayPal, Venmo or other platforms)

Facilities and Materials

c. Lessons Learned

- You will need to recycle or remission clothing/shoes that don't work for your program.
 We work with a recycling company that picks up the items we can't use or we donate some to thrift stores that use their profits to support the community.
- Outside donation boxes hosted by faith communities or businesses are a great way to provide convenient 24/7 containers to encourage the public to donate clothes/shoes to you. We have our boxes built as Eagle Scout projects.
- Regardless of the size of your workspace, you will probably have times you will need to rent a storage unit. We have had donated and discounted units before. It doesn't hurt to ask.
- People will ask you if you wash the clothes before they are given to the children/families. In the early days, the Reiland family did wash everything but as the donation amounts grew, it became impossible. Better still, educate your donors that only clean, high-quality pre-owned or new clothing and shoes will be provided to the children.
- In our case, we build a mini-wardrobe for each student and package lots of basics for younger siblings and adults in the home. This method allows us to serve a greater number of children and families each year verses having families come shop for free. Because our children do not get to pick out their own clothing, everything has to be really nice. If there is one bad item in their package, everything then feels like charity and there is no dignity and love in that.



How we build our mini-wardrobes





SECTION 2



Volunteers are the lifeblood of our organization and will be for yours, too. The secret to any leader's/organization's success is the ability to delegate and collaborate. This is community organizing in its most basic form. When your program truly belongs to the community there is no limit to what can be done.

Community organizing is a process where people who live in proximity to each other or share some common problem come together into an organization that acts in their shared self-interest.

There are many ways to utilize volunteers! It takes EVERYONE to make a clothing distribution program function. Below are a few volunteer roles we utilize. Volunteers come from all walks of life and can be found in many places! Churches and faith organizations, businesses, clubs, sport teams, book groups, students who need service hours and volunteer connection services like <u>Volunteer Match</u> and nonprofits like <u>Activate Good</u> that are found in your area.

Who can help?

Volunteer shifts can be scheduled in 2-3 hour shifts. Our original shifts were scheduled as needed but has grown to Monday - Friday from 9:00am - 12:00 pm and 1:00pm - 4:00pm and Saturdays from 9:00 - 12:00 pm.

Volunteers will help with quality control, sorting, sizing, folding, shelving, and organizing donated clothing. Our age policy is that children aged 13–15 may volunteer at NITP when accompanied 1:1 by an adult. We suggest that children aged 16 may volunteer unaccompanied.

You may also consider allowing volunteers to do some of these items from home, especially in the early days when space may be limited.

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Volunteers

Volunteers

Volunteer Leaders

This role oversees day-to-day volunteer group activities, conducts volunteer training, and helps volunteers identify the highest quality clothing on the shelves for when it is needed.

Clothing Processing

These volunteers will do a quality check on all donated clothing and shoes. Since clean high quality, stain and tear-free clothing is a must, a thorough check is necessary. The clothing we process goes through two – a First sort, where clothing is assessed and then sorted by girls/boys/women/men sizes. A Second sort can also be performed, and is often necessary, depending on the skill of the volunteers who did the first sort. Remember, not everyone will have the same opinion of what is quality and/or school appropriate.

Also note – middle and high school children (and some elementary students) are wearing adult sizes, so we recommend you request donations of all sizes and explain that these are for adult-sized children.

Clothing Drive Coordinator

This role speaks to individuals and groups interested in hosting a clothing drive. They can help with planning, provide graphics and coordinate delivery of the items they collect.

Clothing Delivery

Delivery people pick up completed clothing requests and deliver them to the school or agency who referred the student(s). Deliveries can be made to specific schools, agencies or areas within each volunteer's comfort zone and volunteers can designate certain days or how often they would like to help. NITP contacts drivers each morning to see if they are able to deliver to a specific location. In our distribution model, clothing packages are not delivered directly to the family's home by our volunteers or sent home on the school bus. School social workers deliver the packages when they do a home visit. By providing clothing to families, this helps to build a bridge with the social worker and the families.

Donation Pick Ups

We collect clothing in part through donation bins located throughout the community. Volunteers are needed to empty and deliver the clothing donations to the Volunteer Center on a regular basis.

Website and Social Media

Creation and updates for a website and creation of social media content can be done by one person or a communications committee.

Administrative Tasks

There are many administrative tasks from data entry to filing to preparing mailings that must be done to keep the organization funded and running smoothly. Various skills are needed at certain times of the year.

Grant Researcher (possible virtual volunteer)

Someone who can search for and identify upcoming grants that support the mission to serve children living in poverty.

Fulfillment Coordinator/Clothing Distribution

This role uses the information the referral partners have given to select and package the clothing/outfits for the families and prepare them for delivery.

Board of Directors

Yes! Your board of directors are volunteers. Before you have paid staff, you may have a "Working Board." As you grow your staff, your board should shift to a governing board. Through committee work they can still help, there will just be an important shift that should happen. The Complete Guide to Building a Nonprofit Board article.

When you are ready to apply to become an approved 501c3 nonprofit, your board will be a big part of this process.

Consider all areas where you need help as volunteer opportunities. Visit Volunteer connector websites to help you write short concise descriptions of the type of help you are looking for.

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Clothing Distribution Program

Community

SECTION 3

Internal

Clothing

Establishing a network of donors to provide clothing is a key step in the process of NITP. This can be facilitated through individual donations, church and organization clothing drives, and drop-off locations. Having set places in the community for drop-off locations gives donors a consistent point to continue donations. New and gently used shoes and clothing of all sizes are accepted for donation. NITP can issue receipts for tax purposes, but cannot assign a monetary value to clothing donations. The IRS advises that it is up to the donor to estimate the fair market value of a donation.

Donated shoes and clothing will be processed and evaluated for suitability to use. If they are found unsuitable they may be given to another nonprofit group, recycled, or sold by NITP to further the mission.

Sorting/Inventory Management (spreadsheet in Exhibit B, available upon request)

Incoming donations are stored until ready to be processed. Donations are weighed and recorded before the quality control process begins to show how many pounds of donations were processed each day. By tracking the amount of donations received and processed you will be able to show an increase in donations and volunteer support over time. This is valuable for grant writing and to show increased community support. From there, the clothing is sorted for quality control purposes. NITP requires the clothing to be in top quality shape for it to be provided to children. Volunteers are told that clothing must be in good enough shape that they would wear it themselves or they would feel comfortable giving the item as a gift.

From there, the clothing is inventoried to the correct sizing (using database; see attached in forms) to keep track of available clothing.

SECTION 3

Community Connection

External

- Establish a small network of social workers and social services agencies that you can work with. These will be your Referral Partners. Their role will be to identify the children/ families in need and obtain the clothing sizes for each child and/or person in the home, depending on who you decide to serve.
- To find Referral Partners, reach out to local public school social workers, churches, and social services agencies to establish these partnerships.
- **Develop strategy with these agencies to implement distribution plan.** At NITP, we provide clothing with dignity and love. One way we do this is to make sure children are never sent home on the school bus with a bag of donated clothing. The referral partner is responsible for coordinating the pick up or delivery of clothing to the family.
- There is an overwhelming need for clothing support within these multiple agencies that with you acting as an added resource will allow them to focus more fully on their direct mission such as housing, education, job placement, substance abuse, etc.
- It will be very important to limit the number of requests and referrals you allow from these agencies while you build up your strong volunteer base and clothing supply. This will ensure that you are able to provide timely distribution of the clothing.
- Timely distribution of clothing is extremely important.
- Build up a proper inventory of clothing through donations and clothing drives.
 - Beginning goal should be to provide several new outfits with corresponding basic needs such as new underwear and socks, shoes, etc. In our program, socks and underwear must be new. We provide 5 pair of socks and 5 pair of underwear that we roll into pre-packaged bundles that are taped together with the size written on it.
 - As inventory builds, the ultimate goal should be to provide a child two week's worth of outfits including new socks, underwear, and shoes when available. In the winter months this would also include coats, scarves, and mittens as well.
- Five volunteers working three to four days per week should be adequate to effectively handle 50 clothing requests/referrals per month.

Reminder: Maintaining a limit on the number of incoming agency referrals will help to ensure efficiency in both your quality of service and your turnaround time.

Our Mini-wardrobe includes a minimum of 10 tops (long & short sleeve), 5 bottoms (shorts & pants), 5 pair of new socks, 5 pair of new underwear, tennis shoes and any outerwear appropriate to the season. When available we include extra tops and bottoms as well as any other extras we have on hand like gloves, scarves, hats, sweaters, hoodies, jackets, shoes or pajamas.



SECTION 4

Each state has fundraising rules and regulations through the Secretary of State to safeguard the general public from scams and dishonest people who are soliciting donations for programs that are not really in existence. Visit your state's Charitable Solicitation License ("CSL") requirements.

You must have either a 501c3 certification and State Solicitation License or operate under a faith community or another nonprofit's umbrella. This is also known as Nonprofit Fiscal Sponsorship. This will allow you to provide tax receipts to donors for their financial and in-kind donations.

Events

As your program develops, fundraising events will provide necessary income to facilitate the mission and goals of the organization. Grants require time and planning as many requests have to be in alignment with the grantor's priorities to receive consideration. A series of small fundraisers will provide both income and pubic awareness. One larger signature event is a fun way to gain community support with sponsorship opportunities. Coordinating clothing drives with these events is also a good way to increase clothing donations, as well as the financial resources required to meet space demands and other resources necessary to run your program.

Examples of Fundraising ideas and events:

- **5K Walk/Run** and Kids Fun Run
- Home by the Holidays Fundraiser to raise funding to pay for space
- ▶ By collecting names and addresses of volunteers and clothing donors, you will build a mailing list that you can use to send out fundraising appeal letters, especially in November/December, which are the biggest giving months
- Faith Communities have outreach funding and will help support programs that are providing services to children and families





SECTION 5

In the beginning, you will be 100% volunteer run. NITP was for the first 8 years. Many programs will remain this way intentionally. At some point, though, this may no longer be sustainable to continue to grow.

Organizations who find the right people for the right roles will succeed. You may begin with an Executive Director and slowly add staff as you can afford it. Until then, the right volunteer staff can work miracles.

Future Management (Full-Time, Part-Time or a combination of both)

Executive Director

- Responsible for vision and mission development
- ▶ Community and Partnership Engagement
- Board development and recruitment
- Overall program development and staff development
- Operational planning and management
- Financial planning and management

Operations/Office Manager

- Oversight of day-to-day operations
- Oversight of data collection to generate monthly KPI reports (Key Performance Indicators)
- ♥ Human Resources management
- Policy maintains and updates the Operations Manual as things grow and change
- ▶ Risk Management Insurance and safety measures
- Bookkeeping and some budgeting

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SECTION 5

SECTION 5



Development Director (supervised by Executive Director)

- ▶ Manage all public relations efforts, including marketing and other communications
- Research and respond to grant opportunities
- Donor cultivation and stewardship
- Fundraising event planning and implementation
- Assists in seeking and responding to grant opportunities with Executive Director
- Coordinates fundraising events

Program Director (supervised by Executive Director)

- Oversee paid program staff, volunteers, and referral partners (recruitment and training)
- Provides employee and volunteer training in partnership with Distribution Coordinator
- Oversees all programmatic data collection and constantly assesses program effectiveness through performance measurement and trial and error. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. This is how we learn.

Communications and PR (sometimes done by committee or Development Director)

- Website
- Logo and tagline designs (look for professional volunteer help)
- Collateral marketing pieces that explain your program and/or needs both volunteer and in-kind. In-kind items are donations of goods or services rather than money.

Volunteer Coordinator

- Recruit and train volunteers as well as write up volunteer descriptions
- Tracks volunteer hours for data management
- Coordinates volunteer appreciation events, tracks hours worked for recognition and manages the critical volunteer retention tool - Thank you's

Clothing Distribution Coordinator

- Responsible for all incoming and outgoing clothing inventory
- Builds and trains volunteers

Volunteer Leaders

- Gives new volunteers the history of your organization, explains what they will be doing during their shift and how their work will effect the children and families you serve
- Guides and redirects volunteers in a way that makes them feel seen and appreciated so they can leave knowing they have made a difference in their community
- ♥ When volunteers have a great experience volunteering several positive things happen:
 - They tell friends and family this is a great place to volunteer and about your mission
 - They may donate more clothing, shoes and financial support
 - They may host a clothing drive or help you find people/groups who will





SECTION 6

Data is used to help determine which programs are working and provide warning signs for those that are not. Data can also be used to measure success and to communicate that to stakeholders for funding support.

Note in the Pocket measures the following:

- Number of individuals served each year (students, younger siblings, adults, children identified as homeless, children in the foster care system and military families)
- Number of items received per person and their value (based on IRS values for donated clothing)
- Weight of clothing donated/processed
- **♦ Schools and Agency partners** per city/ town/county
- **♦** Number of referrals/clothing requests per school/organization
- **Number of Volunteers**, hours served and the value of that time as determined by your state

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SECTION 7

Amber Smith is an amazing nonprofit founder, community leader and friend. Amber has produced dozens of videos that will answer lots of nonprofit questions you didn't yet know you had.

Start with: How to Start a Nonprofit with No Money
Also watch: 5 Mistakes GROWING my nonprofit

Nonprofit free blog articles and low cost nonprofit courses:

<u>Founder to Full Time</u> <u>Gail Perry - Fundraising</u>

On Facebook, I recommend joining <u>Your Thriving Nonprofit group</u>. With 46,600+ members nationwide, this is a great resource where you can ask questions but also join in discussions and search Q&A's already discussed.

We have researched other organizations tackling the issue of clothing insecurity nationally and have found only a very few that have the same tight focus on clothing or provide the quality and quantity that our program does. Here are a couple of examples of other nonprofit organizations doing similar work to tackle the issue of Clothing Insecurity.

- **b** Boxes of Basics
- Curt's Closet
- **▼** The Sharing Shelf
- **▼** The Giving Closet Project



SECTION 8

501c3 Process & Forms

To apply for recognition by the IRS of exempt status under IRC Section 501c3, you must use either Form 1023 or Form 1023-EZ. All organizations seeking exemption under IRC Section 501c3 can use Form 1023, but certain small organizations can apply using the shorter Form 1023-EZ.

501c3 Process

Standard Forms Samples (available upon request)

- Volunteer Form
- **▶** Referral Partner registration form
- Clothing request form

- Tax receipts
- Weigh sheets (incoming and outgoing)
- **∀** Volunteer leader training check-list

A Note in the Pocket is not what we believe your community needs.

What we do believe, is that children in your community NEED a Clothing Distribution Program. We hope this will inspire you to support a program that is already established in your area or to help start one if there is not one.



noteinthepocket.org

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