

Welcome Home offers curbside pickup for gently used housewares

By **Ali Audet** Boston University journalist, Updated December 17, 2020, 5:31 p.m.



Lisa Porter, left, a volunteer at Welcome Home, hands a bag of requested items to a client outside of Welcome Home's space at Trinity Parish of Newton Centre. ALI AUDET (CUSTOM CREDIT)

With no end in sight for the COVID-19 pandemic and the holidays upon us, a local home goods pantry has found a new way to offer their services to clients.

Welcome Home, a nonprofit that distributes “gently used housewares” to people free of charge, emphasizes the importance of clients choosing their own items, said Julie Plaut Mahoney, the organization's founder and director. The pantry has now moved to a curbside

only model, where clients can request items by email or through a caseworker and pick the items up at a specified time.

“It’s powerful to pick what you like, colors that you respond to, a shape of a mug that you respond to, rather than just having someone give you a box of things,” Plaut Mahoney said. “So that’s been very challenging for us during COVID.”

Since clients cannot come in to [Welcome Home](#) — located inside Trinity Parish of Newton Centre — to pick their own items, volunteers ask for their preferences of color and style and do their best to match these needs. In some cases, volunteers will show clients items through the windows so they can choose what they like.

Volunteer Lisa Porter said the biggest loss Welcome Home has suffered due to the pandemic is lack of personal connection.

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“It’s the client to volunteer connection, relationship, that we were really able to build in a lot of ways before the pandemic,” Porter said. “That relationship has changed a lot because we pack inside, we bring to someone who’s outside and it’s a handoff and it’s quick. So there’s a little bit of a disconnect.”

Another complication Welcome Home is grappling with is the holiday season. Plaut Mahoney said many clients are looking for gifts for friends and family members, so volunteers have compiled a five-tier gift rack of items, including small trinkets for children and specialty kitchen gadgets like Keurig coffee makers or bread machines.

“The basics of the kitchen that everybody asks for are toasters, toaster ovens, coffee pots, blenders, microwaves,” Plaut Mahoney said. “Those, everybody wants year round, but these other items, these are more specialty items. They’re not must-have in a kitchen. We’re trying to make those available to people.”

Porter said she’s concerned donations will decrease in the coming months.

“We’re anticipating a slowdown of the donations, which then impacts how many clients we can have, because if we don’t have the things we don’t have the clients,” Porter said.

Olivia Allison, a care coordinator at Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program who works with Welcome Home to provide goods for newly housed individuals, said she was nervous at the beginning of the stay at home order that many organizations were working entirely remotely. But when she emailed Welcome Home about providing items for one of her clients, they were able to fulfill the request with curbside pickup.

“They were incredibly flexible, incredibly accommodating to the situation, and really understanding that even with everything going on in the world, that these items are vital to people,” Allison said.

Porter said even though Welcome Home’s operations have changed, it’s mission to provide quality goods for those in need is just as important as ever.

“I guess the other thing that I’ve been thinking about lately with all the bigger food pantry cause is people need that food, but they also need the can opener to open the food, and they also need the pot to cook the pasta that they’re getting from the food pantry — and without those basic things, that food is not getting to the people.” Porter said.

Allison said winter is an especially challenging time in her line of work, but the support of organizations like Welcome Home is “priceless.”

“I think this year especially has been difficult, but also with that difficulty, you’ve been able to see people step up, organizations step up, and really get creative with how they try to solve these problems and support others,” Allison said.

To become either a recipient or a donor of Welcome Home, e-mail welcomemass@gmail.com or go to welcomemass.org.

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