Hello, Jean!: Filling the Gap With Care

By Tara Simpkins • Photos provided by Kris McCurry

For families facing financial hardship, stretching a household budget often means making difficult choices. Food pantries throughout Carroll and Howard counties help place meals on the table, but everyday necessities such as shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, laundry detergent, and cleaning supplies can still remain out of reach. Because programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, do not cover nonfood items, many families are left with a quiet but very real gap in support.

Hello, Jean! Inc. was created to help fill that gap. Founder Kris McCurry first recognized the need while making regular donations to her local food pantry. She noticed that personal hygiene products were not readily available and began looking more closely at how families obtained these essentials. Her research confirmed what she had observed: food assistance programs and pantries understandably focus primarily on food, leaving few resources for personal and household care products.

That realization inspired Kris to turn a longstanding family value into a more formal way of serving others. "Helping has always been a part of what our family does, and this is a formal extension of that need to help," she shares.

Incorporated in September 2025, the Sykesville based nonprofit now provides free personal hygiene, feminine hygiene and home care products to individuals and families in Carroll and Howard counties. Those seeking assistance can enroll through the organization's website. Once accepted, they receive a link to request the items they need. Available products are then packed specifically for each household and arranged for pickup or delivery when needed.

The packages may include soap, toothpaste, shampoo, body wash, deodorant, shaving cream, razors, lotion, and toilet paper, along with household staples such as all-purpose cleaner, dish soap, laundry detergent, paper towels, sponges, and Swiffer refills. Though these products may seem ordinary, having them on hand can bring comfort, cleanliness, and a greater sense of stability to a family navigating a difficult season.

For Kris, the organization's first year has been both rewarding and eye opening. The number of requests has shown her just how many neighbors are trying to manage without the basics. "There are more people than you realize who are unable to pay for food and personal care items," she says. At the same time, every package offers a reminder of why the work matters. The greatest satisfaction comes from helping families receive what they need and knowing that, even in a small way, one burden has been eased.

The community has embraced the mission from the beginning. Supporters can purchase products from Hello, Jean's! Amazon Wish List and have them shipped directly to the organization, deliver new and unopened items to its home base, or arrange for a pickup. Some neighbors regularly meet Kris at the Eldersburg Library with products to share. Hello, Jean! affectionately calls the people who "grant wishes" from the list or contribute items directly it's "Jeanie's."

Those frequent Jeanie's have quickly become an important part of the organization. Because Hello, Jean operates entirely through product contributions and financial gifts used to purchase needed supplies, their generosity determines how many packages can be filled each month. The response has been so encouraging that even the nonprofit's current storage space offers a cheerful reminder of the work underway. Kris jokes that she never knew her garage could smell so good.

Recently, Kris's husband, Charlie, has become an integral part of Hello Jean!. Since retiring, he has put his talent for bargain hunting to good use by shopping for products. He also organizes storage areas and helps package items for families.

As Hello, Jean! continues to grow, Kris hopes to build greater awareness of an often overlooked need. The organization plans to hold collection events throughout the community and looks forward to having a continued presence at the Sykesville Farmers Market during next year's spring and summer months. These opportunities will help keep shelves stocked while introducing more neighbors to the mission behind each carefully packed bundle.

The name itself carries a friendly invitation: "Hello is just another way of saying hi. When you think of hygiene, think of Hello, Jean!" Behind that playful phrase is a caring and practical mission, one that helps local families feel seen, supported and a little less alone.

Though Hello, Jean! is still in its early days, its mission is already making a meaningful difference for local families. With every carefully packed bundle, Kris and her growing circle of Jeanie's are providing more than everyday essentials. They are offering comfort, dignity, and the reassuring reminder that no one should have to face life's difficult seasons without the care of their community.

Community members can support Hello, Jean! by contributing new, unopened personal care, feminine hygiene, and household cleaning products through the Amazon Wish List, arranging a product pickup, or making a financial gift through the organization's website. To request assistance or learn more, visit www.hellojean.org. Follow Hello, Jean! on Facebook at www.fb.com/hellojeanmd or Instagram at www.instagram.com/hellojeanmd. The organization can also be reached at 443-604-2927 or helping@hellojean.org.

Providing Personal Hygiene & Home Care Items to Local Families in Need